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The Smartest Guys in the Room and the Best of the Best:

Max Performing Air Force Culture

by

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Abstract

The past decade has revealed significant organizational failure within corporate America that has highlighted organizational cultures characterized by the toleration of deceptive accounting and poor decision-making. After their fall, one can see similarities among the failed companies and their organizational cultures that contributed to the failures. Before their fall, however, many of these corporations were viewed as the “best of the best”—they hired the best and held their people to rigorous standards. The Air Force, too, prides itself on being the “best of the best”—the preeminent air and space

fighting force in the world. But the service nonetheless faces major challenges as it undergoes a critical transformation in the provision of airpower. As the service transforms, it is incumbent upon us to ask: *What are the failure inducing traits of Air Force culture and can an analysis of corporate failures help us determine them?* Using Enron as a prominent example of a corporate failure within the past decade and sources documenting the modern, dominant fighter-pilot subculture in the Air Force, this paper argues there are three cultural similarities between the organizational cultures of the failed corporations and that of the Air Force with the potential for negative effects: 1) a pride-inducing reputation, 2) significant conformity pressures, and 3) a toleration of perception engineering. This paper evaluates the three identified similarities for the potential to enhance or degrade the Air Force's ability to accomplish its mission. It finds the cultural traits of a pride-inducing reputation and significant conformity pressures can be managed to enhance mission accomplishment despite also having the potential to degrade it. The evaluation finds the cultural trait of a toleration of perception engineering has the potential only to degrade mission accomplishment. Based on this evaluation, this paper recommends steps be taken to manage the first two traits by expanding Crew/Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) service-wide and replacing the Air and Space Basic Course (ASBC) with an officer-wide Remotely Piloted Vehicle (RPV) training program. To help eliminate the negative trait of perception engineering, this paper recommends a continued "back to basics" push and the creation/reinforcement of a cultural firewall to protect service culture from mission degrading influence.

Chapter One: Introduction

All of the services must examine their cultures critically, if we are to have the capabilities relevant and necessary to overcome the most likely threats America will face in years to come.

- Secretary of Defense Robert Gates
Maxwell AFB, 21 April 2008

When speaking to Air Force officers at Maxwell Air Force Base, the home of Air University and the educational epicenter of Air Education and Training Command (AETC), Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called for critical examination of service culture. The Secretary of Defense that day exhorted officers, “For the good of the Air Force, for the good of the armed services and for the good of our country, I urge you to reject convention and careerism.”¹ As Secretary Gates recognized, critical examination and transformation often proves unconventional.

The speech was made during a period of struggle and cultural upheaval in the Air Force. General Michael “Buzz” Moseleyⁱ held the top Air Force position in an era marked by fighter pilot control of the service and during a time of significant priority differences between the service and the Secretary of Defense.² The Air Force sought to concentrate on traditional conventional warfare and sought to arm the service with additional F-22 aircraft. The Secretary did not share the service’s view on the priority of the stealth fighter and prioritized what ground-force commanders were requesting: a significant increase in air support from remotely piloted airpower. The debate was passionate and evoked what some called “borderline insubordination” by one fighter pilot flag officerⁱⁱ, who expressed that the Air Force would pursue more F-22s regardless of the

ⁱ General Moseley has a background as an F-15C pilot.

ⁱⁱ General Bruce Carlson has a background as an A-10 pilot.

President's budget priorities.³ It also evoked an open disagreement by the general officerⁱⁱⁱ that commanded the Air Combat Command (ACC).⁴ Less than two months after the Secretary's Air University speech, General Moseley was forced to resign and replaced by a non-fighter pilot, ending the reign of the "fighter mafia" over the top Air Force position, which had until General Moseley's resignation been continuous for nearly three decades.⁵ Months later, a non-fighter pilot was also chosen to lead ACC.⁶

In this same period the Air Force found itself portrayed in a dim light in the media. The media covered the mishandling of nuclear weapons and raised concerns regarding plans to purchase "comfort capsules" with Global War on Terror funds.⁷ The Air Force had its reputation stained by the actions of senior leaders, including then Chief of Staff, General Moseley, concerning improper influence during a \$50 million Thunderbirds video contract.⁸ A scandal concerning the acquisition of a new aerial tanker also tarnished service image.⁹ The relevance of the service became an issue of public debate, so much so that the *New York Times* published an individual's op-ed that advocated eliminating the Air Force entirely, prompting a reply from the new Air Force Chief of Staff^{iv}, General Norton Schwartz.¹⁰ Even years before these public blemishes, some individuals connected to the service were already warning of its demise. One active duty major asked, "Is the Air Force bankrupt?"^v and a former Air War College professor, Dr. Grant Hammond, claimed in 1996 that the United States Air Force "is in serious jeopardy of ceasing to exist in the not too distant future."¹¹

ⁱⁱⁱ General John Corley has a background as an F-15C pilot.

^{iv} General Schwartz has a background as a C-130 pilot.

^v Major Randall Boswell asked the question in an edition of Air Force Print News Today, referring to the lack of funding for the Air Force and the reduction of force strength. He then warned we must not neglect the education of Air Force members or stop pursuing weapon systems that "really are capable of doing more with less" (Boswell, 2008).

The Air Force was not the only institution experiencing problems during this period. Secretary Gates' speech at Maxwell played out against the backdrop of a larger American crisis. Newspaper headlines were filled with stories of corporate failures on Wall Street and within the auto industry, resulting in unflattering portraits of leadership for companies such as American International Group (AIG). Multiple companies went bankrupt from financial mismanagement while others thought "too big to fail" were kept alive by massive government bailouts.¹² Barely more than a month before Secretary Gates' speech, the President of the United States was asked about this corporate leadership. Among his remarks, President Barack Obama responded, "The fact that these guys are looking for bonuses having run down AIG begs the question of, why were they making that much beforehand? When nobody was criticizing them, everybody thought they knew what they were doing. That kind of culture has to change."¹³ Today it is almost universally accepted that America nearly suffered a depression as a result of the corporate and financial meltdown.¹⁴ Many point to corporate leadership cultures rife with greed, unchecked risk, fraud and fact distortion, and self-serving ethics. One researcher who catalogued and analyzed business news reports from 2000 to 2005 found that forty corporations in the *Fortune 100* had behaved unethically or illegally.¹⁵

Organizational and leadership culture in the corporate world continues to make headlines.

Members of the Air Force and leaders of the corporate world all come, as an initial matter, from the same American culture, so there is a good chance the individuals in those groups share many of the same cultural traits. But can one expect the *organizational* cultures to share any similarities? Both market leaders and the Air Force share at least this much: they are often portrayed as the smartest guys in the room and the

best of the best. The organizations are designed to max perform^{vi} in high-pressure environments. Does that shared orientation lead to any shared defects? If so, better to know now, than to have them revealed after some revelation of systemic failure. Like many of the corporations that failed, the Air Force faces major external pressures right now: chiefly, but not exclusively, resource constraints while fighting two wars and the need to transform in order to remain relevant for the wars of today while still preparing for the wars of tomorrow. The questions are, how well does the Air Force know its organizational culture? Will that culture enable the service to triumph? Are there things the Air Force can change in order to max perform its culture?

As one small step toward answering these broader questions, this paper undertakes to answer the following research question: *“Does the modern Air Force organizational culture have traits similar to the organizational culture of corporate America and, if it does, how can those traits be enhanced or minimized to aid the service mission?”* The paper undertakes a narrow comparative analysis, evaluating and comparing the organizational culture of Enron (as representative of modern corporate American failure) with that of the Air Force fighter pilot subculture (as representative of the service). After setting out the goals and limitations of this paper’s methodology in the Introduction, the paper utilizes the evaluation framework described in *Six Research Frameworks* by Ackerman, Stafford, and Williams.¹⁶ As a first step in the evaluation, in Chapter Two the paper determines parallels between the two cultures. Chapter Two analyzes each culture using the cultural framework provided by MIT professor, Dr. Edgar

^{vi} The term “max perform” is used to denote maximizing performance of an organization without demanding so much that performance suffers. The term is also used to denote maximizing aircraft performance without going beyond aircraft performance limits.

Schein in his book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, and determines the organizational cultures share three traits of interest: 1) a pride-inducing reputation, 2) significant conformity pressures, and 3) a toleration of perception engineering.

As the second step in the evaluation, in Chapter Three the paper evaluates the identified similarities by reference to a standard criterion: mission effectiveness. As the evaluation framework often demands, the paper will show an ethical connotation from that criterion; traits with the potential to enhance mission accomplishment will be presented in a positive light, and traits that degrade it will be presented as negative. Chapter Three finds that the cultural traits of a pride-inducing reputation and significant conformity pressures can be managed to enhance mission accomplishment despite also having the potential to degrade it while the cultural trait of a toleration of perception engineering has the potential only to degrade mission accomplishment.

As the final step in the evaluation, Chapter Four relates these findings to a broader cultural discussion and concludes with recommendations to enhance positive cultural traits while minimizing or reducing the negative. Those recommendations include expanding Crew/Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) training service-wide, replacing the Air and Space Basic Course (ASBC) with an officer-wide Remotely Piloted Vehicle (RPV) training program, enhanced promotion of a “back to basics” culture, and creating/reinforcing a cultural firewall to protect service culture.

Acknowledging the constraints of this narrow comparative approach, the remainder of the Introduction explains five limitations related to the study’s methodology. Section 1.A explains why the Enron comparison is relevant although Enron has failed, and the Air Force has not. Sections 1.B and 1.C explain why this paper has

selected Enron and the fighter pilot subculture for comparison as representative of their broader organizational cultures. Section 1.D discusses the primary sources used in this research to analyze the Air Force fighter pilot subculture. Finally, section 1.E explains limitations of this research and potential bias.

A. Enron Failed - the Air Force Has Not

Turning to the other side of the comparison, the reader may well ask how Enron can possibly be a good comparator when Enron failed and the Air Force has not. Enron's failure was of massive proportions: the largest corporate bankruptcy of its time,¹⁷ the result of massive fraud, "shocking incompetence, unjustified arrogance," and "compromised ethics" on a large scale.¹⁸ The United States Air Force, on the other hand, remains a success. This paper does not suggest that the Air Force is substantially similar to Enron, nor that it is poised on the brink of some similarly massive failure. The purpose of the paper, however, is to investigate any potential similarities in organizational cultures, so the paper necessarily focuses on those similarities, and not the many differences between the two institutions.

But of course the differences *are* many. Just to highlight a few: First, the Air Force remains vitally relevant and supplies critical airpower in support of the nation's interests around the globe. While Enron collapsed, the Air Force has not. Second, Air Force leadership continues to transform the service culture and capability in an attempt to best meet the nation's future requirements.¹⁹ While Enron refused to change its culture, the Air Force has not. Third, the Air Force has an established culture of risk assessment to protect its people and equipment from unjustified loss.²⁰ While Enron encouraged unchecked risk, the Air Force has not.

Why, then, maintain such a dramatic comparison? As explained further below, Enron was chosen in part because it has been subjected to detailed study, resulting in a wealth of source material. Beyond that prosaic point, however, critical examinations are rarely desired, and even less so when conducted by an outsider to those examined. But they are necessary, and Enron's spectacular failure after so many successes, due in part to an unexamined organizational culture, provides a useful reminder that one hallmark of Air Force culture—critical debrief—is necessary for sustained excellence. This research offers one imperfect contribution to the Air Force goal of critical cultural analysis and transformation. It has been offered in the spirit of the critical debrief, a hallmark of the fighter pilot community that seeks to constantly improve for the defense of the nation. The continued effort to max perform its culture will ensure the Air Force never equates to Enron.

B. Why Concentrate on Enron?

Enron was selected among several recent corporate failures because the failure ran its course into bankruptcy and is distant enough that it has been extensively analyzed. It is a representative failure. Enron's culture and operating practices were certainly not limited to it alone. According to former *New York Times* investigative reporter Kurt Eichenwald, "Enron appeared to be just the first symptom of a disease that had somehow swept undetected through corporate America, felling giants in its wake from WorldCom to Tyco, from Adelphia to Global Crossing. What emerged was a scandal of scandals, all seemingly interlinked in some mindless spree of corporate greed."²¹ Indeed, the link between Enron and more recent failures was previously identified by former Securities and Exchange (SEC) chairman, Arthur Levitt, who correctly predicted the nation would

see many more corporate failures as the result of a shared culture of reality distortion.²²

Enron was not unique, but has been singled out because there is a rich well of source material regarding its failure.

C. Why Concentrate on the Fighter Pilot Subculture?

The service's purpose is to generate combat capability that protects the country, and not necessarily to provide equal career opportunities for those who fly heavies, or, heaven forbid, don't wear wings at all.

- General Merrill McPeak, former Air Force Chief of Staff

The fighter pilot subculture was chosen because although fighter pilots make up a small percentage of the whole service, their subculture exerts an outsized influence on Air Force culture as a whole. General McPeak's statement provides a strong indicator of the importance of the mission: generating combat capability.^{vii} But it also touches on the importance of the fighter pilot subculture to the Air Force. This paper concentrates on the fighter pilot subculture for several reasons. Fighter pilots have controlled Air Force leadership positions for the past three decades. As then Major Bruce Danskin^{viii} pointed out in his 2001 paper entitled, *Fall of the Fighter Generals*:

Fighter pilots dominate the senior leadership of the United States Air Force (USAF) holding 67 percent of the four-star general officer positions and commanding 63 percent of all major commands. Yet they make up only 5.3 percent of the force... They constitute an elite group that influences, if not outright controls, every aspect of the Air Force institution.²³

^{vii} General McPeak has a background as an F-15C pilot.

^{viii} Then Major Bruce Danskin has a background as an RC-135 navigator.

Danskine's observation remains relevant despite the top Air Force position being currently filled by a non-fighter pilot. AETC, the command that trains every pilot regardless of weapon system, provides the initial "gateway" to the service for *all* service members and provides recurring education to all airmen. It illustrates this dominance. As an example from this researcher's 2008 experience in AETC, the six-level chain of command extending from his squadron commander to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force consisted entirely of F-15C fighter pilots. This dominance persists despite the AETC mission encompassing pilot training for all weapon systems and regardless of non-fighter pilots outnumbering fighter pilots by more than four to one, and non-fighter pilot Air Force officers outnumbering fighter pilots by twenty-four to one.²⁴ As Danskine illustrates, the dominance of the minority fighter tribe has existed for some time, and it remains overwhelming to this day.

It is not surprising that with such institutional dominance, the fighter pilot subculture provides the culture from which the majority of senior leadership continues to be picked. As Danskine suggests, the direct connection between fighter pilot subculture and the culture of senior leadership means the fighter pilot subculture can be expected to inform and influence the culture of the rest of the Air Force beyond that of any other subculture.

It should be noted that the cultural findings in this paper, while limited to the fighter pilot subculture, do not suggest they are unique to that subculture. Further research is required to determine the scope of these findings throughout the Air Force institution. If Danskine's assertion concerning the influence of the minority tribe is correct, these cultural findings should prove applicable to the broader Air Force culture.

D. Primary Sources Used for Air Force Cultural Research

Every research paper is necessarily limited by its sources. While the topic of fighter pilots has captured imaginations since fighter pilots first took to the sky, accounts of modern Air Force fighter pilot subculture are exceedingly rare. Several books have been written about fighter pilots from various conflicts and about legendary fighter pilots like John Boyd, Robin Olds and the Tuskegee Airmen. Works on modern, post September 11, 2001, fighter pilot subculture, however, are extremely limited. For this reason, this research utilizes only two primary sources to analyze fighter pilot subculture with a third supplemental source. One limitation resulting from the small collection of available sources is their scope: the primary sources focus on the F-15C and F-16 communities. The F-15E, F-22, and A-10 communities are not represented. Even so, the sources appear to cover the majority of the fighter pilot community; without accounting for manning disparities, the F-15C and F-16 comprised 67% of the Air Force fighter pilot fleet in 2009.²⁵

The primary sources relied upon include one book and one reality television series. They were selected as the most modern depictions of fighter pilot subculture by modern fighter pilots available in the public domain. They are particularly useful because they demonstrate the cultural artifacts, attitudes, and values of fighter pilots while themselves seeking to explain fighter pilot subculture to the outside world. The sources present firsthand accounts of fighter pilot culture rather than third person narratives.

The first source is *Christian Fighter Pilot is not an Oxymoron*, written in 2007 by then Captain Jonathan C. Dowty, an active duty Air Force F-16 pilot with multiple

operational tours in the aircraft. In his description Dowty writes that his book explains “the popular fighter pilot culture” and includes specifics that “may be foreign even to pilots of other kinds of aircraft.”²⁶ The primary strength of this source is its explanation of modern fighter pilot subculture by a modern fighter pilot. While the stated audience and message is theological in nature, Dowty seeks to provide an understanding of fighter pilot subculture and furnishes a proud yet critical depiction of his subculture. It is precisely his discussion of the culture analyzed through his theological perspective that provides the rich cultural discussion. He reacts to cultural traits he finds offensive or negative and proudly presents cultural traits he sees as positive. His book provides a balanced narrative and unusual candor as evidenced by his willingness to critique his culture and himself while also detailing heartfelt pride in being a part of the fighter pilot subculture.²⁷ The primary limitation of the source is that it is comprised of the viewpoints and experiences of one singular fighter pilot.

The second source upon which the paper relies is “American Fighter Pilot” (AFP), a made-for-television reality series that details the training of several pilots going through initial F-15C qualification. AFP was created in 2002 as a reality-TV series to be aired on network television. It received extensive support from the United States Air Force, AETC, Tyndall AFB and the 95th Fighter Squadron (FS).²⁸ The producers give “special thanks to the United States Air Force” stating that “without their invaluable efforts and support this project would have not been possible.”²⁹ According to one reality television critic:

Coproduced by action-film mavens Tony and Ridley Scott, AFP: American Fighter Pilot charted the progress of three aspiring USAF aviators (known to

veterans as "boners"), who, in the wake of the Twin Towers disaster, elected to train for combat service as F-15 jockeys. The series began with the trio's orientation at Tyndall AFB in Florida, then progressed to practical training in the air -- mistakes and all -- while the pilots' loved ones anxiously waited back on solid ground. Although the reality of the series was never in question, the producers chose to depict the events in a stylized, cinematic fashion. AFP: American Fighter Pilot debuted on March 29, 2002.³⁰

AFP provides a unique look at the production of F-15C pilots and allows rare access to the instructors, students, and leadership of the 95th FS. The squadron serves as a gateway to the Eagle community and “provides capable warriors for America's Air Dominance Force in the renown “‘world's greatest air superiority fighter,’ the F-15C Eagle.”³¹ While the standard editorial used to describe the AFP series calls it “a serious examination of Air Force culture,” the series does have limitations.

The series can make it challenging to understand context because of its fast-paced and repetitive cinematic editing style.³² Additionally, the presence of a camera may have had an effect on the airmen being filmed. The pilots involved in the filming were likely cognizant of the public relations importance of the series, and may have in some measure behaved abnormally despite the purpose of the series to document the reality of F-15C training. Finally, the portrayal of the squadron culture may have been slanted toward the dramatic in an attempt to make the series more entertaining.

Unlike other reality shows, however, AFP has two major differences that make it more likely to accurately document reality rather than provide a sensational depiction. First, the individuals who participated did not do so in order to make a career as an actor

or for some other extrinsic goal; the AFP participants were military officers paid by the United States Air Force to show the public the training of pilots and the induction into the cultural community. As such the participants were bound by legal and ethical constraints that encouraged them to provide accurate information to the general public. This significant difference provides a measure of credibility to the AFP series as an accurate depiction of fighter pilot subculture rather than as a purely sensational product.

Second, most of the show – and the part of the show on which this study relies – consisted of simple interviews with the pilots. As one critic indicates, the emphasis on interviews is unique among reality productions.³³ Those interviews are unlikely to have been sensationalized in the same way other types of scenes could be sensationalized. Furthermore, the interviews make AFP a very important source. It is arguably the most detailed modern portrayal of F-15C culture, if not the Air Force fighter pilot subculture, in existence today, and is a quasi-official portrait.³⁴ It is particularly valuable because it documents the training of new members of the culture, which as Schein suggests, is a good way to discern elements of a culture by those not privy to that culture’s inner circle.³⁵ Indeed Schein’s emphasis on the socialization process for understanding culture makes this series on training and socialization particularly well suited for this research.³⁶

In addition to AFP, which depicts the culture of the 95th FS, this paper uses the unofficial 95th FS guide entitled “Mr. Bones^{ix} Eagle Driver Rules” for additional information regarding the fighter pilot subculture. The document was independently verified as a legitimate unofficial source of expected behavior in the 95th FS and is available in the public domain despite having apparently been written for a private

^{ix} “Colonel Bones (ret)” is the skeleton mascot of the 95th FS.

audience. The document's audience is both student Eagle pilots and veteran Eagle drivers. It discusses preparation and grading expectations and contains an appendix written specifically to 95th FS student pilots. The document, like the series, is quasi-official in nature.

E. Potential Bias and Research Limitations

As it can be difficult to separate the observer from the observation, this section first sets out the personal characteristics of the researcher that may result in potential bias. This researcher is part of the broader Air Force culture and necessarily therefore has a bias concerning the service. This bias may be heightened by the fact that subculture choice in the Air Force is often a matter of self-selection of airframe and community; this researcher self-selected out of the fighter pilot subculture in Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT). In an effort to limit the effect of any bias, the paper relies primarily upon first-party accounts of modern fighter pilot subculture.

The researcher's position in regard to the culture being analyzed poses an additional limitation of the cultural analysis. This researcher is not a fighter pilot and is not privy to the inner workings of the fighter pilot community. As Schein discusses, one valid critique of cultural analysis is that a member removed from the community cannot provide a comprehensive cultural analysis.³⁷ On the other hand, the outsider's vantage point presents potential benefits for analysis as well.

Turning to other limitations on the study's methodology, the paper confines its analysis primarily to a subset of Air Force officer culture. As discussed in Section 1.C, the selected subculture has the greatest effect on Air Force culture as a whole and is therefore a good representative choice. Still, it is not necessarily representative of all

flying subcultures, much less *all* subcultures; for example, 80% of the Air Force is enlisted.³⁸ Furthermore, as discussed in Section 1.D, the sources examined are somewhat limited and present only a subset of the fighter pilot force. The research conclusions presented here therefore cannot be expected to form a comprehensive view of Air Force culture.³⁹

Finally, some may contend that the picture painted by this paper does not accurately convey the fighter pilot or greater Air Force culture, that this researcher's findings have failed to accurately convey a more complicated cultural reality. This is a valid criticism. RAND researcher Dr. Carl Builder in his study, *The Masks of War*, discusses such criticism and emphasizes that models of culture cannot be comprehensive depictions yet prove useful for isolating more easily understood elements.⁴⁰ In the same spirit, this research paper isolates important aspects of the fighter pilot subculture, and extrapolates from those aspects useful trends in Air Force culture even if it does not—indeed, could not—succeed in providing a thoroughly complete and nuanced depiction of that culture.

F. Summary

This paper evaluates Air Force organizational culture by comparing that culture to the organizational culture of corporate America through the lens of two representative units: Enron and the fighter pilot subculture. Although no analysis, particularly by an outsider, can present a perfectly complete and nuanced picture of a culture, and the primary sources from which to evaluate the fighter pilot subculture are limited, there is sufficient material from which this paper can draw out important aspects of both cultures along the six factors of Schein's framework and show some similarities. Considering

three similarities of particular interest, this paper finds that two of them can, if properly directed, contribute to mission success whereas the third can only downgrade mission effectiveness. Finally, the paper recommends ways in which the Air Force can maximize the identified aspects of its organizational culture in an effort to provide one small contribution to the service in its time of transformation and cultural reevaluation.

Chapter Two: Schein's Framework For Cultural Analysis

Cultures can have powerful consequences, especially when they are strong. They can enable a group to take rapid and coordinated action against a competitor... They can also lead intelligent people to walk, in concert, off a cliff.

- John P. Kotter, *Corporate Culture and Performance*

In this Chapter, the paper introduces Schein's concept of culture and some limitations of cultural examination. The paper then shows the cultural parallels between the organizational cultures of Enron and the fighter pilot community discovered in its research.

A. What is Culture?

In his widely referenced book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein maintains that simple models of culture should be avoided in favor of "more complex anthropological models."⁴¹ He likens one aspect of culture to character or personality in an individual, reasoning that while we can see the effects of culture, just as we can see an individual's behavior, the hidden and often unconscious phenomena of culture-directing behavior is more difficult to isolate.⁴² He describes another aspect of culture as something that evolves through environmental inputs and states, "Culture as a concept is thus an abstraction but its behavioral and attitudinal consequences are very concrete indeed."⁴³ Cultural consequences can include reinforcing or threatening the survival of the organization itself.⁴⁴ Healthy organizations make organizational culture a survival-reinforcing asset by instituting and enforcing norms dedicated to the survival of the organization. Schein writes:

As members of different occupations, we are aware that being a doctor, lawyer, engineer, accountant, or other professional involves not only the learning of technical skills but also the adoption of certain values and norms that define our occupation. If we violate some of these norms we can be thrown out of the occupation.⁴⁵

According to Schein, “leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin.”⁴⁶ On one side leaders are promoted from within an organizational culture. On the other, leaders manage culture and, in what Schein calls an “ultimate act of leadership,” demolish culture when it is not serving the needs of the organization.⁴⁷

Schein provides a formal definition of culture as primarily involving group assumptions involving external adaptation and internal integration that are then passed on in a process of socialization.⁴⁸ He discusses the challenge of studying the socialization process as follows:

Studying what new member of groups are taught is, in fact, a good way to discover some of the elements of a culture; however, by this means one only learns about surface aspects of the culture—especially because much of what is at the heart of a culture will not be revealed in the rules of behavior taught to newcomers. It will only be revealed to members as they gain permanent status and are allowed into the inner circles of the group in which group secrets are shared.⁴⁹

He goes on to explain that despite this difficulty, the socialization process can uncover assumptions held by the culture. Schein concludes his description of culture by noting:

Once a set of shared assumptions has come to be taken for granted, it determines much of the group's behavior, and the rules and norms are taught to newcomers in a socialization process that is itself a reflection of culture.⁵⁰

This paper's research examines both Enron and fighter pilot subculture from an external perspective in order to determine the shared assumptions, rules, and norms of those cultures. The sources provide some discussion of internal secrets (subsequently made public), but of course the ability to peer into the inside of a culture is necessarily limited, and this paper recognizes the sources are mere reflections of a more complex comprehensive cultural reality.

Schein outlines six "embedding mechanisms" as the primary ways organizational leaders teach their organizations "how to perceive, think, feel, and behave based on their own conscious and unconscious convictions."⁵¹ These mechanisms can be used to help identify an organization's culture by discovering how each mechanism operates within an organization. Schein's framework consists of identifying:

- What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis
- Leader reactions to critical incidents and organizational crises
- How leaders allocate resources
- Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching
- How leaders allocate rewards and status
- How Leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate

With these mechanisms in mind, sections 2.B and 2.C analyze Enron and fighter pilot culture in order to determine the similarities between the two.

B. Cultural Analysis of Enron

Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling...were known as the smartest guys in the room, captains of a ship too powerful to ever go down.

- Narrator, *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*

This analysis of Enron draws first from College of William & Mary professor, Dr. Ronald Sims and Norwegian School of Management professor, Dr. Johannes Brinkman's *Enron Ethics (Or: Culture Matters More Than Codes)* (2003), which analyzed Enron's culture using Schein's framework. The purpose of Sims and Brinkman's study was to demonstrate that the leadership culture had significant effects on the ethics of its employees, but their findings regarding the six mechanisms have a broader relevance. Their analysis is supplemented by this paper's analysis of additional sources including Harvard professor Malcolm Salter's book *Innovation Corrupted: The Origins and Legacy of Enron's Collapse* (2009) and former *New York Times* investigative reporter Kurt Eichenwald's, *Conspiracy of Fools: A True Story* (2005). The results of this analysis are presented in several broad categories (ie, "stock price" or "perception engineering").

What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis

This paper finds four main focal points for Enron's leadership: stock price, perception engineering (mark-to-market accounting), credit rating, and criticism.

Stock Price

Enron's leadership paid inordinate attention to the company's stock price.⁵² This focus was demonstrated in a tangible fashion by Ken Lay's decision to install a large digital readout of the stock price at the entrance of Enron's corporate headquarters.⁵³ It was also exemplified by the company encouraging its employees to purchase its stock

and the payment of much of its compensation to employees in stock options, ensuring they were financially vested in the price, and by paying senior executives large bonuses if the stock price hit certain benchmarks.⁵⁴ Although any publicly-traded company has reason to be concerned with its stock price, Enron may have been more focused on the metric than most because of its structured finance deals, many of which included “triggers” based on the stock price. If Enron’s stock price dropped to a certain amount, it would trigger an obligation for payment from Enron that would set off a chain reaction and cause the company to come undone.

Perception Engineering (Mark-to-market Accounting)

Another focal point was the perception of profit, through mark-to-market accounting. Once Enron was approved for mark-to-market accounting, which allowed businesses to report future projected gains as current profit, it began constructing deals that allowed it to claim projected profits as current value. For example, if Enron closed a ten-year deal to deliver a commodity at a certain price, it was able to project the profit of the entire ten years and place it as current value on the balance sheet (even if the profit wasn’t realized in those ten years). Deals constructed by Enron showed projected profits as Enron saw fit and did not have to endure an independent valuation.⁵⁵ As a result Enron began to make transactions concerned less with the creation of actual realized wealth and more with the perception of future earnings. Enron was even willing to relax ethical rules in order to engage in transactions that offered the perception of profit.⁵⁶ This focus is a species of what this paper terms “perception engineering,” that is, the practice of embellishing, distorting, or concealing facts for the purposes of personal or unit enhancement. One problem with the new accounting method was that earnings for a

multi-year contract could only be reported during the first year. Each year, new deals had to be constructed in order to show the company was continuing to grow so that the stock price would not fall.⁵⁷ This ultimately resulted in the construction of several dubious “structured finance” entities that served to trade with Enron so that projected profits could be put on the books and growing debt could be masked.⁵⁸ The focus of leadership thus turned from actual deals to deals made only for their perception value.

Credit Rating

Enron was also “uniquely dependent” on its credit rating and grew ever more dependent upon it as it progressed under mark-to-market accounting.⁵⁹ Just as structured financing entities contained triggers based on stock price, they also contained triggers based on a devaluation of the credit rating. Andy Fastow, Enron’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO), went to great lengths to ensure the credit rating did not drop below investment grade, because that event could trigger contractual obligations of Enron to pay huge sums of money by starting a domino effect pulling other structured finance triggers.⁶⁰ This was a catastrophic risk as Enron had little cash and a great deal of debt.⁶¹ Unfortunately for Enron, the dominos did fall after the company credit rating was lowered leading to its failure.

Criticism

Enron’s daily survival was dependent upon its stock price and credit rating, which was in turn dependent upon its ability to project an image of solvency and financial growth to consumers. As the company began to depend more upon mark-to-market accounting—i.e., the perception of profit—the house of cards became increasingly vulnerable. As a result, Enron executives were hypersensitive to any bad perceptions of

Enron, negative press or other portrayals of their company in a poor light and took drastic action to avoid criticism. For example, Enron successfully influenced the most prestigious accounting firm in U.S. history, Arthur Andersen, to sign off on questionable financial maneuvering and to engage in illegal behavior.⁶²

Enron actively managed its public relations image and was rewarded, for a time, with a reputation as one of the most successful companies of all time. When outsiders began to question the company, executives responded defensively. During an analyst open conference call with Jeff Skilling, Enron's then-CEO, Richard Grubman of Highfield Capital asked Skilling to provide a balance sheet. When Skilling stated he could not provide one, Grubman stated, "You're the only financial institution that cannot produce a balance sheet or a cash-flow statement with their earnings." This infuriated Skilling who ended the call by calling the analyst a profanity during the public conference call.⁶³ In another episode, Skilling was similarly defensive with an inquisitive *Fortune* magazine journalist, Bethany McLean, informing her that her desired story was unethical and rooted in jealousy of Enron's success.⁶⁴

Leader reactions to critical incidents and organizational crises

This paper finds that there were three main modes of reaction to crisis: denial, conformity (suppression of dissent), and perception engineering.

Denial

Enron's leadership often reacted to crises with denial.⁶⁵ Top-level Enron executives refused to acknowledge the catastrophic risks the company faced,⁶⁶ ignored assessments from outside accountants showing Enron's profit projections to be false,⁶⁷ and exploded when an employee suggested the company was facing a crisis.⁶⁸ One

illustrative incident occurred when, during a presentation to Jeff Skilling, Enron's then-president, the head of the retail department presented a slideshow detailing problems with a structured finance entity known as Chewco. Although Skilling and other executives wanted to see the entity accounted for with a particular mark-to-market profit, the employee showed the potential profit margin for the entity was actually very low. Skilling reportedly did not want to see the information and told the employee "you're too f***ing smart for this. I don't want to ever see that slide again." When the employee responded that it was the truth, Skilling again repeated his desire to never again see the slide. When the employee slammed his hand on the table and exclaimed these were the facts, Skilling shouted, "It may be the facts but I don't want you to think about it that way!"⁶⁹

Conformity (Suppression of Dissent)

One of the crises was of an ongoing nature: the continued need to produce phenomenal growth.⁷⁰ The voices of individuals criticizing the types of actions taken to fuel that growth (or, rather, the appearance of growth) were suppressed for failing to conform to operating norms of passive acceptance. While Enron employees who expressed critical opinions were few, those who did were often relocated to new jobs and removed from any responsibility in the company. One employee, Vincent Kaminski, led a research group in the Risk Assessment and Control (RAC) division of Enron. The function of the group was to perform risk analysis on proposed structured financing deals. Kaminski strongly argued against at least one proposal, a structured financing entity called LJM. Kaminski was charged with operating his group "like cops" and was transferred out of RAC and oversight responsibility.⁷¹

The suppression of dissent was not limited only to Enron employees. Carl Bass, an Arthur Andersen accountant, understood Enron's accounting practices were flawed if not illegal. His attempts to provide objective criticisms of the deals were ultimately seen as "caustic and cynical" and he was prohibited from working on Enron's account at the request of Enron's chief accounting officer.⁷² Bass was then told he might want to consider a job opportunity outside of the firm. Similarly, John Olson was an independent stock analyst for Merrill Lynch who was critical of Enron's lack of transparency. He thought the stock price was overvalued. Merrill Lynch, however, had reaped great profits from deals with Andy Fastow. In response to Olson's consistently negative opinions, Fastow shut off business to Merrill Lynch and Enron's executives made their displeasure known. "[A]n unspoken understanding about the future of John Olson" was reached and Enron began again working with Merrill Lynch. Olson was told he was "too negative on Enron" and had offended Enron's CEO Kenneth Lay.⁷³ He was officially fired "for failing to forge strong relationships with the firm's bankers."⁷⁴ Individuals within the company or its partners were punished for attempts to accurately diagnose Enron's practices.⁷⁵

Perception Engineering

In addition to responding to crisis by denying it, the leadership responded to crisis by attempting to hide it. The trigger-laden structured financing entities of Enron presented a growing risk to the company should public opinion affect its credit rating or stock price. Enron's leadership managed public opinion by providing limited and doctored information to the public. Furthermore, because profits for transactions were reported immediately due to mark-to-market accounting, the company labored

continually to create new structured finance entities designed to do business with Enron (despite being controlled by Enron) in deals that would show new profits, conceal debt, and ensure the stock price did not go down.⁷⁶ As the house of cards was built increasingly higher, the company responded by adding to the house of cards: creating more and more structured financing entities. Each new entity solved Enron's immediate problems while ensuring its company would eventually fall. Until the very end, Enron carefully managed the perception of its health through carefully engineered financial reporting.

How leaders allocate resources

This paper finds the leaders at Enron allocated resources toward perception engineering, or, more specifically, the perception of profit.

Perception Engineering (Perception of Profit)

Quite simply, Enron allocated resources—money and access—to employees who could provide the *perception* of profit. Indeed, Enron prioritized resources to those employees over the employees generating *actual* profit. For example, the prized elite division was Andy Fastow's, responsible for the financial creations that enabled Enron to creatively report unrealized profits and shield massive debt. He surrounded himself with yes men and created a group of his favorites he called the "special-projects group."⁷⁷ The group was considered an elite, almost clandestine, subculture within Enron and worked on Fastow's entities and simultaneously made deals for personal gain.⁷⁸

Furthermore, Enron executives allocated money and manpower to projects that would allow them to claim future profits using mark-to-market accounting. The leadership allocated significant money to several international energy startup projects that

would allow them to claim even larger revenues on the books, despite less-than-rosy prospects for actual returns. Rebecca Mark, a graduate of Harvard Business School, spearheaded a project to build a multi-billion dollar state-of-the-art gas power plant in India. In a meeting with a representative from India, Mark explained the power plant would have to be massive, gas would likely have to be imported, and the cost of the produced energy would be twice as expensive as a coal power plant. She stated she did not think India could afford the power.⁷⁹ When the representative explained the government would support the project, projections of profit were created and the board signed off on the deal, investing over two billion dollars.⁸⁰ The plant was built but was unable to pay its operating costs. Enron employees manipulated the numbers to conceal the growing problems.⁸¹ The power plant turned out to be a financial disaster that never came close to meeting the profit projections put on the books. The project was not an isolated fluke and other projects characterized by optimistic projections and a failure to materialize wealth existed.⁸²

Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching

Our culture is a tough culture...it's a very aggressive culture.

– Jeff Skilling, President of Enron

This paper's analysis finds there are three main cultural norms that are deliberately taught, modeled, or coached: risk taking, perception engineering, and perfectionism and competition.

Risk Taking

There appears to have been an organized effort by Skilling to model aggressive risk taking. He took his top employees, including Andy Fastow, on field trips that were devoted to adventure and risk. During one trip, an employee flipped a jeep and nearly died while others broke bones while racing in the Baja desert. Skilling busted his lip and required stitches during this same venture. Those stories became legendary and fed the macho culture of Enron.⁸³

Perception Engineering

Enron leadership modeled the cultural norm of discounting or ignoring negative information that did not provide a positive perception of the company. As previously discussed, Eichenwald details a conversation between one employee and Skilling concerning financial reporting problems; Skilling told the employee not to provide that information again. Skilling simply didn't want to see it.⁸⁴ Lay was provided a report by one executive showing the myriad of catastrophic problems with Enron's structured financing; he took steps to ignore and defuse the report.⁸⁵ Leadership coached employees that it desired the appearance of success, even if that meant being creative to generate the appearance. Employees who presented real problems were told they were not performing creatively or smartly.⁸⁶ Creative performance was role modeled by Enron's leadership and consisted of misrepresentation, withholding information, and deceit.⁸⁷

Perfectionism and Competition

Ken Lay, the CEO of Enron stated, "We're never satisfied, and I don't want us to ever be satisfied, with our stock price...it should always be higher."⁸⁸ Former Enron executive Amanda Martin characterized leadership expectations as, "Failure was not an

option.”⁸⁹ Skilling was reportedly a fan of the book, *The Selfish Gene*, and wanted to inspire competition with employees in a Darwinian fashion with performance being the key indicator. Eichenwald reports, “Skilling thought he was on his way to building a perfect meritocracy, where smart, gifted—and richly compensated—people would be pitted against one another in an endless battle for dominance, creating a free flow of ideas that could push the business past its competitors.”⁹⁰ Through a Performance Review Committee (PRC) process, employees were racked and stacked by supervisors and the bottom 15 percent were to be fired each year. Skilling’s vision was to create an environment in which the recruited best would battle each other to produce the best ideas to further the company.⁹¹ The environment established by Enron’s leadership resulted in a competitive ethos with a self-centered individualistic ethic that helped derail the organization.⁹²

How leaders allocate rewards and status

This paper’s analysis finds there is one main cultural finding for this element: Enron rewarded perception engineering.

Perception Engineering

Partly because its business model depended almost entirely on perception, rather than reality, and perhaps partly because Enron’s leadership was unwilling to hear bad news or brook failure (even when the news truly *was* bad, or winning was actually *not* an option), Enron valued and rewarded primarily those who could provide the *perception* of profit. Those were the individuals who advanced in the company and were awarded large bonuses. Andy Fastow came from a background of “esoteric deals, derivatives, [and] wealthy bankers with business degrees” and secured his position with creative, if

practically imaginary, thinking.⁹³ He delivered almost incomprehensible manipulations that resulted in reported profit once promoted to the CFO position.

The compensation system of Enron rewarded those who made and closed deals instead of rewarding them or providing incentives to see the project completed and generating actual profit.⁹⁴ Rebecca Mark and her team, for example, enjoyed bonus rewards for their efforts regarding the power plant in India. One Enron employee complained, “We pay millions in bonuses based on projections, and then end up with pieces of [s**t] that don’t look like what we started with.”⁹⁵ The plant in India wasn’t the only international failure. In the Dominican Republic, Enron built a multi-million dollar power plant that required local villagers with wooden poles to push trash away from its water inlet. The power plant did not make money because the Dominicans could not afford the energy.⁹⁶ Still the project was funded, the team rewarded, and profits put on the books.

The Performance Review Committee (PRC) handled bonuses paid to employees at Enron. The group was effectively controlled by the traders and Andy Fastow and consistently rewarded the traders “who had worked on fancy, eye-catching deals.”⁹⁷ Non-trading employees were viewed as support personnel in the company who did not contribute on the front line.⁹⁸ As a result they did not deserve the big bonuses, regardless of the quality of their work.

Those few employees who labored for reform were given lower bonuses as their reward.⁹⁹ Indeed, a particularly valuable employee resigned as the result of the PRC process. Kevin Kindall was a young employee who worked for Enron’s research department and had spent a year inquiring into the company’s structured financing

entities. His work uncovered the threats posed by Fastow's financial creations. Despite the value of his work to Enron's success and sincere efforts by his boss, Kindall was not rewarded during the PRC process. Kindall resigned because he concluded the company did not value his contributions. Eichenwald reports, "The person who had discovered the true nature of the financial threats that would ultimately destroy Enron was gone, his contribution dismissed as irrelevant to the company's continued success."¹⁰⁰ Honest analysis and reporting were simply not valued above profitable perception engineering. A former Enron vice-president acknowledged rule breaking, cheating, and lying were acceptable as long as money was made.¹⁰¹

How Leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate

This paper's analysis finds there are three main norms exhibited by the manner in which Enron recruited, promoted, and excommunicated: a pride-inducing reputation as the best, perception engineering, and conformity (suppression of dissent).

A Pride-Inducing Reputation as the Best

Enron recruited largely based on its reputation and its compensation. Enron prided itself on employing the best minds. Jeff Skilling was a product of Harvard Business School. During his interview to Harvard he was asked if he was smart. He responded, "I'm [f**king] smart."¹⁰² Beyond the academic credentials of its employees, Enron cultivated its image as employing top-notch executives at the very top of the pyramid. Andy Fastow worked with the company's public relations chief to get himself named CFO of the Year by *CFO* magazine. *Fortune* magazine also praised the company. Enron was on its "most innovative company" list for six straight years, was ranked 22 on its list of best companies to work for and 18 on its list of companies most admired.¹⁰³ In

1999, *Fortune* put Enron first across the nation for management quality.¹⁰⁴

At the time Enron went bankrupt, it was understood to “have a deep reservoir of talent” owing to Ken Lay’s policy of hiring the best and the brightest. Ken Lay reportedly often said, “There is no substitute for talent...If you have the best talent and a reasonably good strategy, everything else works out.”¹⁰⁵ The raw talent hired by Enron was then placed in a recruiting program that introduced them to complicated financial structuring and was “designed, according to a former Enron executive, to put recruits on a pedestal ‘so they would develop a sense of superiority.’”¹⁰⁶ “[T]he self-congratulation and hype surrounding recruitment” at Enron “fertilized whatever arrogance new recruits brought to the job.”¹⁰⁷

Perception Engineering

As previously discussed, Enron promoted and rewarded employees who could deliver projections of profit. These employees were rewarded for their loyalty and creativeness primarily through the PRC process and the bonuses it provided.

Conformity (Suppression of Dissent)

Those who did not conform to the unwritten expectation to avoid questioning the creativity of the financial maneuvering or who sought to understand the complexities of the entities were at the least sidelined: removed from positions with oversight responsibilities and given lower bonuses. One of Fastow’s subordinates, former executive Sherron Watkins, had researched Fastow’s entities and discovered their great potential to sink the company. She wrote a letter to Ken Lay sharing her findings and stating she was “incredibly nervous” that Enron would “implode in a wave of accounting scandals.”¹⁰⁸ She followed up by meeting with Lay and expressed her concerns.¹⁰⁹ Lay

decided to have the issues investigated by its law firm instead of taking Watkin's advice to obtain an outside investigation, concluding there was no need to "reinvent the wheel."¹¹⁰ The firm concluded there were no problems.¹¹¹ When Fastow discovered the letter written by Watkins, he called human resources and demanded she and her secretary be fired and her computer taken. Fastow was "bent on destroying her career."¹¹² Watkins was not fired but was moved out of Fastow's group and later resigned from Enron.

While Watkins may have been Enron's most vocal whistleblower, she was not the only employee trying to save Enron from itself. Those who criticized Enron's practices were not successful and paid a personal price for their criticisms.¹¹³ Dissenters were excommunicated—by firing, by sidelining, or by convincing employees to depart due to lack of reward. Those who tried to bring Enron's practices into the light were punished.¹¹⁴

C. Cultural Analysis of the Air Force

...those who are ultimately allowed to fly fighters are the best of the best.

- Captain Jonathan C. Dowty, Air Force F-16 Pilot

Turning to the other side of the comparison, this paper uses Schein's framework to analyze Air Force fighter pilot subculture by examining how each of Schein's six mechanisms operate. The analysis draws upon the three primary sources discussed in the introduction: Dowty's account, the American Fighter Pilot (AFP) series, and the unofficial "Eagle Drivers' Rules."

What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis

Everything we do is training and this is just social training. And this social training is going to culminate in an event we call the solo party.

- Capt Robert “Shark” Garland, Chief F-15C Instructor Pilot

Primary source research indicates there are two main cultural norms that leaders pay attention to and control: technical performance and social conformity.

Technical Performance

Leadership in the fighter pilot subculture is concerned with the technical progression of student pilots in the training environment and continued performance in operational squadrons. AFP details the progression of each of the three student F-15C pilots as they go through initial qualification training in the 110-day program. The ability of the students to meet course training standards proficiently comprises a major portion of squadron leadership’s attention. One student fails two simulator rides and faces elimination on a third simulator sortie. His progress is observed and commented on by a simulator instructor, the squadron operations officer, and the chief instructor.¹¹⁵ The technical progress of the students is observed and measured in their training flights as well as their performance in other ground syllabus events. Weekly instructor pilot meetings gauge the technical performance of each student and instructors discuss student progress on specific course events. Positive and negative reinforcement is utilized throughout the program to encourage technical performance.

This focus on technical performance does not end after initial training; in operational squadrons awards such as the “air-to-ground top gun” are provided to pilots who demonstrate superior technical proficiency.¹¹⁶ One source of a fighter pilot’s reputation is formed from performance on checkrides and in upgrade programs.¹¹⁷

Success in these operational endeavors leads to a superior reputation and a favored disposition among peers.¹¹⁸

Social Conformity

In the training environment, leadership is concerned with the social performance of the student pilots. Instructors stress the importance of social conformity and provide fraternal rituals and regular social events at the squadron bar to gauge performance. Regular instructor pilot meetings also examine how the students are performing socially.¹¹⁹ Lessons on how a pilot is expected to fit into the squadron are taught to the students, measured, and reinforced. Instructors comment on student social artifacts such as hairstyle, automobile choice, and emphasize acceptable social behavior. For example, one F-15C instructor describes how Eagle pilots do not color their hair or wear nipple rings and explains the balance of his world would be upset if he knew his wingman was wearing one.¹²⁰ Additional appearance prohibitions in the Eagle community include the prohibition of briefcases and umbrellas.¹²¹ Attention to social performance extends beyond initial training and both prohibitions listed above are stated specifically in the list of prohibitions on appearance listed in the unofficial 95th FS “Mr. Bones’ Eagle Driver Rules,” (“the Rules”) which contain twenty-six different fashion prohibitions, including not wearing calculator watches and not wearing turtlenecks.¹²²

Leadership consistently places a high priority on social performance in the training environment. A chief F-15C instructor pilot states, “it doesn’t matter what you drive, it doesn’t matter how you look, the only thing that matters is being able to successfully execute in this weapons system and be an integral part of our community.”¹²³ He appears to suggest social conformity is required to be integral to the

community saying, “No matter how good these [student pilots] might be in the jet, if they can't fit in socially they can't be an American fighter pilot and in this course that means [they] won't graduate.”¹²⁴ The chief instructor evaluates one student's performance noting his assimilation into the fighter pilot fraternity, his internalization of the fighter pilot personality, and concludes it is a positive development.¹²⁵ Social conformity is a requirement for inclusion in the fighter pilot culture.^x

Leader reactions to critical incidents and organizational crises

None of the primary sources demonstrate critical incidents or organizational crises from which this mechanism of Schein's framework could be observed. One operational F-16 pilot does provide a potential indication of likely initial reactions to crises stating, “Fighter pilots by nature don't like to be wrong, and their first response is generally to become defensive and deny an offense was committed.”¹²⁶ This contrasts with the Rules, which demonstrate the importance of self-analysis and correction. The Rules state, “It's a fact - you will f**k up in training. It's not acceptable, but it's inevitable. We make mistakes, *call ourselves out* on them, and learn from them. The goal is to not f**k up in war” (emphasis in original).¹²⁷

How leaders allocate resources

The primary sources do not paint a full picture of this mechanism. They do not, for example, elucidate how the leadership of a fighter pilot squadron allocates people or

^x The importance of social performance in the fighter pilot culture is not a modern invention. Robert C. Stone conducted a study of combat fighter pilots in 1947 observing, “Because of this all-enveloping nature of the group, the adjustment of the individual is not a partial one to only one aspect of the day's activities. Rather, adjustment must be made to a ‘total social situation.’ (Stone, 1947, 391)”

money among different squadron functions or demands. That sort of data would be useful for a more complete understanding of this mechanism. The sources do, however, provide some data and indicate leaders allocate resources toward two priorities that are in tension: family, and time at the squadron.

Family

Leadership makes an overt effort to allocate resources toward pilots' families. This includes a day set aside, in the training environment, as "family day," giving students and instructors an opportunity to bring their families into the squadron to see how their loved ones are spending long hours at work. This includes squadron leadership thanking spouses for loaning their husbands and wives to the squadron. Leadership allocates work time, maintenance support, and fuel expenditures to provide family members an opportunity to taxi down the runway in the fighter aircraft.¹²⁸ The family day provides a morale boost and leads to a better understanding by spouses.¹²⁹ This focus does not end after initial training despite significant challenges of the fighter pilot lifestyle and long hours on family life. The Air Force "continues to recognize that a military member's family life directly influences the performance of his duties."¹³⁰

Time at the Squadron

Although the sources do not directly document leadership's allocation of individuals' time, they do show that individual pilots allocate their time in favor of spending more time at the squadron. Long hours are experienced in both the training and operational environments and "many fighter pilots misprioritize their job, placing it above themselves and their families..."¹³¹ Long hours results in resentment from some spouses.¹³² The "Eagle Driver Rules" emphasize the importance of a pilot not leaving

work early when he can instead help his peers and states that some squadron events are moral/professional obligations that trump a personal agenda.¹³³

Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching

This paper finds there are five main cultural findings for this element of Schein's framework—five norms that are deliberately role modeled, taught, and coached: perfectionism, technical performance, conformity, fraternal behavior, and a required thick skin.

The instructional mission of the training fighter squadron lends itself well to this element of Schein's framework. In the AFP series, one student claims his idealistic image of himself is to be the chief instructor pilot.¹³⁴

Perfectionism

An attitude of perfection is required in the fighter pilot community and individuals are expected to be perfectionists. Fighter pilot instructors displaying “classic characteristics of the fighter pilot personality” are “aggressive, terse, and blunt...[and] critical and demanding in a harsh way” and make a thick skin necessary “because criticisms [are] not couched in pleasant words but [are] delivered with severity.”¹³⁵ Fighter pilots demand perfection not only from themselves, but also from others around them.¹³⁶ Dowty explains that since fighter pilots are often successful in their drive toward perfection they are “extremely proud, which is often perceived as arrogance.”¹³⁷ This necessary trait is role modeled and evaluated in both operational and training squadrons.¹³⁸

Technical Performance

Technical performance is instructed and role modeled in both training and operational fighter pilot squadrons. In training squadrons this is achieved primarily through instructors interacting with students in accordance with a syllabus. In operational squadrons, upgrade programs and training events develop greater pilot proficiency and checkride evaluations measure it.¹³⁹ As discussed under Schein's first mechanism (what leaders pay attention to), technical performance is a very important norm in this subculture.

Teamwork

New fighter pilots are quickly taught the importance of teamwork. The AFP series details the failures of one student in the emergency simulators; a proficient student helps him with his emergency procedures and he passes his third attempted simulator ride.¹⁴⁰ According to the appendix to student pilots in the "Eagle Driver Rules," complete loyalty is required of students and they are required to help peers having difficulty.¹⁴¹

Conformity

As discussed above under Schein's first mechanism, leaders in this culture pay attention to social performance. The sources show that leaders teach the importance of a certain kind of social behavior; being a fighter pilot is something outside the technical proficiency of flying a fighter aircraft. An Eagle operations officer explains, "What we do more than just teach you how to fly is teach you how to be a fighter pilot. Don't be surprised if you find yourself going through some kind of metamorphosis. We expect that to happen."¹⁴² This sentiment is reflected in the words of another instructor pilot

who states, "We're actually trying to teach [them] on a couple levels. One level is technical proficiency and it's flying the jet and employing the Eagle. The other side of it is learning to be a fighter pilot, learning to be part of a brotherhood, learning to be part of a team."¹⁴³ In the operational environment a fighter pilot "learns not only tactical skills but also how the fighter pilot life is supposed to be lived."¹⁴⁴ To some, being a fighter pilot is less about flying and more about comradery, drinking, and traditions.¹⁴⁵ In order to promote this social performance, leadership emphasizes conformity. Dowty provides a particularly salient discussion of the importance of social conformity in the fighter pilot subculture stating:

The stereotypical fighter pilot is the break-all-the-rules maverick who pushes the boundaries, goes it alone, and uses his 'I know better than they do' attitude to win the war (and the girl). Reality is a slightly different story.... For better or worse, fighter pilots face pressure from their peers to act a certain way. The result is that a fighter pilot isn't the stereotypical individualist or nonconformist—rules, regulations, and ridicule cause him to act in a manner that is consistent with the rest of the group. Whether it is 'safety in numbers' or 'mob mentality' (either of which could accurately convey a fighter pilot perspective), fighter pilots tend to act like a herd. When one fighter pilot is different, he sticks out of the pack, and the pressure to conform is immense.¹⁴⁶

Conformity pressure is evidenced both in student interaction with instructors and in social behavior. One Eagle instructor states, "Lesson number one as an Eagle Driver, never pass up the opportunity to keep your mouth shut." Individuals who do not follow this

advice are ridiculed.¹⁴⁷ The apparent intent is to make junior pilots more receptive to the coaching of more experienced pilots.^{xi}

One particularly visible artifact of social conformity in the subculture is fighter pilot speak. “Standard fighter pilot lingo is laced with various forms of sexual innuendo, most through the use of linguistic games. The most frequently used fighter pilot linguistic skill is the phrase ‘so to speak’ to highlight a potential sexual reference in normal everyday speech.”¹⁴⁸ Another common word game involves “replacing certain words that have a possible sexual connotation with their generic or scientific equivalent” to highlight the words.¹⁴⁹ This is seen in the training squadron when pilots use the word “cranium” instead of saying “head.” This linguistic behavior is modeled by one chief instructor pilot and is mirrored by the students. In one example, a student Eagle pilot relates his failed simulator performance as, “You’re only as good as your last performance, so to speak, your last simulator. So when you do something marginal you kind of hang your cranium a little bit low.”¹⁵⁰

Fraternal Behavior

The sources clearly demonstrate the fraternity aspect of the fighter pilot community. That is, an individual is not just becoming a fighter pilot but is joining a select brotherhood set apart from, and above, other affiliations. Eagle pilots consistently refer to their community as a club, a brotherhood, and a fraternity.¹⁵¹ Students use the

^{xi} This cultural norm is part of a larger fighter pilot heritage of ensuring new pilots are receptive to experience. According to Stone, “The new man is made to feel at once that he is at the bottom of the status system both while he is on the ground and while he is in the air. First and foremost, new men are told that their continued existence is dependent upon following the advice and orders of the “old boys,” the men with experience (Stone, 1947, 389).”

same language.^{xii} One student states, “I’ve never been in a fraternity but I wanted to be a part of the brotherhood—that fraternity of fighter pilots.”¹⁵² In both training and operational squadrons, ritualized events similar to those found in a college fraternity are conducted.¹⁵³ Dowty characterizes these events as including “alcohol, games, unit history, and aspects of an initiation” and relates that those he has participated in “have been more akin to fraternity initiations than events that call on the history and pride of a unit, the Air Force, or the country.”¹⁵⁴

One important fraternal ritual is the singing of fighter pilot songs. Although not all songs are vulgar, “Popular fighter pilot songs glorify sex, death, prostitution, and adultery, are laced with profanity, and chorus on virtually every natural and unnatural sexual organ and function.”¹⁵⁵ The “Eagle Driver Rules” similarly emphasize the importance of the songs and events, the importance of participation, and warns “above all else, keep this in mind - no one trusts the dude who is never around, no matter how good he may be in the air.”¹⁵⁶

As other mechanisms have revealed, social participation is an important norm, and the sources indicate leadership models this norm and teaches social participation as being at least as important as the ability to fly an aircraft and employ a weapon system. A chief instructor pilot explains that the squadron provides “social training” and his operations officer further comments that the bar is not a place merely for socializing but

^{xii} Fraternal behavior is not a modern invention in fighter pilot culture. Stone observed, “The socialization of new members was furthered through interclique connections. Drinking, ‘dating,’ card-playing, hobbies, and ‘bull sessions’-all were social situations in which members of several cliques would participate. Thus the poker-playing crowd represented a special-interest group that crossed clique lines. Such special interests brought old and new members on an intimate level and gave the new man many opportunities to learn the group subculture and value system (Stone, 1947, 393).”

“is a place to talk about things.” He explains there is “an old adage that you’ll learn more at the bar than you will in any flight.”¹⁵⁷

The actual, mission-related training value of this social brotherhood is unclear although it is evident the purpose is to build bonds between the aviators.¹⁵⁸ While one source indicates the brotherhood forged from such events leads to success in combat,¹⁵⁹ another explains some fighter pilot social events “are rooted merely in fraternity and revel in the exclusivity of the fighter pilot culture...” merely “reindeer games” only understood by fighter pilots.¹⁶⁰

A Required Thick Skin

Consistent with the typical collegiate fraternity pledge process, the fighter pilot community deliberately creates a culture of degradation and sarcasm, and coaches new guys to be quiet and develop a thick skin. This includes demeaning or degrading social events¹⁶¹ and interactions that “are often based on criticism, cynicism, sarcasm, and mutual degradation.”¹⁶² This behavior is role modeled in both training and operational environments. One Eagle instructor says of the students, “We sh!t on them cause we can” and another instructor explains “you have to show us that you can put up with the crap we’re gonna give you because we are gonna give you a hard time.”¹⁶³

A consistent norm is to deliberately teach new pilots not to be what senior pilots call “SNAPS,” an acronym standing for “Sensitive New Age Pilots.” The term apparently has several different meanings. One operational fighter pilot describes the title as a “disparaging term often used by ‘old’ fighter pilots to describe the personalities of the younger ‘kinder, gentler’ pilots. Often generically used to describe any thin-skinned, hypersensitive, or easily offended person. Political correctness is the epitome of

a ‘SNAP.’”¹⁶⁴ The Rules state that SNAPs are unacceptable and explains, “If you don’t like the way someone talked to you, get the f**k over it. If you think your opinion should matter, it doesn’t. If you want some respect, stop whining about it - get off your ass and *earn* it. If you feel like crying, then get the f**k out of my Eagle community.”¹⁶⁵ Fighter pilots deliberately model the necessity of a thick skin and coach new members of the community to expect and tolerate sarcasm and degradation, lest they be decried as “SNAPs.”¹⁶⁶

How leaders allocate rewards and status

No matter how good these guys might be in the jet, if they can't fit in socially they can't be an American fighter pilot and in this course that means you won't graduate.

- Capt Robert “Shark” Garland, Chief F-15C Instructor Pilot

This paper finds there are two main bases on which leaders allocate rewards and status: technical performance and social conformity. The rewards include course graduation, awards, and increased responsibility.

Technical Performance

Technical performance is clearly required for both reward and status. In the training environment, student pilots must display technical proficiency to achieve operational status. Beyond successful course completion, the community rewards technical performance with distinguished graduate awards and top gun awards, which bring status and an increased chance of career progression. In operational squadrons technical proficiency is a continued requirement and similar status increasing awards are presented for superior performance.¹⁶⁷

Social Conformity

Rewards are also allocated based upon social conformity. One chief instructor states that socially fitting in is a requirement for graduating the course, regardless of technical proficiency. He reinforces this theme stating:

“These guys have proven to us that they can solo the Eagle jet which is a huge milestone in their lives and in this program. The next thing, though, is that they have to prove that they can fit in as one of us. That really didn't matter so much before now because they might not have even made it to this point.”¹⁶⁸

He provides the reasoning for this requirement, explaining “If we don't respect a guy or don't like a guy so much, it makes it difficult for us to put that trust in him or to put our lives in his hands.”¹⁶⁹ The Rules emphasize the same rationale:

The Eagle Driver Fraternity is a brotherhood. The bros you fly with are the men you will go to war with. As a result, you owe them your complete and total loyalty. You must develop a bond and an esprit de corps that is beyond what any other organization in the world requires. You must have complete faith in your brothers, and they must be able to have complete faith in you.¹⁷⁰

A major reward that depends substantially upon social conformity is the awarding of a callsign. The callsign signifies acceptance in the fraternity and is an artifact of social conformity and status in the Eagle community.¹⁷¹

How Leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate

This paper finds that leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate on the basis of four primary attributes: a pride-inducing reputation as the best, technical performance, conformity, and perception engineering.

A Pride-Inducing Reputation as the Best

Leaders are able to recruit based upon the fighter pilot subculture enjoying a reputation as the best. One operational fighter pilot states that those “allowed to fly fighters are the best of the best” and “many wish they could [be a fighter pilot], but few actually can—it is an elite and select career field.”¹⁷² This reputation is known even outside the military establishment and leads to instant respect and credibility. The broader public understands that a fighter pilot has survived a grueling selection process, arduous training and “only the best become fighter pilots, and many wish they could be one.”¹⁷³ This superior reputation is a useful recruiting trait as, “with the sole (and arguable) exception of astronauts, more people want to be fighter pilots than any other part of aviation.”¹⁷⁴

Technical Performance

As has been mentioned, technical proficiency is a critical norm in this subculture. It is one mechanism by which membership in the subculture is recruited, selected, or excommunicated. Pilots who are not able to display technical proficiency are excommunicated from the fighter pilot community, and potentially the broader military aviation community.¹⁷⁵ Once operational, continued technical excellence is a necessary condition for progression as a fighter pilot.¹⁷⁶

Conformity

As with the allocation of rewards, conformity is an important attribute by which individuals are selected, promoted, or excommunicated from the community. Instructors maintain the requirement for officer social conformity for selection into the Eagle community. One student reports, “If they think you have an attitude or something like

that, I think they'll just wash you out because they don't like you.”¹⁷⁷ Necessary points of conformity are codified and demand adherence in order to maintain membership in good standing in the community.¹⁷⁸ Those rules range from demonstrating an attitude of excellence, always being prepared, accepting criticism to unacceptable behavior when on temporary duty assignment (TDY). Failure to comply with the latter carries a stiff excommunication penalty explaining, that “the penalty for failure here is permanent banishment from the brotherhood. Your bros need to be able to trust you. Don’t let them down.”¹⁷⁹

Social conformity is required for selection, promotion, and maintenance of membership in the fighter pilot community. There is “immeasurable pressure to compromise...convictions to conform.”¹⁸⁰ One fighter pilot was told his failure to participate in non-mandatory squadron social events would detract from his professional advancement, he would not be made a flight commander,¹⁸¹ and that he might want to reconsider his fighter pilot career if he did not participate.¹⁸² Even though he was eventually made a flight commander,¹⁸³ his report underscores the high value placed upon social conformity in determining who gets selected and promoted within the fighter pilot subculture.

Perception Engineering

One final norm that plays a part in selection and promotion is perception engineering; that is, inflating or manufacturing information to be used in selection and promotion decisions. “[A]n officer’s career may live or die based on his performance evaluations.”¹⁸⁴ A common practice is to inflate events at deployed locations in order to make the events sound more praiseworthy in medal citations.¹⁸⁵ Ordinary workplace

events are often turned into magnificent claims on an officer performance report.¹⁸⁶ Military officers “will see—and will be a part of—reports, forms, and packages that describe everyday events in spectacular terms. Depending on perception, it is possible that at some points those documents will cross the line from ‘fantastic’ to ‘fantasy.’”¹⁸⁷ One illustrative example: An officer’s task of having a dumpster emptied might translate into “Hard charger—hand picked by commander to spearhead bioenvironmental cleanup effort; coordinated with multiple base agencies and ensured continued mission success with record-setting response.”¹⁸⁸ Glorification is “a virtual requirement for success in the military” and it is not uncommon for officers to not recognize their own accomplishments in a performance report as a result.¹⁸⁹

This mechanism is employed regarding aerial achievements as well. Dowty paints a picture of his peers glorifying combat sorties to make submissions for medals sound more heroic and dangerous.¹⁹⁰ He describes a squadron culture that expected pilots to “embellish...escapades so as to be awarded higher honors” and describes one squadron member who received the Bronze Star for aerial flight despite that medal being expressly reserved for ground operations. In this case, the medal submission was rejected and the squadron did “the routine thing” by resubmitting it after adding the phrase “in ground combat against the enemy” to the narrative of the sortie.¹⁹¹ Dowty explains,

Left out of the package was the fact that our unit was based on a peninsula in the Persian Gulf that was nearly 400 miles from the nearest hostile force... No member of our flying squadron participated in ground operations against the enemy, and therefore no member of our squadron deserved the Bronze Star

Medal. The desire to receive accolades prevailed over the truth of what actually happened.¹⁹²

Finally, there is a “common practice” of making paperwork reflect an inaccurate reality by “pencil whipping” paperwork simply to accomplish the paperwork or to document completion of a task that wasn’t actually done.¹⁹³

D. Similarities Between Air Force and Corporate Culture

The analysis yields three general similarities between the organizational culture of Enron and the fighter pilot subculture. First, both cultures are characterized by pride-inducing reputations. Both cultures are characterized as elite groups that consist of the best and brightest who take pride in their affiliation and its standard of perfection. All sources analyzed provided indications of this cultural trait. Second, significant conformity pressures characterize both cultures although there are differences in the intensity and manifestations of the pressures. Enron’s pressures of conformity are primarily displayed through reward and punishment—this cultural attribute emerged when analyzing how leaders allocate rewards and status, and how leaders select, promote, and excommunicate—so that employees who model a “go with the flow” orientation are generally rewarded while those who are critical of company operations are punished. Fighter pilot culture also generates conformity pressures that operate through reward and punishment, although in that culture conformity pressures are also exerted in support of a valid goal. For example, analysis of how leaders allocate rewards and status, and how leaders select, promote, and excommunicate, shows instructors successfully construct an expectation of excellence that students are pressured to emulate. Despite the variation in the intensity and manifestations of conformity pressures, the pressures are significant in

both cultures. Finally, both cultures are characterized as tolerating perception engineering though in greatly differing degrees. This finding was almost overwhelming with regard to Enron's culture; this attribute was indicated when analyzing six out of Schein's six mechanisms. This paper therefore finds Enron's culture tolerated a great deal of reality distortion and manipulation of facts. The fighter pilot culture demonstrated a much lesser level of this toleration, but it did emerge when examining how leaders select, promote, and excommunicate.

Chapter Three: Evaluation of Cultural Parallels

Three Air Force cultural parallels were identified using Schein's framework including a pride-inducing reputation as the best, significant conformity pressures, and a toleration of perception engineering. The evaluation framework requires elements to be evaluated using a standard criterion. For this paper the standard utilized is the potential of the cultural trait to enhance or degrade Air Force ability to accomplish its mission.

This paper finds that a pride-inducing reputation as the best and significant conformity pressures have both the potential to enhance or degrade mission accomplishment. The third cultural trait of toleration of perception engineering is evaluated as having only the potential to degrade mission accomplishment.

A. Pride-Inducing Reputation as the Best

Even air power's staunchest advocates say the [Air Force] suffers from a culture of superiority, one that deflects criticism rather than embraces it.

- Thom Shanker (*The New York Times*, 10 June 2008)
Former National Security Correspondent

Evaluation of this cultural trait suggests it has both the potential to enhance or degrade the service's ability to successfully accomplish its mission. A reputation for being the best can be an asset to the larger organization. The Air Force seeks to recruit high quality individuals from the larger American culture, and potential airmen will be drawn to join an organization that is a highly esteemed defender of the nation.¹⁹⁴ In the fighter pilot subculture, the instant credibility provided by the community's reputation may aid recruiting and service leadership ability to more effectively communicate airpower requirements to the defense establishment and the nation.¹⁹⁵ Within individual

units, the reputation may manifest itself in a greater work ethic and higher performance by airmen. As University of Wales professor Barrie Gunter and University College London professor Adrian Furnham conclude in their study, *Biographical and Climate Predictors of Job Satisfaction and Pride in Organization*, pride can be a component of high morale that predisposes “employees to exert extra effort to achieve organizational goals and objectives and experience strong feelings of commitment to the organization.”¹⁹⁶ This paper’s research indicates fighter pilot subculture places heavy emphasize on technical performance and excellence and takes great pride in this fact.

When a pride-inducing reputation inheres in a subculture, however, it also carries inherent risks for the larger organization. The rightness of beliefs and actions may be taken for granted by individuals socialized into believing their inclusion in such a group constitutes proof of superiority. Pride can lead to arrogance and degrade cooperation in both the larger Air Force organization and in the larger defense structure. This degradation due to pride has been identified as a factor facilitating the failure of the defense intelligence community to cooperate to achieve national security objectives.¹⁹⁷ If inclusion into a specific group is considered bona fides for superiority, it will consider non-members as inferiors or competitors and is more likely to discount their ideas and contributions. This tendency appears to exist within the fighter pilot subculture. For example, Dowty reports that “Fighter pilots don’t respect—or follow—mediocre men.”¹⁹⁸ If fighter pilots consider themselves the best, the question arises how they perceive non-fighter pilot peers. A manifestation of this tendency appears in a section of *The Rules* entitled “Shoe Clerks, Gumshoes, and Other Worthless Idiots,” which explains that

sometimes those outside a fighter squadron may have a poor work ethic and counsels fighter pilots that:

As Eagle Drivers, we have no tolerance for these clowns, but sometimes there is no choice but to work with them to get our queep^{xiii} done. Try not to punch gumshoes when they piss you off, as this may be counter-productive. Realize that they hate us because they are jealous of our good looks, charm, skill, and hot wives. Therefore, you may actually have to be nice to them in order to get them to want to help you. A wise man once said “there is no job in the Air Force that an Eagle Driver couldn’t do better...*if* he wanted to.” True. True (emphasis in original).¹⁹⁹

Thus, a culture that considers itself the best of the best may prevent cohesive cooperation and team building with others outside that culture required to solve problems.

Furthermore, although increased morale in a subculture may increase the productivity of its members, extreme pride can potentially lessen loyalty to the larger organization and dilute service cohesion. One fighter pilot’s study on the morale of fighter pilots tasked to fly Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPVs) supports this assertion within fighter pilot subculture. Capt Paul Thornton^{xiv} provided a survey to 185 fighter pilots in current fighter assignments and 89 pilots (including 39 fighter pilots) who were flying Air Combat Command (ACC) RPVs.²⁰⁰ Thornton’s study indicates those in the ACC remote-pilot community display significantly less morale, unit pride, and willingness to continue in the Air Force as compared to those in current fighter assignments.²⁰¹ Furthermore, his data indicate that the decrease in morale and willingness

^{xiii} This term typically means non-flying paperwork and other tasks.

^{xiv} Capt Thornton has a background as an F-16 pilot.

to serve is larger for the fighter pilots flying RPVs than for the pilots from other communities.²⁰² Thornton's study has several acknowledged limitations concerning the limited scope of his survey including its limitation to ACC assets and a lesser number of respondents due to ops tempo issues.²⁰³ From those respondents who did supply data, Thornton concludes that "job satisfaction and organizational commitment are significantly higher among UAS^{xv} pilots who were not previous fighter pilots"; roughly sixty percent of fighter pilots surveyed currently flying remotely piloted aircraft feel little loyalty to their current unit, as compared to roughly thirty percent of non-fighter-pilot RPV pilots expressing the same.²⁰⁴ Thornton concludes his "study has shown that UAS assignments are causing poor morale among fighter pilots and to some extent all pilots" and that "the most obvious reason is extreme job dissatisfaction."²⁰⁵ He states that many of the surveyed pilots "made comments about working hard and out-performing their peers in realizing their dream of becoming a fighter pilot only to have that dream taken away unfairly due to manning issues."²⁰⁶ He explains "the feeling by former fighter pilots that they have been treated unfairly" is one of the reasons for a lack of pride and that "the lack of pride in UAS units" naturally "brings a lack of loyalty."²⁰⁷ In sum, Thornton's study suggests that the pride-inducing reputation of the fighter pilot community may result in a decreased loyalty to the mission of the larger organization.

As demonstrated by the experience at Enron, a pride-inducing reputation as the best can give rise to a certitude that undercuts critical discussion—from within and without. As discussed in Chapter Two, elite Enron employees shared the pride-inducing reputation of being the smartest "guys" in the room. One former Enron executive

^{xv} Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) is the term previously used to describe RPVs.

described Enron executives as “young, well-paid, aggressive executives pumped up with their own self-importance.”²⁰⁸ That culture, which continuously reinforced the superiority of its members simply by virtue of group membership, led to a sense of infallibility that reinforced ideas and viewpoints within the unit and stifled the ability to accept ideas outside the group. The pride contributed to “a sense of infallibility bestowed by Enron’s seemingly boundless ability to hit profit targets.”²⁰⁹ Former Enron executive, Amanda Martin, observed that Enron was a “culture that had a lot of focus on reminding us how good we were.” In Martin’s view, “The fatal flaw at Enron” was “pride, then it was arrogance, intolerance, greed.”²¹⁰ This attitude of certitude may also have taken root in service culture. Dowty states, “Though they have a reputation for being thick-skinned, fighter pilots, as a generalization, have a personality that will instantly become defensive if their perfection is questioned. It’s not that they’re sensitive; they’re just right.”²¹¹ However widespread this attitude is in the fighter pilot subculture, a sterling reputation can potentially become an institutionalized mythology of superiority that undercuts critical discussion in an organization by reinforcing an attitude of certitude.

In sum, although a pride-inducing-reputation can generate beneficial effects, it is important to properly manage this aspect of the culture so that it does not result in an inability to cooperate across subcultures, a dilution of loyalty to the larger organization, and an inflexible certitude that tolerates no criticism. One attribute of the fighter pilot subculture is a justified, well-deserved pride in the community’s reputation. The 95th FS official homepage explains its squadron patch stating, “The patch signifies a death's head emanating from a cloud, with an arrogant expression” and “is symbolic of the squadron's

dauntless capability to accomplish the mission in any weather, day or night; primarily stalking the enemy to destruction.” This confidence is also displayed in The Rules:

The success of our Mighty Eagle community has earned us this well deserved lethal reputation. Never before in the history of warfare has an enemy buried only one type of combat asset. In 2003, Iraq did just that. They did not bury their tanks. They did not bury their SAMs. They buried their fighters. They knew that if they raised the gear, they were dead. We achieved Air Superiority by reputation alone. That, my fellow Eagle Drivers, is mission success of the highest degree.²¹²

This trait—a pride-inducing reputation—has both the potential to enhance or degrade the ability of the Air Force to accomplish its mission. Healthy unit pride and a superior reputation can be leveraged to enhance the effectiveness of units through quality recruiting, increased morale, and an emphasis upon excellence. But pride also has the potential to give way to mission-degrading arrogance that degrades the communication, cohesion, and team building required for mission accomplishment.

B. Significant Conformity Pressures

Willingness to disagree is a major characteristic of the aces—the high achievers.

- Paul Torrance, *Group Decision-Making and Disagreement*

As with a pride-inducing reputation, evaluation of this cultural trait suggests it has both the potential to enhance or degrade the service’s ability to successfully accomplish its mission. Conformity can serve valid goals. Air Force professionals must conform to standards that allow the military to function effectively.²¹³ These standards are codified in regulations and inform recruiting standards that ensure those accepted from the general population have conformed to basic values. The standards are also embodied in training

and professional military education in order to reinforce these values and ensure the quality of personnel. The Core Values are perhaps the best known codified set of principles that airmen are expected to display in their conduct.²¹⁴ Air Force commissioning programs are expected to allow only moral individuals who meet these expectations into the officer corps and it is assumed that officers have met the requirements to conform to the institution. In this way, significant conformity pressures can enhance service ability to accomplish its mission by inducing members to comport themselves with integrity, service oriented action, and excellence. For example, this paper's analysis demonstrates that in the fighter pilot culture, there is significant pressure to conform to a norm of excellence in technical proficiency, which enhances the service's mission effectiveness.

But conformity, like pride, is a cultural trait that has the potential to degrade the mission in three primary ways: inducing groupthink, strengthening subculture loyalty at the expense of the larger organization, and inviting unethical behavior. First, extreme expectations of conformity can lead to groupthink and can suppress new ideas and the reporting of negative information. Groupthink and the silencing of dissent can prevent mission-critical information from reaching service leadership and can result in decision making based on poor or inaccurate information. Such handicapped decision making degrades the ability of the Air Force to accomplish its mission. This aspect of groupthink was a contributing factor to Enron's collapse. Central Washington University professor Dr. Brian Kulik, in his paper *Agency Theory, Reasoning and Culture at Enron: In Search of a Solution*, identifies Enron as an organization that developed a strong, homogenous culture and quotes an employee who described the culture as "almost cultlike."²¹⁵ As

discussed in Chapter Two, conformity at Enron often manifested as suppression of dissent. Sims and Brinkman maintain “Although very individualistic, the culture at Enron was at the same time conformist” and a good example of groupthink “where individuals feel extreme pressure not to express any real strong arguments against any co-workers’ actions.”²¹⁶

Other studies support this connection between conformity and groupthink. A cultural anthropologist, Dr. Donna Winslow, studied groupthink in a Canadian military unit that emphasized extreme loyalty. Much like the American military, she states unit members “are expected to respect values and norms that transcend individual self-interest in favour of a presumed higher goal.”²¹⁷ Her study revealed intolerance for loyal dissent and states, “The pressure is so strong that beyond the group, right and wrong lose their meaning. Only the group matters—until it’s just too much, and things start to come out on the outside.”²¹⁸

Cultures with a high level of groupthink tend to reinforce their own assumptions and viewpoints and discourage counterpoints. As Yale professor of psychology, Dr. Irving Janis details in his book, *Victims of Groupthink*, cultural norms used in groups to suppress information that challenges dominant group beliefs including social pressure to remain silent.²¹⁹ Dissent can cause the group to alienate those who think outside the groupthink box, thereby limiting their ability to provide critical information.

Conformity leading to groupthink may be particularly pronounced where the bonds of the subculture rest in large part upon social cohesiveness. Janis concludes that:

Concurrence-seeking tendencies probably are stronger when high cohesiveness is based primarily on the rewards of being in a pleasant ‘clubby’ atmosphere or of

gaining prestige from being a member of an elite group than when it is based primarily on the opportunity to function competently on work tasks with effective co-workers.²²⁰

Janis suggests those most susceptible to conformist tendencies are those who are “most fearful of disapproval and rejection” and who need a social, rather than solely professional, connection with their coworkers.²²¹ Although this conformity is not always bad—Janis notes that if all else is equal, a higher level of cohesiveness brings higher group participation, more effective reception to group norms, and individual security and increased self-esteem—a culture that tolerates or encourages wide-ranging suppression of dissent can be disastrous, as the experience of Enron shows.

Furthermore, the tendency toward groupthink often becomes stronger during times of crisis, perhaps at the very moment that tolerance and consideration of new ideas is most important. Janis finds that information-suppressing tendencies are exacerbated for groups that feel their value is attacked. He reports that “the greater the threats to the self-esteem of the members of a cohesive decision-making body, the greater will be their inclination to resort to concurrence-seeking at the expense of critical thinking.”²²² The Air Force, and the manned fighter pilot subculture in particular, has endured increasing threats to institutional self-esteem as its relevance is questioned and manned aircraft are replaced with RPVs. Such external threats may cause a defensive reaction that serves to enhance groupthink tendencies.

Turning to this second consequence of conformity, extreme conformity pressures can strengthen subculture loyalty at the expense of the larger organization. One Air Force officer, Jeffrey York, suggests in his research paper, *Why We Lie: Air Force Core*

Values V. Air Force Culture, that the Air Force has a problem with the “loyalty syndrome” and states that individuals feel pressured to give loyalty to an individual or squadron even when such loyalty challenges higher authority such as the Constitution, the President, or the Secretary of Defense.²²³ Dr. Winslow’s study of the Canadian military also documents this aspect of conformity. She contends that “exaggerated loyalty to the group can lead members to work at counter purposes to the overall goals of a mission” or the larger defense structure.²²⁴ She explains localized loyalty can be so extreme that members of the unit are expected to cover up for members of the unit charged with wrongdoing and finds that loyalty to a subculture can result in a lesser respect for higher ranking soldiers from a different subculture.²²⁵

As the above studies indicate, extreme loyalty that results from group conformity presents risks for an ethical slide when coupled with extreme external pressures. In his study, *Linking Groupthink to Unethical Behavior*, Sims finds that cultures suffering from groupthink are often characterized by “arrogance, overcommitment, and excessive or blind loyalty to the group...” and that “by facilitating the development of shared illusions and related norms, groups” exhibit groupthink behavior that “can be directly tied to unethical actions committed in organizations.”²²⁶ Enron presents a parable consistent with Sims’ warning: Salter characterizes Enron as an organization that fell victim to a gradual erosion of its values and commitment to reality in response to increased external pressures. He writes that “Enron’s ethical drift—involving increasingly devious and deceptive behavior—unfolded in incremental steps over time” partially as the result of external market pressures.²²⁷

In sum, conformity is a cultural attribute that can be beneficial but also presents serious risks. This paper finds Air Force culture significantly risks groupthink, communication degradation, and ethical erosion as the result of significant conformity pressures. The maxim that individuals should never pass up the opportunity to shut up combined with significant social conformity pressures creates an environment ripe for the suppression of information. Beyond the suppression of critical information, conformity may result in the illusion that with respect to any given problem, there is a unified and unchallenged—and therefore accurate or valid—viewpoint. As Janis explains, members of cohesive groups typically assume silence means consent.²²⁸ A group that successfully suppresses dissent through its culture may therefore provide the illusion of unanimity within its ranks, which in turn reinforces groupthink and prevents the flow of mission-enhancing information. Such suppression of dissent can mask unethical or illegal behaviors such as perception engineering or actions such as those that have blemished service reputation in recent history. A toleration of loyal dissent is critical to a healthy organization.

Indeed, studies of high-achieving individuals and groups indicate that one attribute of effectiveness is toleration of dissent. A study conducted to evaluate aircrew effectiveness in combat over Korea discovered that the most effective aviators were those who tolerated disagreement. (University of Georgia professor, Dr. E. Paul Torrance, *Crew Performance in a Test Situation as a Predictor of Field and Combat Performance*). Torrance writes:

The effect of disagreement on group process cannot be fully understood without examining the effect willingness or unwillingness to disagree with others has

upon the individual. Research findings indicate that certain individuals show a generalized willingness to oppose others and disagree when the situation requires it. In a series of studies of the personality requirements for survival, such individuals were found to produce superior results in the form of more adaptive behavior in survival situations, willingness to take calculated risks, and unwillingness to accept defeat. In our studies of USAF jet aces in Korea, we found that this characteristic was typical of the ace when compared with his less successful colleagues.²²⁹

Torrance finds that the quality of a decision is directly related to the range of options presented to the decision maker and this effect is enhanced when dissent is free from reprisal.²³⁰ He finds willingness to disagree is indicative of more successful groups and contends permanent groups, marked by high-status members who are unquestioned, are likely to be psychologically in a rut and to fail to use their resources.²³¹ He states, “decision makers need to accept the fact that task-oriented disagreement is almost always ‘good.’”²³² Unfortunately Torrance finds that the high-achievers evaluated in his study were not always supported by the dominant service culture:

Willingness to disagree is a major characteristic of the aces—the high achievers. It also characterizes those best able to meet frustration, those most willing to take calculated risks, and those who have the most “will to fight.” In spite of the fact that most really outstanding people appear to possess this characteristic, many of them fare rather badly at the hands of...superior officers... They are seen as threats by superiors and are frequently not appreciated, or even tolerated. Too often the greatest rewards are for conformity.²³³

Conformity, then, is a cultural trait that can produce some good results—for example when it results in pressure to conform to high ethical standards, or when unit cohesiveness results in better mission effectiveness. But at the same time, this paper finds the strength of pressures to conform within the fighter pilot culture, and likely by extension within the larger service culture, run the risk of groupthink and extreme, disadvantageous loyalty to unit or subculture at the expense of the larger organization or mission.

C. Perception Engineering

Wishful thinking may be winning the day over faithful representation... Managing may be giving way to manipulation. Integrity may be losing out to illusion.

- Arthur Levitt, Chairman of the SEC (1993-2000)

Unlike the two traits discussed above, this paper's evaluation finds perception engineering has only the potential to degrade the service's ability to successfully project power. An organizational culture that places heavy emphasis on image and reputation may provide a perverse incentive to maintain a positive reputation at all costs, and regardless of the state of reality. In other words, this trait may encourage an organization to tolerate the distortion of reality in an attempt to maintain its image.

Perception engineering, defined as the practice of embellishing, distorting, or concealing facts for the purposes of personal or unit enhancement, can only degrade the mission. The tolerance of perception engineering by an organization invites ever-increasing fraud, distortions of truth, theft, and cover ups. It can destroy the credibility of an institution. If tolerated to the extreme degree evidenced in Enron's culture, it can lead to institutional failure. Former SEC chairman Arthur Levitt diagnosed this problem

within corporate America, finding rampant “hocus pocus” accounting and concluding that “Enron is symptomatic of something that's going on in a lot of American companies where there has been, in my judgment, an erosion in the culture of integrity that was so significant a part of America's corporate structure up until recent years.”²³⁴ In 2002 Levitt correctly predicted the nation would see other examples of business failures after the collapse of Enron stemming from false or distorted accounting. According to Salter, “As former SEC chair Arthur Levitt has testified, many U.S. corporations have unfortunately developed a ‘culture of gamesmanship’—‘where it is okay to bend the rules, to tweak the numbers, and let obvious and important discrepancies slide; where companies bend to the desires and pressures of Wall Street analysts rather than to the reality of the numbers....’”²³⁵

The Air Force has not, of course, experienced such widespread failure, and as noted in the summary of Chapter Two, this paper finds that perception engineering is a cultural trait within the fighter pilot subculture, but the degree of tolerance is not comparable to that exhibited by Enron’s organizational culture. Even a modicum of perception engineering can seriously hamper mission effectiveness, however. General Ronald Fogleman, former CSAF and F-15C pilot, called integrity “the cornerstone of mission accomplishment” and pointed out that integrity and leadership are necessarily linked.²³⁶ He further explains that integrity requires sincerity, a quality that “presents no false appearance” and is consistent and contains substance rather than merely “the image of integrity.”²³⁷ The ability of an organization to produce members who consistently provide accurate information greatly increases the potential that decision makers will make quality decisions. The inverse is also true. Fogleman explains, “Dishonest acts are

like cancers that eat at the moral fiber of organizations, especially if the acts are explicitly or implicitly condoned by leaders.”²³⁸ Military commanders and policy makers require the unvarnished truth of events if they are to best prepare the service for combat in peacetime and best project power in wartime.

Despite the countervailing emphasis upon integrity within the Air Force, this paper’s findings, detailed in Chapter Two, indicate that perception engineering is sometimes tolerated within the fighter pilot subculture. Other studies indicate that tolerance likely extends throughout Air Force culture. York, for example, identifies institutional pressures that derail ethical behavior in pursuit of image and an attitude of looking good over being good. He suggests such an attitude has taken hold in the Air Force culture and can lead to inflated readiness reports and a general lack of accountability and reminds us that “image is not excellence” but rather “excellence is excellence.”²³⁹ York contends there is an institutional pressure to succeed which is most often manifested in careerism and an Air Force culture that has evolved into “getting things done *at all costs*.”²⁴⁰ Because integrity of information is vital to mission success, even the tiniest acceptance of perception engineering—in General Fogleman’s words, a cancer—can damage mission effectiveness.

D. Evaluation Summary

Though members of the United States Air Force may be discomfited by the assertion, their service is in serious jeopardy of ceasing to exist in the not too distant future.

- Dr. Hammond, *Paths to Extinction: The U.S. Air Force in 2025*

The Air Force is at a crossroads, as it faces challenges in fighting the nation’s current wars while preparing for its future wars. Hammond, in his study *Air Force 2025*,

explains that the service is losing its vision, failing to adapt to changing realities, and mismanagement of its people and programs threaten service survival. He states, “The USAF may well face extinction by the year 2025. If such a state of affairs comes to pass, it will be because of its failure as an institution to ensure its viability and evolve appropriately in a complex, uncertain, ambiguous environment both at home and abroad.”²⁴¹ Other commentators bemoan the service’s inability to efficiently and properly equip itself to meet its challenges. Franklin Spinney, a former Air Force officer and DoD analyst of nearly thirty years, argues the service is not being properly equipped due to accounting and budget maneuvering.²⁴² Dr. Rebecca Grant, a Senior Fellow at the Lexington Institute, echoes this viewpoint in a Mitchell paper claiming the Air Force is in crisis because it has failed to equip itself sufficiently for future combat operations and risks its ability to project power.²⁴³ The service’s organizational culture can either help or hinder its ability to respond to these challenges and criticisms. This paper finds that although the Air Force may share three cultural similarities with Enron, it need not follow Enron’s path to failure.

Enron failed because it utilized dishonest profit predictions and accounting to paint a picture of solvency in order to reap short-term benefits at the expense of its future and because it had a culture that punished loyal dissent and mission-enhancing unpopular opinions. Enron’s culture did not prevent, and in fact facilitated, its failure by suppressing critical thinking, debate, and analysis. This paper’s research suggests Air Force culture shares similar traits that may also facilitate failure if not appropriately managed. The Air Force organization’s pride-inducing reputation, significant conformity pressures, and tolerance of perception engineering could lead to an ethical slide and a

culture characterized by groupthink and the suppression of loyal dissent. Such a culture would be unlikely to prevent the Air Force from failing and could itself contribute to service failure.

But the outlook is not all bleak. Two of those cultural traits—a pride-inducing reputation and conformity—can be managed so that the positive aspects of those traits are encouraged and the negative aspects discouraged. The last trait, perception engineering, can only degrade mission capability but the evidence indicates the trait is less entrenched in the Air Force than it was in Enron’s doomed culture. Unlike Enron, the Air Force has provided avenues for critical opinions and continues to emphasize the need for cultural transformation. These actions and difficult retooling decisions may provide the course corrections required for the service to remain successful. Continual cultural management will be required to ensure this success. In Chapter Four, this paper offers recommendations for consideration as potential measures to aid in cultural improvement.

Chapter Four: Max Performing Air Force Culture

Looking at Enron is like looking at the flip side of so much possibility because like most things that end terribly it didn't start out that way... it's like taking so much promise and possibility and looking at it in the mirror and seeing the flip side reflected back at you.

- Bethany McLean, *Fortune* Magazine Reporter
Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room

There is an unfortunate cultural norm in the Air Force that one should not elevate problems to leadership that challenge the status quo unless one presents a ready solution.²⁴⁴ This norm has some benefits in encouraging creative problem-solving, but it is also problematic for failing to recognize the value of problem identification as a useful input in and of itself. The norm also denies that a team is often required to solve complicated and serious issues. Much as the pilot of a C-17 would not rebuke his loadmaster for reporting a hydraulic leak even if the loadmaster did not know how to fix it, the greater Air Force should encourage identification of problems as an end in and of itself. It is with that spirit that this paper makes the following recommendations while acknowledging that in some instances this researcher lacks specific knowledge of how to implement them or whether implementation is even feasible.

Because two of the three identified traits are not per se negative or positive, there is no easy or permanent solution to managing them effectively. The recommendations presented here require active measurement and management of organizational culture in order to ensure the traits are mission enhancing.²⁴⁵ They are designed to max perform Air Force culture in the same way aviators push their aircraft to top performance. Like the aerodynamic characteristics of a flying wing itself, pride and conformity are cultural traits that offer great promise but have a significant downside in the extreme. The ability of a wing to produce lift required for flight is a function of the angle of attack demanded;

the higher the angle of attack, the more lift. This aerodynamic reality, however, includes a “critical angle of attack” at which point too much is demanded, and the layers of air over the wing begin to separate. This causes turbulence, buffeting, and a failure of the wing to fly, resulting in a loss of altitude. Aviators do not, however, stop demanding lift from their wings as a result of this potential drop. Instead, they must manage the wing. And if it stalls, they recover in the drop and proceed to fly.

In the same way, the Air Force organizational culture should encourage pride and conformity, but must temper this encouragement with consistent monitoring and measurement to prevent those traits from stalling the institution. If a stall does occur, the Air Force must recognize it and recover from it. While pride and conformity can be max performed, perception engineering is purely a drag upon the USAF mission, and the Air Force should attempt to reduce or eliminate it from the organizational culture.

Considering these three cultural findings in relation to one another, four recommendations are offered to max perform the beneficial effects of pride and conformity while limiting their negative effects and also to limit perception engineering. These four recommendations are: 1) expand CRM training service wide, 2) establish an RPV rating for all officers, 3) enhance the back-to-basics push, and 4) create or reinforce a three-part firewall, isolating Air Force organizational culture from negative influences. Acknowledging that the last recommendation in particular may not be feasible, it is offered in the spirit of the C-17 loadmaster who sees a problem but may not know how to fix it.

A. Expand Crew/Cockpit Resource Management Training

Physicians in all specialties resemble airline pilots, but surgeons are the fighter pilots of medicine and can benefit from military CRM, especially the fighter mission brief and debrief.

- James M. McGreevy, MD

Crew/Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) is a program that originated from NASA research in 1979 to curb aviation accidents. The NASA research found most accidents were the result of human error and “failures of interpersonal communications, decision making, and leadership.”²⁴⁶ Airlines began using CRM; early programs concentrated on leadership concepts and on changing the behavior of timid junior pilots and dictatorial airline captains. The CRM approach recognized that the goal of leadership during a complicated task is to utilize all resources to ensure accurate information reaches the decision maker. If the decision maker has accurate information, then he or she enjoys valid situational awareness and can make a proper decision. If he or she has poor information, reflecting an incorrect reality, the decision maker may choose a course of action that results in a catastrophic event or crash. CRM teaches that leaders must encourage course-corrective feedback from junior crewmembers, and junior members must not be intimidated into remaining silent because they may have information that proves vital to mission accomplishment. CRM provides tools to aviators to combat the effects of groupthink and to improve the fidelity of information provided to decision makers. One former airline pilot and flight instructor, Kathleen Bangs, provides a story indicating the importance of the CRM environment, describing a time when she, as a junior pilot, recognized her aircraft had subtly drifted off course and the captain was receptive to her input:

After the crew got up to speed, thankfully, so did the gyros. In that particular case,

it was a positive crew resource management (CRM) environment that permitted me to speak up when I thought something was wrong, and simultaneously allowed the captain to take another crewmember's concerns seriously.... In a poor CRM environment, one could voice his concerns to the rafters, but if the other pilot doesn't respond, probably no change in course of action will occur. Conversely, if an extreme dictatorial atmosphere prevails in the flightdeck, concerned crewmembers might be too intimidated to force an issue.²⁴⁷

Despite her success story, Bangs reports that “initiating group-think change in a pilot group takes place in about the same time increments as glaciers advancing.”²⁴⁸ By and large, however, CRM has resulted in greater safety oriented attitudes in aviation.²⁴⁹ One communications researcher, Dr. Scott Duncan, found that “prior to crew resource management (CRM) training, key decision makers such as aircraft captains may have created an atmosphere in which information simply could not or would not flow to them with the content fidelity necessary for rapid error detection and timeliness required for corrective action.”²⁵⁰

The Air Force incorporated CRM into its aviation operations for both single seat and crew aircraft communities. While the non-fighter community focuses on crew interaction, the single seat fighter community concentrates on interaction between pilot and his or her wingmen and communication resources. The goal remained the same in both communities, to feed the decision maker with accurate and relevant information. Dowty discusses the origination of CRM to help the institution limit unacceptable numbers of aircraft incidents in the Air Force. He says “Decades of telling #2^{xvi} to be

^{xvi} The term “#2” is a reference to a wingman in a formation of multiple aircraft.

quiet had taken their toll...and most would only speak up in rare circumstances” but the introduction of CRM helped break down communication barriers and reduce Air Force accidents.²⁵¹

The effectiveness of CRM training is still debated and is not yet clear. Determining whether or not CRM has produced overall safety is problematic for those who desire to measure its results, as safety statistics do not provide clear reasons for the result.²⁵² Despite the lack of definitive proof of success, the training has shown to positively increase success oriented attitudes and behaviors and has been increasingly utilized in several industries.²⁵³ Air Force Instruction 11-290, *Crew Resource Management*, states “CRM training is a key component of a combined effort to identify and manage the conditions that lead to error.”²⁵⁴ The Instruction directs a CRM curriculum to include:

Knowledge and skill objectives covering the impact on aircrew performance of command authority, leadership, responsibility, assertiveness, conflict resolution, hazardous attitudes, behavioral styles, legitimate avenues of dissent, and team-building [and] includes knowledge of common errors, cultural influences, and barriers (rank, age, experience and position). Skills will encompass listening, feedback, precision and efficiency of communication with all members and agencies (i.e., Crewmembers, Wingmen, Weather, ATC, Intelligence, etc.).²⁵⁵

CRM is in essence the recipe for a healthy organization; it “involves enhancing team members’ understanding of human performance, in particular the social and cognitive aspects of effective teamwork and good decision making.”²⁵⁶ It provides behavioral tools to limit the effects of groupthink, pride, and conformity pressures in

order to enhance decision-making ability. The same communication barriers that occur within crews and flights can occur within commands, and this same approach—CRM on a large scale—could provide similar benefits to the larger organization. After a study of several Air Force major commands, Duncan concluded that the “pace of negative information flow to the top of these flying wings was predictive of their health and resulting overall effectiveness” and that “successful organizations created a climate in which bad news could travel upward quickly, and the content of that information was unchanged en route.”²⁵⁷ Even more than within a single aircraft, in a complex organization with competing interests, decision makers require high-fidelity information to make appropriate decisions.

The Air Force institution is far more complicated than any aircraft in the inventory and comes with far more barriers to communication. The mission of the service is more important than the mission of a single aircraft or formation. For these reasons, CRM training should be extended across the service and should be instituted as the model for communication along local chains of command. This would maximize effective communication by providing and teaching tools that enhance communication and problem solving and discourage groupthink and the suppression of loyal dissent. Just as single seat mentality pilots were trained to utilize all their resources, Air Force leadership should continue to seek to consider the inputs of its airmen.

Within the flying community in the Air Force, the current model for teaching CRM consists of annual training and includes several hours of classroom (rather than online courseware) instruction that emphasizes participative discussion and the review of historically poor decisions, aided by safety investigator reports. This model could be

utilized for an expanded institutional recurring training program to help actively manage Air Force culture on a local scale. Says Harvard professor Dr. John P. Kotter in his book, *Corporate Culture and Performance*:

Holding onto a good culture requires being both inflexible with regard to core adaptive values and yet flexible with regard to most practices and other values. It requires pushing hard to win, but not allowing the pride that comes with success to develop into arrogance. And it requires providing strong leadership, yet not strangling or smothering delicate leadership initiatives from below.²⁵⁸

Service wide CRM sessions could help identify if pride is giving way to mission-degrading arrogance or if conformity pressures are limiting the fidelity of information to decision makers. Regular sessions would allow units to critically analyze their operations and cultures and provide valuable information to organization leaders.

Outside of the Air Force, CRM has proved successful when applied to non-flying operations in high stress environments including nuclear power, off shore oil, and medical operations.²⁵⁹ Surgeons have incorporated and implemented its concepts and a post-graduate course in CRM is taught at the Annual Clinical Congress of the American College of Surgeons.²⁶⁰ CRM has been used to reduce patient error; surgeons report it “has great value for surgical teams in that the concept addresses specific attitudes and behaviors in the workplace (cockpit or [Operating Room]) that interfere with team performance.”²⁶¹ The “regular reflection on performance,” no rank in the debrief, and the organized learning objectives of fighter pilot CRM have led one surgeon to call for its expanded use within the surgical field. Dr. McGreevy in his article, *Briefing and*

Debriefing in the Operating Room Using Fighter Pilot Crew Resource Management

states:

Surgeons are characteristically single-minded and independent decision makers.

But so are the pilots of single-engine, single-seat, high-performance aircraft, like the F-16. If fighter pilots can embrace a culture in which the needs of the mission supersede their own needs, so can surgeons.²⁶²

As surgeons like Dr. McGreevy are demonstrating, the principles of CRM are useful in any enterprise that deals with pressure, situational awareness, and error-prone human communication. The CRM tool has proven successful in fostering success-oriented attitudes and should be extended service wide in the Air Force in order to actively discourage any negative effects from the cultural attributes of pride, conformity, and perception engineering.

B. Rate all Officers as RPV Operators

As discussed in Chapter Three, a pride-inducing reputation and conformity can both lead to unhealthy levels of loyalty to the subunit at the expense of the larger mission. The Air Force has long dealt with a lack of cohesion, identity, and vision. Builder explains that unlike other services, Air Force officers primarily identify themselves with a particular function instead of their officer role.²⁶³ Officers primarily associate with their subcultures in a fragmented organizational culture with a distinct pecking order. This fact exacerbates the risks of groupthink associated with localized conformity pressures and intense subculture pride. Unlike members of the United States Marine Corps, who relish their service identity above functional subculture and enjoy the fact

that *all* Marines are infantryman first,²⁶⁴ airmen do not have a meaningful common identity or common vision.

This lack of universal vision was one fact that prompted the Air Force to establish the Air and Space Basic Course (ASBC). According to a RAND study, the course was created in 1996 as the result of leaders recognizing “the need for a renewed vision of the Air Force's mission and a clearer articulation of institutional values and core competencies.”²⁶⁵ The goal was to provide young airmen with this renewed vision and to “foster a shared understanding of what it means to be an airman in today's world.”²⁶⁶ In addition the course was designed to address several deficiencies found in the officer corps, including a culture that “has encouraged officers to identify with their career specialties rather than identifying themselves first as airmen.”²⁶⁷ Another deficiency to be addressed was the finding that “Officers tend to undervalue the importance of teamwork in accomplishing their mission and do not understand how to build unit cohesion and loyalty.”²⁶⁸ The new course was designed to mirror the Marine Corps basic infantry school and to encourage a warrior ethos.²⁶⁹ The RAND study finds the implementation by Air University diverged significantly from the plan and that although the program did have benefits, “the course failed to achieve its main objective, which was to inculcate institutional values, such as integrity, service before self, excellence, and teamwork.”²⁷⁰

The original goals of the ASBC course could be achieved by greatly modifying the existing ASBC course to provide all Air Force officers with training in piloting and employing RPVs and by awarding those who graduate with an aeronautical rating.²⁷¹ The backbone of the course would provide all officers with a common skill set employing

airpower and would introduce and incorporate operational missions in ISR and global strike. All officers who successfully complete the course would earn operator wings and those unable to complete the training would be removed from service for failing to meet standards. Based on performance, officers completing the RPV qualification course would then proceed to secondary career field training such as traditional pilot or navigator training, finance, etc. The assignment system should ensure airmen from all secondary specialties are regularly tapped for their primary RPV mission through assignments and temporary duty.

The potential benefits to this program are several. This would force a cultural shift that would more evenly, though imperfectly, spread the positive effects of pride and conformity through the institution. Such a course would allow all officers to share in the operational employment of airpower and would bring that knowledge to their secondary career fields, increasing the effectiveness of mission support across the institution. Such training would better provide the teamwork, vision, and role of airpower desired in the officer corps. A truly common bond would be forged making the motto “one team, one fight” a more tangible reality. Builder discusses the various causes of the Air Force identity problem in his RAND study, *The Icarus Syndrome*, listing them as “too few operators, too few rated officers, too few heroes, too few war fighters, too many support officers.”²⁷² A universal RPV program would potentially cure each listed ailment.

Universal pride, service cohesion, and a warrior ethos cannot be gained by slogans. Service attempts to shift its corporate culture into a more military ethos require the production of warriors. The warrior ethos is best, and perhaps solely, inculcated when airmen engage in the operational art of war. Officers trained to a rigorous standard

to employ airpower will see the direct effects of their efforts and skills. This realization of the importance and uniqueness of their contributions from larger society will encourage the warrior mindset that comes from warfare.

Thornton's study of current RPV pilots suggests certain subcultures would experience an initial decrease in pride and loyalty if this recommendation were implemented. Additional research may indicate this would be one small trough in a surge of institutional pride across the service and subcultures. As Builder discusses, the mission of the Air Force to "fly and fight" is problematic because few in the current Air Force are able to fly and of those who do, fewer still are called to actually fight.²⁷³ Even fighter pilots who train for a combat mission "may go their entire careers without fighting a war."²⁷⁴ Utilizing the RPV program as a common identity-forging bond will at least partially remedy this feature of the service. It may go a long way toward building unit cohesion and shared vision, while limiting the negative effects of subculture pride and localized conformity pressures. Despite its potential benefits, this suggestion is certainly not invulnerable to criticism.

A critic may suggest such a program will lessen the warrior ethos and cohesive vision of the Air Force because an RPV operator does not risk physical harm and therefore cannot be considered a true warrior. Other critics, such as one flag officer heard by this researcher, assert that removing the human from physical risk presents a moral issue in warfare because combatants removed from the battle space will not approach warfare with the same investment.²⁷⁵ While this critique does have some merit, it is also true that the nature of aerial warfare has consistently reduced risk with superior technology. Indeed the General who argues that airmen should endure increased risk

without a greater tactical or strategic benefit will likely be viewed as a questionable military professional. Risk does not define the warrior. It is arguable that an F-16 pilot flying at 30,000 feet in a high performance aircraft with an ejection seat in OIF/OEF bears only slightly more combat risk than the finance troop at the same altitude flying into country on the rotator, and perhaps less risk. Technology in warfare has consistently sought to limit the risk of the warrior, from crossbows to artillery to RPVs. The warrior is defined by employing the technology of warfare to take lives and provide tactical and strategic effects to accomplish a military success. As such, the true warrior concentrates on best employing those tools, whatever they may be, to provide needed effects for victory in combat. Builder has suggested that pilots are more interested in flying their machines than in employing them in combat.²⁷⁶ If true, this focus on the tools rather than the effects of the technology, despite the risk of employment, is actually a step removed from a true warrior ethos. A universal program utilizing RPVs to provide effects would therefore stand to inculcate a warrior mindset throughout the service.

A critic may also suggest that the demands of RPVs in the aeronautical environment will prove beyond the limits of the average Air Force officer. The Air Force's current experiment with training non-rated officers into RPV pilots belies that critique.²⁷⁷ Furthermore, while more research is required, it is plausible that as RPVs become increasingly automated, the traditional "stick and rudder" requirements of employing airpower will be increasingly replaced with click-and-drag computer control. As the technology matures, the difference between the RPV pilot and the space officer controlling satellites may begin to fade. Traditional hand-eye coordination piloting skills will give way to an emphasis on situational awareness, multi-tasking, attention to detail

and appropriate decision-making. These are skills that should be, and arguably are, required of all Air Force officers.

A critic will certainly raise the financial feasibility of such an expansive training program. Flight training, remote or otherwise, is expensive and the high demand for operational RPVs does not lend itself easily to a training curriculum. The enhanced RPV/ASBC program would need to be designed to impart fundamental airpower and warfare concepts, and some limited employment experience, in a cost effective manner. Leveraging highly realistic network simulator training could potentially accomplish this through a network of ground forces, aircraft and vehicles making for a realistic and communication intensive simulated environment. The software-based simulators would not require the expensive components of traditional flight simulators (ie, hydraulics) that attempt to simulate the aerospace environment. The training program could limit the number of real world RPV missions or provide an initial rating that required follow on RPV training for operational RPV units. Additionally, the program could be initially limited to operational support missions mostly closely tied to airpower such as intelligence, maintenance, and space and missile career fields.

The advent of RPVs allows for the dismantling of the historical cause of elitism within the USAF. Since the birth of the service, aviators were largely set apart from their peers by stringent medical requirements and to a lesser extent by the ability to adapt to the aerial environment. This limitation has provided one of the primary obstacles to true institutional cohesion and can now be overcome. Beyond spreading the pride-inducing reputation of the rated subculture more evenly across the service, an RPV rating would also discourage groupthink and stove piping. The RPV program would have the potential

to serve as a glue-like conduit for all career fields and would have notable benefits in the space, cyberspace, and intelligence career fields. Builder suggests the Air Force must redefine its mission, and that the mission must “unify rather than fractionate the diverse interests and endeavors of people within the institution.”²⁷⁸ By providing a common operational experience and professional identity, this vision could be achieved as officers transition from RPV assignments to other secondary assignments and back again.

C. Enhance the Back to Basics Push – Accountability

Commanders are not martyrs. We didn't make it this far by telling it like it really is.

- Raymond Hamel's, *Are Professionalism and Integrity Only a Myth?*

In order to limit perception engineering and other unethical behaviors, the Air Force must create and reinforce a culture of integrity by ensuring accountability is practiced in deed and word. Without accountability, the service will not foster a culture worth protecting. In order to cultivate that culture, accountability for dishonesty must be demanded and enforced regardless of rank or position. This accountability needs to reach from the highest halls of the Pentagon to unit levels throughout the service.

Any effective cultural change requires leadership on all levels to walk the walk. If accountability is not evident at the highest levels of the institution, the trenches will be filled with opportunists and only a sprinkling of service-oriented martyrs. Without leadership enforcing an ethical and honest environment, no amount of training will succeed in bolstering the integrity of airmen. Enron provides a prime example. According to Sims and Brinkman, the leadership of Enron executives fostered the environment that led to the destruction of that company's ethical boundaries and “used the five mechanisms [of Schein's framework] to reinforce a culture that was morally

flexible opening the door to ethics degeneration, lying, cheating, and stealing.”²⁷⁹ This paper’s research suggests the Air Force seriously risks opening the same door.

It is widely accepted that leadership must role model behavior for that behavior to be emulated in an organization. (Here again, one sees that the pressure to conform can be beneficial—but only if leadership models the correct behavior). If an organization is led by leadership that does not role model its expressed values and deviates from those values with impunity, the message to the organization is heard loud and clear that adherence to the values is merely a game.²⁸⁰ When leadership is not punished for failing to uphold service expectations, members see the double standard and learn that what is truly valued is simply the *appearance* of meeting those expectations. In matters of integrity, this lesson invites airmen to seek perception over reality and to engage in perception engineering when convenient. In this way, the fidelity of information is sacrificed and decision makers are provided distorted information. Poor information provides for poor decisions, thereby seriously risking mission success.

A lack of accountability for officers in power positions undermines all service values and expectations. The Core Values booklet says of justice, “A person of integrity practices justice. Those who do similar things must get similar rewards or similar punishments.”²⁸¹ Recent Air Force history demonstrates the service has at times lost its commitment to justice, and accordingly lost its commitment to integrity.

In 2005 the top Air Force legal officer, Major General Fiscus, escaped a court-martial and was permitted to retire as a Colonel after failing to uphold military standards. The General “received a formal reprimand and forfeitures of pay... for conduct unbecoming, fraternization, obstruction of justice and violating a lawful general

regulation.”²⁸² The punishment received by the top justice officer in the Air Force was seen by many airmen as a failure of justice and accountability.

According to one Air Force lawyer, Lt Col Donnie Bethel, “You can talk to any defense counsel in the Air Force, any defense counsel,” and “He or she will tell you they have clients who have been court-martialed for far less than what [Major] General Fiscus is reported to have done.”²⁸³ David P. Sheldon, a defense lawyer who specializes in military cases, echoes this sentiment. Sheldon said the punishment given to Fiscus was light and “Enlisted and officers in the Air Force face court-martial for less egregious cases—I can think of two or three I’ve handled.”²⁸⁴ This appears to have been the case for Staff Sergeant Jennifer Jones, charged with dating one of her students. The Air Force Times reports:

Staff Sgt. Jennifer Jones thumbed through the pile of reports on her couch, getting angrier with the turning of each page. She read that the Air Force’s judge advocate general, Maj. Gen. Thomas Fiscus, had engaged in multiple unprofessional relationships outside his marriage, harassed some of the women, “spooned” with a major, kissed subordinates on the mouth, and then tried to cover up his misconduct by deleting e-mails when he was caught. For his misconduct, he was getting nonjudicial punishment, escaping the possibility of jail time. So why was it that she, a member of Air Education and Training Command, the same command under which Fiscus was disciplined, was headed for a special court-martial, to face the possibility of a year in jail, she wondered.²⁸⁵

Jones’ attorney asked the AETC Commander who decided Fiscus’ fate, General Donald

Cook,^{xvii} to dismiss the charges against her in light of his decision regarding Major General Fiscus. The charges were not dismissed.

The double standard in the application of justice goes against the concept that higher rank brings higher levels of responsibility and accountability. The Fiscus case and several others like it have led to the belief that the Air Force has “different spansks for different ranks.” A year after the Fiscus incident, Brigadier General Richard Hassan^{xviii} was “issued a written reprimand...for engaging in an unprofessional relationship, sexually harassing his subordinates and maltreatment of a subordinate” and also allowed to retire as a Colonel.²⁸⁶ Three years later, former Air Force Chief of Staff, General Michael “Buzz” Moseley was given a letter of admonishment for his role in steering a \$50 million contract to friends, including another retired Air Force general.²⁸⁷ His retirement benefits were unaffected.

Such cases demonstrate the Air Force has not role modeled the Core Value of integrity and instead encourages airmen to develop the perception of integrity while seeking political connections to shield them from accountability. Says one Air Force officer, “I find it ironic that in giving Maj. Gen. Fiscus a minimal punishment the Air Force continues to promote the same problems that it seeks to prevent. Perhaps this discrepancy in standards is what people mean when they cite leadership as a prime reason for separating from the Air Force.”²⁸⁸

The Air Force simply cannot succeed in creating a culture of integrity that protects the fidelity of mission dependent information unless accountability is delivered regardless of rank or position. Army Lt Col Paul Yingling contends in his article, *A*

^{xvii} General Cook has a background as a B-52 pilot.

^{xviii} Brigadier General Hassan has a non-aviation background.

Failure of Generalship, that a lack of accountability has led to general officers who lack the moral courage required to deliver accurate information to their superiors.²⁸⁹ He cites the failure of generals to pass accurate information about the insurgency in Iraq in the early years, and maintains that a soldier is punished more for losing a rifle than a General is for losing a war.²⁹⁰ Yingling believes Congress must exercise its right to confirm the retirements of General officers to establish a lacking accountability.²⁹¹

This paper recommends that Air Force leadership commit once again to an active program of promoting accountability and integrity. Without a sincere effort to do so, there can be no positive cultural transformation of the Air Force and the service will be doomed to the failure forecasted by its critics. The clubby atmosphere of senior leadership cannot be allowed to ruin the nation's air service for personal gain. There are indications the service is moving in the right direction. General Schwartz has been described as bringing accountability back to the service by removing commanders who failed to meet standards in nuclear units.²⁹² It is imperative that officers are held accountable not only for failures associated with high visibility issues such as the nuclear program, but also for countless failures of integrity that are less visible but no less damaging.

D. Create/Reinforce a Cultural Firewall

If a service-oriented culture of integrity can be created and reinforced it must also be protected from sectors of society that may not share its higher standards. In former Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, John Hillen's view, "to many observers, the values and social mores of 1990s America—narcissistic, morally relativist, self-indulgent, hedonistic, consumerist, individualistic, victim-centered, nihilistic, and

soft—seem hopelessly at odds with those of traditional military culture.”²⁹³ In presenting several existing views, Builder summarizes one argument sometimes heard concerning the interaction between Air Force culture and the greater American culture:

The Air Force, as with all of the American military institutions, is a reflection of the American society and its values. Those are changing, not always and everywhere for the best, and some of the problems of the American society are manifested in the Air Force today in such complaints as careerism, selfishness, impatience, self-gratification over altruism, etc. They will get better or change, if and when the American society gets better or changes.²⁹⁴

While the argument may be valid, it does not justify inaction by service leadership. The findings of this paper indicate while the Air Force culture is sometimes at odds with the greater culture, the mission degrading values of society are not entirely successfully filtered from the service. The extent of potential ethical decline in Air Force culture, as a reflection of the wider culture, should continue to be a concern for leadership. As York maintains, perception engineering and disingenuous reporting have been traced back to at least Vietnam, and efforts taken in the previous decade to bolster service integrity have failed. In addition to taking steps to strengthen the moral character of Air Force culture, discussed above, the service should consider a further attempt to create or reinforce a cultural firewall to limit outside influences.

Hillen describes the gap between service and greater social culture and states, “the [cultural] gap is a fact of life: it should not be closed, indeed it cannot be closed, but managed.”²⁹⁵ While it is both unrealistic and undesirable to expect to erect a barricade around service culture, a firewall allows for managed interaction between outside

influences and organizational culture. Hillen raises the question, “Exactly how does a military protect the professional culture necessary to perform its missions in the unnatural stresses of war within the legal prerogatives of its government, and yet remain responsive to and reflective of the civilian culture it serves?”²⁹⁶ He answers that leader willpower is required and suggests that failing to resist intrusion upon military culture by the social expectations of the greater culture will result in replacing functional imperatives with social ones and may introduce “a possibly calamitous confusion between means and ends.”²⁹⁷ While a daunting task, service leadership should continue to explore the construction/reinforcement of a protective barrier surrounding a carefully groomed and uncompromising professional culture. This barrier would shield the service from three primary outside influences: society, politics, and corporate affairs.

A Social Firewall

The Air Force should consider enhancing the existing firewall between the general public and the service. A firewall is already in place through recruiting standards, basic training, and commissioning programs that are charged with quality control (and cultural shaping) of airmen entering the force. But it may not be sufficient. According to Hillen, the Marine Corps extended its basic training by one week after concluding the raw product it received from the general public was of a lesser moral quality.²⁹⁸ The Air Force’s initial training may suffer from a similar deficiency. Furthermore, the initial training—the entry through the wall—must itself ensure integrity is taught not only by courseware, but also through uncompromising institutional actions. Moreover, it is not enough to demand integrity at the service doorstep if such accountability is not enforced within the service; thus, this recommendation can only

work in conjunction with an emphasis on basic accountability. The utility of a firewall is precisely to allow unhindered development of service culture.

Of particular importance is the gateway training of the service. Both York and Dowty suggest their experiences at the Air Force Academy included an unwritten lesson emphasizing the maxim that perception is reality.²⁹⁹ York describes a moral grey area in which cadets were not being given the resources necessary to accomplish given task and were expected to be unable to succeed without creative actions that circumvented the black and white institutional rules.³⁰⁰

Beyond gateway training, in order to enhance the social firewall the Air Force should hold its members accountable to ethical behavior regardless of commentary and criticism from the greater social realm. Given the culture gap described by Hillen, a leadership success in reinforcing an ethical culture may be expected to produce criticism from the larger society. Leadership must be willing to endure such criticisms and to refuse to alter decisions as a result of the criticism. The display of leadership willpower suggested by Hillen will exact a cost in public perception. For example, the recent policy imposed by Major General Anthony Cucolo making a soldier's pregnancy in Iraq punishable by court martial has resulted in public criticism. Despite the clear functional imperative of protecting deployed troop strength against the mission-degrading actions of its soldiers, the policy has been criticized in terms of the social imperative.³⁰¹ One Yale Law School professor who teaches military law claims the policy comes with "a mare's nest of legal, ethical and policy issues" and contains "issues that go to the core of personal autonomy: reproductive rights."³⁰² Perhaps as a result of the criticism received, the top officer in Iraq rescinded Major General Cucolo's policy several weeks later.³⁰³

This example exposes the conflict between functional imperatives and social imperatives raised by Hillen. It is a functional imperative that service members should be punished for actions that reduce troop strength in a combat zone. The social imperative, on the other hand, that pregnancy should be unfettered by government regulation, conflicts with the functional imperatives of military service. It is essential for commanders to resist social pressures that degrade military necessity and attempt to close the culture gap. As Hillen suggests, if the cultural gap must be closed “it will be the military that is pressured to lower its standards, not society to raise civilian behavior.”³⁰⁴ He suggests military decision makers must resist the pressures of those who wish to close the gap because those pressures seek to change military service “whatever ruin this may visit on the culture, ethos, and value system that justify its existence.”³⁰⁵

A Political Firewall

As Hillen recognized, however, the military is the servant of civilian society. In this nation’s democracy, social pressures often become political pressures. Civilian law necessarily must be respected; the civilian control of the military and the constitutional divisions of power between the branches of government is necessarily immutable. But as with social pressure, political pressures can cause damage to service culture. It is no small or simple task to insulate service culture from political pressure, but steps should be taken to limit and manage the interaction between the military services and Congress. The congressional branch necessarily represents the larger society and the interests of corporate and other groups. Service leadership must remain impervious to mission-degrading interests of this larger society. Although some interaction with the congressional branch is clearly required, it must be carefully managed. As Admiral

Bradley Fiske said, “the...defense of our country is our profession, not that of Congress.”³⁰⁶ Any firewall between the military services and the greater political system must unquestionably provide civilian control of the services but still help to protect mission-enhancing culture.

Difficult as it would be to erect a firewall serving civilian control but protecting service culture, a firewall of some kind might help prevent service culture from falling prey to political pressure. An example of service culture falling victim to politics is the infamous Kelly Flinn case in the late 1990s. Then CSAF General Fogleman sought to punish Flinn for violating military regulations, disobeying orders, and making false statements concerning her illegal relationship with a married man.³⁰⁷ Her situation became politicized and resulted in Senate hearings on the subject. The accountability sought by the Air Force’s top officer resulted in political pressure from both civilian executive branch leadership and congressmen who claimed the Air Force needed to “get real.”³⁰⁸ The Air Force’s attempt to uphold integrity and accountability within its service was subverted by the greater political system and the officer was allowed to separate with a general discharge.

Due to the necessary function of Congress to represent interests, including those other than the nation’s defense, political pressure may not always adhere to the benefit of service culture. This researcher acknowledges the great difficulties in walling off the service from political pressure, but if it could be achieved, a carefully constructed firewall would help protect service culture.

A Corporate Firewall

Because of the Air Force's dependence upon technology, the service must interact with profit-motivated corporate America. This outside influence, too, could have grave effects on service culture, particularly in the acquisitions arena. A firewall that appropriately manages the interaction between the service and corporate America would help preserve the ethical focus of service culture. There are several ways this could be achieved.

First, the revolving door between airmen and contractors provides potentially perverse incentives to decision makers charged with weapons system procurement decisions and should be replaced with a gate and timer. University of Maryland professor, Dr. Ryan D. Kilty explains the revolving door in his article, *Military Privatization and Implications for Changes in Power Relations Among the State*, stating:

Corporations recognize the leadership and intellectual capital of officers in the U.S. armed forces. They seek to capitalize on the training provided them by the military (via the federal government). Realizing the need for employment beyond retirement in the military, and that the private sector is increasingly willing to pay for the expertise and connections offered by former military officers, it seems logical that some officers may act, within or outside the scope of the law and conventional ethics, to secure a profitable future. This connection is often viewed as a "good ol' boy" network. Military officers, so the theory goes, send contracts to their retired superior officers with the understanding that the same will be done for them in turn. This situation, in which military and social spheres are blurred, favors the social sphere in the sense that private corporations may come to exert

disproportionate (and unjust) influence over decisions, for example, regarding research and development of new technologies or the types of supplies and technology contracted for troop use and/or support.³⁰⁹

Airmen could be prohibited from working for, or being compensated by, corporations that have significant financial dealings with the military for a specified number of years to limit the perverse incentive identified by Kelty.

Second, significant reforms in the acquisition process would help protect service culture. Recent acquisitions have given the Air Force a black eye in the media and on Capitol Hill. The tanker acquisition, the CSAR-X acquisition, and the unethical handling of the Thunderbirds media contract have prompted criticism over service procedures and transparency. In an editorial in *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, one writer claims the Air Force has become “sloppy”³¹⁰ and one *New York Times* writer claims Boeing and the Air Force proposed to purchase more tankers by using “off-the-books financing made infamous by the scandal at Enron...”³¹¹ According to the Government Accountability Office, the Air Force simply didn’t follow its own acquisition rules. One Congressman summed up the national mood with “No one has any faith in the Air Force.”³¹² The Air Force must provide effective oversight for acquisition processes.

Third, the Air Force must sever its ties with corporate entities when such action amounts to the outsourcing of traditional military jobs. This severance is required to protect a service-oriented culture from one oriented to profit. Reliance upon corporate contractors to perform traditional military tasks undermines the unit cohesion and accountability required to manage a professional military culture.³¹³ Dr. P.W. Singer, Senior Fellow and Director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative at the Brookings

Institution, states in his article, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry and Its Ramifications for International Security*:

The pull between economic incentives and political exigency has created a variety of intriguing dilemmas for the privatized military industry. At issue are divided loyalties and different goals. Clear tensions exist between a [corporate] client's security objectives and a firm's desire to maximize profit. Put another way, the public good and a private company's good often conflict.³¹⁴

Singer's study suggests corporate warriors may be "tempted to cut corners to increase their profits" and cites Brown & Root overcharging the government in operations in the Balkans.³¹⁵ This charge has been greatly echoed against other profit motivated companies in recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, a Pentagon audit found that Halliburton was linked to the vast majority of fraud cases in Iraq and Afghanistan and to "a majority of the \$13 billion in 'questioned' or 'unsupported' costs..."³¹⁶ Holding privatized military contractors accountable is difficult as they "diffuse responsibility," are not subject to military law, and have legal recourse not granted to military members.³¹⁷ Sims suggests such a diffusion of responsibility is a mechanism that encourages groupthink and unethical behavior.³¹⁸ Beyond the myriad of problems posed by privatized warriors, the close interaction of its corporate culture with military men and women proves a significant threat to service culture. Kelty suggests "the state, the military and society form an interpenetrated triad" and "greater access, involvement, and responsibility in national defense by the private sector has shifted power in the direction of the social sphere."³¹⁹ Such a shift of power does not bode well for a service oriented military culture and must be protected against.

The Air Force must establish a corporate firewall to ensure improper influence does not affect its culture by degrading accountability and integrity. In doing so, it must put a process in place to ensure its leadership follows the rules that have been established while ensuring financial transparency. By removing the “revolving door,” limiting interaction with privatized corporate warriors, and establishing effective oversight, the Air Force stands to benefit from superior acquisitions, cost savings, and a renewed public faith in its adherence to integrity and fiscal responsibility. Above all, such reforms could help foster and protect a truly professional culture that is dedicated to communicating mission-essential high fidelity information up the chain of command in a complex world.

E. Conclusion

Recent events have revealed a crisis in the ethical values across corporate America that has greatly weakened the ability of the United States to project power in the world. For example, in his recent speech describing his plan for a troop surge in Afghanistan, President Obama noted that the economic reality of the nation has limited the scope of American future efforts there.³²⁰ Using Enron as a representative corporate failure exhibiting this crisis in values, this paper identified cultural traits that contributed to Enron’s failure, including widespread perception engineering.

This paper conducted a comparative cultural analysis of the most dominant and influential Air Force subculture—modern fighter pilot subculture—utilizing Schein’s framework. This analysis indicated three potentially negative cultural traits shared by Enron and fighter pilot subculture: a pride-inducing reputation, significant conformity pressures, and a toleration of perception engineering. The inflated influence of the dominant fighter pilot subculture coupled with the accounts of military officers like York

and Yingling highly suggest these traits are not limited to one subculture but are found in the greater Air Force culture and military establishment. Further, previous attempts to enhance service culture in the 1990s, including the introduction of new Core Values and the creation of the ASBC course, indicate these cultural challenges are service wide.

An evaluation of these three traits demonstrates that two of the three can be beneficial to the Air Force mission when properly managed, but otherwise can contribute to mission degradation. The third trait, perception engineering, serves only to degrade the mission. This paper makes four recommendations for managing these cultural traits, including expanding CRM training service wide, establishing a common RPV rating across the officer corps, strengthening service culture by continuing a push back to basics regarding integrity and accountability, and protecting service culture with a firewall.

As Air Force leadership seeks to transform its culture it must do so completely. Like a rainforest in which a canopy of old growth shields the fertile soil from sunlight, leadership must ensure its transformational message makes it to airmen at the lowest level if it is to be effective. As Secretary Gates recognized in his call for cultural transformation, it is never easy. Builder echoes that sentiment when he writes:

Many who choose a particular military institution and dedicate their lives to it make their choice because there is something about the service—who it is or what it is about—the appeals to them. They see something in that service attractive or admirable and make an implicit contract with that service to serve in exchange for the associative benefit they perceive. If impending changes in their service then threaten that which they found attractive, they will exert a restoring or stabilizing pressure. With tens or hundreds of thousands of such implicit contracts

outstanding, the potential for voluntarily changing the institution is very small. Significant, rapid change is almost certain to be imposed from the outside and vigorously resisted from the inside.³²¹

The old growth cannot be allowed to shield the sunlight. Current senior military leadership has endeavored to strengthen the Air Force and its ability to project power against resourceful enemies across the spectrum of warfare. In this effort, they have called upon all service members to critically examine service culture. The widespread failures of organizational cultures, the weakening effects on our nation, and the complexity of our enemies require us to meet this challenge. Airman in the trenches must understand and embrace this cultural evaluation and the need for transformation, or history may prove leadership's nascent efforts to be a short-lived vector.

Suggestions for Future Researchers

1. Builder discusses a conversation he had with F-15 pilots about their images of conflict and describes them changing the subject to focus on flying rather than employing the aircraft. He says a conversation with F-4 pilots was not much different, but he noticed that A-10 pilots provided a descriptive answer regarding the battlespace and mission. In Builder's experience, unlike the fighter pilots, the attack pilot "took more obvious pride in the mission of the A-10, busting tanks, than in the airplane itself or flying it."³²² Has the air superiority culture in the Air Force, with its vital yet more narrow mission, led the service culture to hold a more narrow image of conflict? If so, how does that shape the service's institutional priorities in a time of war?

2. Younger generations of Air Force officers are increasingly more active on social networking and other online sites. This fact has recently prompted changes in Public Affairs policies regarding blogging and airmen utilizing social networking sites. Using Diana Martin's research in Appendix One as a starting point, can the culture of those service members who use such sites shed light on the current Air Force "offline" culture?

3. Builder suggests careerism began when TAC took over the Air Force. Is it possible that the single seat mentality of TAC replaced the team-building approach of the bomber barons and led to a service culture less likely to promote teamwork?

4. Builder says that non-flying officers in the Air Force who dealt with missiles and space "quickly recognized that the aviators who ran the Air Force were really more faithful to airplanes than they were to the concept of air power which could now be

served by alternative means.”³²³ Has this proven to be the case in the F-22 / RPV struggle?

5. At first glance, it appears the arguments for the priority of the F-22 over counterinsurgency efforts were remarkably consistent in the fighter pilot community. Was there debate to the contrary in the fighter pilot community and if there was not, is this the result of the significant conformity pressures identified in this research?

6. Franklin Spinney forcefully suggests the weapon system procurement process in the DoD is based on consistently over-optimistic projections fueled by corporate and political pressures. A brief discussion of his research and experience is provided in Appendix Two. Does a budget process steeped in perception distorting practices influence senior leadership and its leadership expectations for subordinate commanders thereby reinforcing a culture of perception at the expense of reality?

7. Sims discusses the connection between cultures characterized by groupthink and unethical behavior and states, “Particularly under stress, members of the group develop a number of cognitive defenses that result in a collective pattern of avoidance. These defenses include (1) misjudging relevant warnings, (2) inventing new arguments to support a chosen policy, (3) failing to explore ominous implications of ambiguous events, (4) forgetting information that would enable a challenging event to be interpreted correctly, and (5) misperceiving signs of the onset of actual danger.”³²⁴ Can the behavior of the fighter pilot community and its arguments concerning the F-22 debate be attributed to this explanation?

8. This paper’s study highlighted cultural traits found in the fighter pilot community and hypothesizes these traits are more likely to be found in the greater Air

Force culture due to the dominant status of the fighter pilot subculture. Is this hypothesis found accurate when analyzing other Air Force subcultures?

Appendix One: Cyber Anthropological Study

The anthropological study below was commissioned as part of this paper's research to attempt to ascertain the level of social conformity on an online forum frequented by Air Force aviators. The desire was to gauge the effects of pressures to conform socially on the willingness of members to provide dissent. The study was conducted by Diana Martin, a cyber-anthropologist, and applied Schein's framework to public interactions in the "Squadron Bar" of the online forum. The study was inconclusive and was not utilized in this researcher's research but has been included for future researchers.

Virtual Drinks at the Squadron Bar at www.FlyingSquadron.com

Anthropological observations and analysis of an online Air Force pilot community

By: Diana Martin, M.S.

Introduction

It's February 2007 and a popular online hangout for Air Force and other self identified pilots (including Navy and Army) opens an off-topic forum titled, 'The Squadron Bar'. In the bar, anything goes. Topics range from strictly military posts, to posts on politics, guns, entertainment, and women. In keeping with the theme of the forum, it starts with a post about scotch and it takes off from there.

Research Goals

My goals for this analysis, as an anthropologist simply observing public interactions, were to answer the following questions concerning traits of individuality versus conformity and the role of rational debate and disagreement in the group dynamics.

1. Does the community tend to foster rational debate and discussion or not?
 - o *Is it better to stand out as an individual or conform to the group?*
2. Does the culture demonstrate traits indicative of those that would provide negative feedback to their bosses or is it more indicative of individuals more likely to remain silent when disagreeing?
3. Do the actions of this online community of Air Force pilots indicate a culture that is more or less likely to provide 'bad news' up the chain of command?

Methodology

Data Collection Methods

My methods for the data gathering phase of this study included recording information on each and every conversation that occurred including the post title, the URL to the thread, the original poster, those who replied, how many replies were made, the context of the post, and the dates. I then took that a step further and coded each post with tags appropriate to the post's subject matter. This was done in order to find out which types of topics trended most often.

Data Analysis Methods

Taking an interpretive approach to analyzing the discourse, I thoroughly read each topic and all of its corresponding replies in order to understand the ways in which the pilots socially constructed their reality. This approach takes into context what information is shared and how it is negotiated and understood in order to reveal and explain variance and bias within the group. Using this method, I reviewed each topic to determine whether or not it answered any of the research questions directly or indirectly and how.

Utilizing Edgar Schein's organizational culture studies, I analyzed the topics in terms of his 5 leadership mechanisms. The idea here is that pilots influence Air Force culture just as leaders influence organizational culture. By applying this analysis to the forum, we will be able to see to what extent and through which ways pilots attempt to assert their influence over Air Force culture.

Lastly, all of this was put into context with the rest of the interactions on the forum. I took into consideration how the pilots communicated with each other as well as what cultural trends emerged based on a holistic review the topics and responses posted.

Barriers to the Study

Every cultural study has its barriers. The barriers to this study included language, accessibility, and time. In terms of language, a lot of military jargon is used throughout the forum and in order to get a good grasp of what was being discussed I was required to stop and look up terms for definitions and context on many occasions. A list of these can be found at the end of the report.

Considering accessibility, there were a couple of issues. First and foremost was the fact that I was observing the forum anonymously which meant that I did not have the proper permissions to download any attachments and therefore could only make assumptions as to their content based on the context of the post to which they were uploaded and the comments made. Being an anonymous observer also meant that I was unable to actually speak with any of the forum members for further explanation on their posts. Second, because the timeline of the forum stretches back to February of 2007 there are links to sites, articles, videos, photographs, and other artifacts that are no longer available. So again, assumptions had to be made as to the content of the artifacts based on the context in which they were uploaded or the comments that were made on them.

On the subject of time, the data collection phase of this project took considerable amounts of time due to the sheer number of posts and replies as well as the two aforementioned barriers. Were there more time to devote to the project, a more thorough analysis could be made on the data. This would allow us to give a better holistic picture of the participants in the forum that would provide not only answers the questions previously presented, but also place them in a broader context. Ways this could make a difference would be to consider the events that were occurring while these posts were being made (in both public and military sectors) and what effect these outside events may have had on the content and context of the posts themselves.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that during this analysis the forums went through a phased upgrade, which caused a reorganization of the topics and different ways information was presented both about the posters and the topics themselves. In order to treat every thread the same, all threads that were assessed prior to this reorganization were reassessed after the reorganization was completed to ensure there were no discrepancies in the information collected.

A note on the research design:

This research was conducted for a client who provided the aforementioned research questions and field site. It was decided that I should remain anonymous and only research what was available publicly in order to avoid my presence inadvertently biasing the interactions of the forum members.

Analysis

In this analysis I focused on 530 threads and more than 12,314 replies that occurred from February of 2007 to July of 2009. This includes the inception of this particular forum to summer of this year. The data gathering and analysis together took over 100 hours to complete. Anthropologically speaking, the data set is so rich and so large that another 100 hours could easily be spent on the project. That said this should be considered a high level analysis with room for further study.

Qualitative Overview

Through the data gathering and analysis phases a few overarching themes emerged. Each of these themes were broader than the research questions, but definitely had an effect on them and the topics posted. Presenting them here helps give a more holistic perspective of the forum culture and gives us a broader perception of the social interactions that occur.

Assertiveness

To begin, there was a sort of odd camaraderie observed where those who posted to this forum came together based on similar interests, jobs, and skills, yet they all seemed to have something to prove whether it be by knowledge, experience, or rank. So, while yes they banded together and bonded over several topics, if someone who was less knowledgeable, less experienced or of a lower rank posted something that could be contested it quickly was and they were put in their place almost immediately.

Toro Posted 13 August 2008 - 03:43 PM

shoes, on Aug 13 2008, 04:08 PM, said:

I take it no one actually knows. If anyone knows where I could find them that would be great. They're not posted at our squadron (or the other squadrons on base) and I wanna put em up here. LPA duties...

Wow...you're right. All the seasoned pilots who have responded -- we must not know. You obviously have the upper hand on all of us, what with you being in the LPA and all. As one of those people who responded, what are the odds that I know 'the rules'.

Seriously - do you not get it?

The rules are unwritten for a reason - because you are supposed to know them. Are the rules written in the bar? Yes. Are you supposed to read those rules? No - hence the ridicule.

If your squadron doesn't have them 'posted', then goes ask the dudes in your squadron. If your squadron is worth a sh*t, they have the rules scribbled down somewhere and scotch-taped to to a cabinet next to the booze. The last sentence in that list is the rule that 'You're not allowed to read the rules out loud.' If your squadron doesn't have them posted then...well...honestly....they suck. But don't call us out for not 'knowing' when we ridicule you for something your squadron should have taught you the first day you stepped in the door.

I did not find a case where someone contested another person without asserting themselves in the process. While several played out like this in what amounts to a debate, others did get more combative and abrasive. The phrase 'choke yourself', as is seen in the example below being stated by a moderator, is used often in these cases.

ClearedHot Posted 24 January 2008 - 10:04 AM

Vertigo, on Jan 24 2008, 08:43 AM, said:

No I said it's quite the double standard that the people on here complain about the hip-hop apparel but get pissed off when they get called out for violating AFI 36-2903.

There was no comparison between the two.

Please choke yourself.

You are comparing pulling your socks up to meet he standard of some Nazi who has never been outside the wire or in any real danger to some thug with his arse hanging out. I believe as your name implies, you have tumbled your gyros and lost all SA.

One member even called attention to this assertiveness:

BuffNav Posted 28 October 2008 - 03:18 PM

As a new forum member, but frequent reader over a couple of years, I have often been astounded by the lack of respect and utter contempt towards our fellow servicemembers posting comments on this forum. We are all on the same side here! Even though the vast majority of the members on this forum don't know eachother outside of the forum, it seems that the "Good 'Ol Boys"" network is alive and well, often joining together to chastize some of the most innocent questions. It is because of these people that people like myself have avoided adding our 2 cents. In my 18 years as an Air Force aviator, I have never seen a reprimand as brutal or un-called-for as here on Baseops. I know for a fact that many of the culprits would not say the same things face-to-face as they say on this forum. How about we treat eachother with respect and stop the senselessness! Standing by for someone to prove my point...

To which another member responds:

Cooter Posted 28 October 2008 - 03:52 PM

Are BUFFs now being crewed by Care Bears? (No offense to my BUFF brethern intended) I just told 5 crew dogs about this sitting around me and they all laughed and then related several stories of making fun of/berating/etc.. I know if I screw up I expect to be heckled and verbally bashed...it's what we do. We're CREWDOGS! Don't screw up or

do stupid and or :rainbow: sh*t and you MIGHT be alright. It's how we regulate eachother. me personally I love it. And now I'm an FTU instructor so I have students to prey upon...mwahahahaha.

Sub-Groups

Another theme that emerged was how quickly people grouped together by the type of plane they flew. Of those that mentioned what type of plane they flew the C-130 Hercules (a transport plane) was the most popular. One thread that started out seemingly harmless with a picture of a C-130 flaring ended with one guy being ganged up on because he was not as impressed with the picture as the rest of the group thought he should be.

Beaver on 06 September 2007 - 05:15 PM

That pic of the gunpig looks like every other flare jettison pic of the gunpig.

To which the original poster, ClearedHot, replied with two posts full of pictures of F-16s he deemed LGPOS (little gray pieces of sh*t) crashed in various ways. Beaver then takes that as a challenge and replies with a post full of C-130s crashed in much more disastrous ways. Having watched this conversation go back and forth another guy steps in and deems the first guy the winner of this little exchange.

HerkDerka on 07 September 2007 - 12:40 PM

Winner: ClearedHot

Beaver on 09 September 2007 - 08:40 PM

Winner: Best example of one Herk Moderator kissing another Herk Moderator's ass.

Other sub-groups occur based on whether they are an academy student/graduate, or someone who is in the Air Force but is not 'lucky' enough to be a pilot. Of this last group, these people are most often referred to either as Shoe Clerks (support personnel) or 'Cone Heads' (those in the space program). What is interesting is the pilot attitude toward these groups as shown in the examples below.

Academy:

soflguy Posted 08 February 2008 - 12:00 AM

And people wonder why airmen have no respect for officers... because big blue makes sure they don't grow up and have no life experience to go off of when they become "warrior leaders." Most 20 year old enlisted dudes I know have 10x as much life experience and street smarts as any 23/4 year old Academy grad.

Shoe Clerks:

Slacker Posted 21 February 2007 - 07:35 PM

I'd get rid of contractors, reflective belts, gay PT uniforms, SNAPS, useless training (violence awareness-I'm in the frickin' military- we're here to project violence, SARC, EO2000, Records management, SATE and whatever the next shoeclerk dreams up tomorrow to make me suffer thru.)

Cone-Heads:

Eeyore Posted 14 May 2008 - 11:25 AM

Remember some of the folks failed at one thing they desired most earning Pilot/Nav wings. So Guardian Waste is an exercise to make the lonely Coneheads feel good about

themselves. Hell if it was not for them how could Pilots/Navs get across the pond or put bombs on target. They are the tip of the spear you know.

Though each of these groups tends to be perceived in a negative light by the pilots, there are contributing members of the forum that belong to each of them. This group diversity creates a dynamic environment where posts can consist of a broad range of topics and quickly change subjects going from jovial to the extreme opposite and back again in just a few replies.

Making Fun

A large portion of topics on this forum, 85 out of the 530 I analyzed, are devoted to making fun of themselves and others.

Making fun of themselves:

Slacker Posted 12 June 2009 - 09:28 AM

The Airman's creed

Quote

I am an American Airman. I am a child. I will not question stupidity.

I am a stepping stone. My mission is to get the management promoted. I am annoyed by a forever changing "heritage", A tradition of backstabbing, And a legacy of yes men.

I am an American Airman, Guardian of stupidity and ignorance, My boss's b*tch and shield, His step and fetcher. I defend his dog and pony shows with my life.

I am an American Airman: Disgruntled, aggravated and tired. I will never see a common-sense AFI, I am starting to falter, And soon I may fail.

Much better than the original bullsh!t and closer to reality.

In fact, the focus of the largest thread on the forum is making fun of things through the creation of demotivational posters. I could not include in my analysis because it was constantly being updated and therefore was 1) a moving target, 2) very large at 36 pages and 714 replies (last check) and, 3) would make my information instantly out of date. However, it is because of these very facts that it deserves mention here and of course an example.



This poster, which ties directly into the next topic, is making fun of how the concept of heritage or culture seems to change on a daily basis. In this example, there is a picture of what they would consider a heroic fighter pilot of the past beside the picture of a man who made the *Cosmo Hot Bachelors* list in 2007. (O'Connor 2007) The latter has endured much ridicule for this and is often brought up to help make the case for the 'gay fighter pilot' or SNAP (Sensitive New Age Pilots) image that is popular in Air Force culture.

Heritage

Air Force culture, history, or heritage appears as a theme overarching many threads. The most common reason why it is mentioned so often is because many see it as something that is constantly under going change, which to them is contrary in so many ways to what culture or heritage is supposed to be.

HerkDerka Posted 21 May 2007 - 04:57 PM

The more the AF tries to "develop" heritage, the further away we go from our true heritage.

A clarification:

Login Name Posted 21 May 2007 - 06:45 PM

Steve Davies, on May 21 2007, 10:40 PM, said:

So why not say what you think your Air Force's 'true' heritage is? I'd be interested to know.

b/c every time we start to develop one, somebody decides to go and changes things. so really, our heritage is constant change!

Though pilots make fun of it, heritage is something they take seriously, especially their place in it as pilots.

HerkDerka Posted 22 May 2007 - 11:31 PM

ShineR, on May 22 2007, 11:13 AM, said:

Every time you walk into the SQ bar you are experiencing heritage, but that's for flying squadrons. I would like to see some heritage that is NOT of flying origin, however, its greatly lacking.

Air Force. Our heritage is as a flying force. Flying our heritage and it's sad when a ground pounder can't be proud of supporting the flying mission.

Osulax05 Posted 23 May 2007 - 06:22 AM

HerkDerka, on May 23 2007, 12:31 AM, said:

Flying is our heritage and it's sad when a ground pounder can't be proud of supporting the flying mission.

Hells yes... I'd be curious how many mx and support guys from WWII got pissed because the the heritage stemming from WWII wasn't from what they did? I'd be willing to bet none. Everybody seems to take the "we can't get the job done without the support folks" mantra too far; they seem to think that their little piece of the pie is somehow more important than any other person's job and thus are entitled to giving you grief for bothering them (read: make them do some work).

I'm really not trying to bash support folks (too hard anyway) because it is true, flyers rely on them to be able to go out and fly the mission. But just like HerkDerka said, we are the Air Force, not the Personnel force or the Finance Force. That is why our heritage is about flying and if people don't like that they should have joined another service.... oh wait, the Navy's heritage is about driving ships and the Army's/USMC's is about putting boot to ass... no mention of finance or personnel anywhere.

bottomline.... heritage should be about the mission and ours is to fly, fight ant win (not that sovereign, cyberspace stuff).

In the following excerpt the forum members react to someone changing the long standing term 'Airmen' to 'Airpersons' / 'Airwomen'.

Bergman on 25 February 2007 - 10:42 PM

Oh for f_ck's sake. YGBSM.

If anyone needs the definition of shoe clerk, this is it. \$69 says she'll end up in MEO, PA, or finance.

GSXR6Racer on 25 February 2007 - 11:33 PM

We can't ignore this.. It won't go away! I am afraid thats what we have been doing and its not working! They are taking over and if we don't stand up to this it'll be too late. We can no longer stand for this crap!

ambwaldo on 26 February 2007 - 02:17 AM

You were given two ears and one mouth for a reason....

You've been in the Air Force all of two months and you've taken it upon yourself to start changing things.... Shut up and color.

M2 on 26 February 2007 - 07:30 AM

I don't give a flying f*ck what her personal opinion is, the term "airmen" is the one that Hap Arnold gave us and the one we will use. Someplace, somewhere in USAF regs it states that the term "airmen" applies to all genders. Someone needs to find this reg, roll it up, and shove it up this lieutenant's ass! She needs to be breech-loaded; but I'll bet she is uglier than hell, which guarantees she end up, as Berg said, in MEO, PA, or finance. Gentlemen, it is your USAF now...if you don't stop this sh*t ASAP, you will regret it for a long time to come!

DigDug on 26 February 2007 - 06:53 PM

I guess she figured that since she didn't fit the definition, she needed a new title....

Okay... I should probably apologize for that comment...

Chuck17 on 26 February 2007 - 06:58 PM

Obviously she reached this opinion as a combat veteran herself. Oh wait a minute...

Shut the MAN-pleaser, keep opinions quiet and learn something about flying airplanes...

THEN try to change insignificant yet time honored traditions started by those who came long before you and suck the life outta the Air Force. Gotta crawl before you walk!

Here not only is change the issue, but who is making the change and whether or not she has the rank or experience enough to do so.

Women Forum Members

On the topic of women, there appear to only be three women who post to the forum and of those three only one is a pilot. Of the many threads on sex, sexism, and the sexist remarks that are made they do not seem to care. In the following example, two of the women reply to a post where the subject is changing the 'Men at Work' street signs to gender neutral ones.

sweethomeco on Posted 14 July 2008 - 11:04 AM

Oh, wow! Yes, I, too, get offended by 'Men at Work' signs... after all, the glamorous job should get the attention it deserves. The first thing that enters my brain is "Aren't there women working here too?", and not "Damn, I'm going to be late for work."

If this changes around the country, the next thing you know is the picture of a man crossing a cross walk will have to be changed to a stick figure with a skirt. And what's with the deer crossing sign always being a buck, huh? I mean, a doe can jump across the road too. Don't even get me started on the elk crossing signs- it can't get any more offensive than that. :)

The Kayla on 14 July 2008 - 05:27 PM

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

What she said

This forum is definitely male oriented and most posts are made to the male audience. That said, sex is a very popular term on the forums from posts, to replies, to avatars, pictures and the numerous times the word gay is used to describe something in a

derogatory fashion. In fact, anything liberal in nature, gay being just one example, is generally chastised on this forum.

Politics

One interesting thing to note here is that there are more than double the posts in the last year than there were in the first year and a half. In analyzing the content of the posts during the last year versus the first year and a half, it seems that politics are the driving force behind the increased posts. The motivation behind this sudden influx of posts is the fact that the members of the forum lean more right, conservative, and republican thus there is a divide between current American politics and their personal preferences and views.

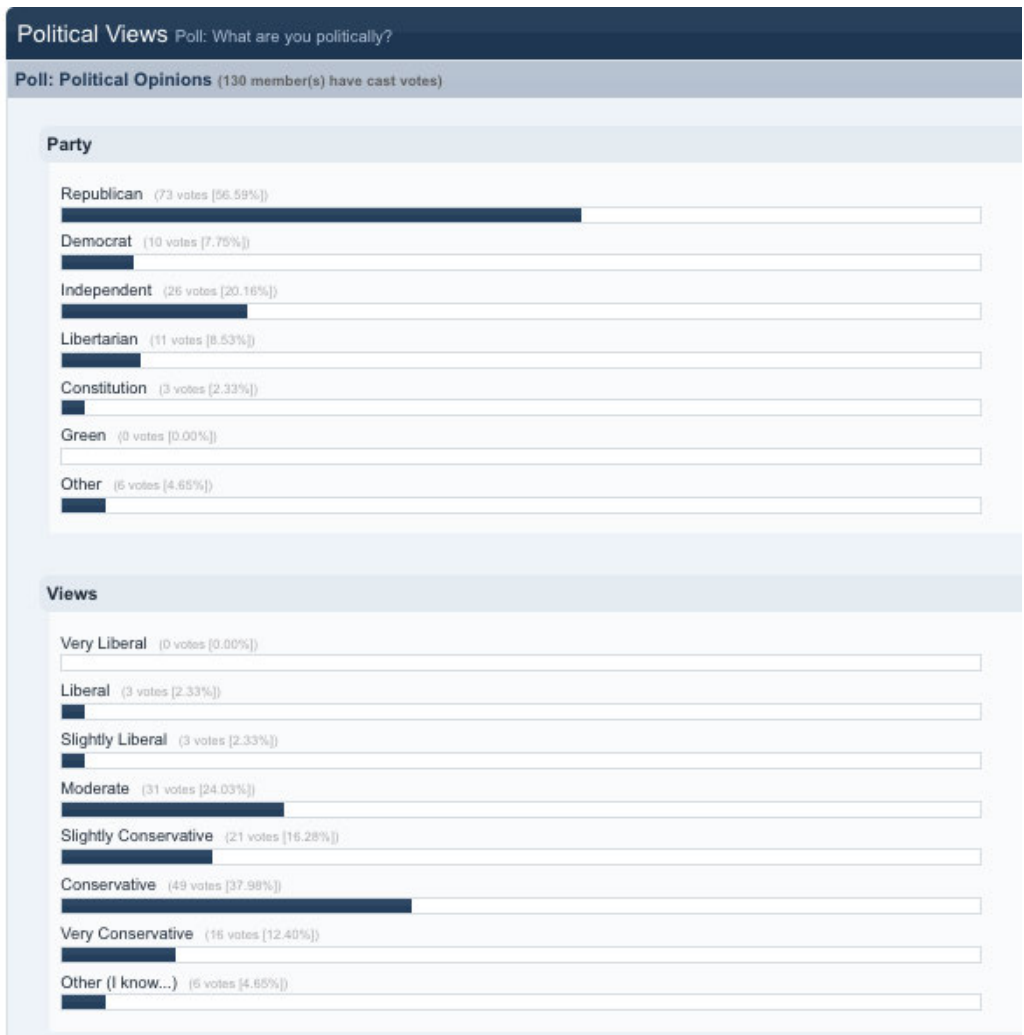
In fact, a moderator of the forum went out of his way to post and pin a warning on political posts the night before the election:

ClearedHot on 03 November 2008 - 09:23 PM

Ladies,

The past few months have seen some heated discussions from both sides of the aisle and tomorrow night we will likely know who the next president of the United States is. Let this serve as a reminder that after tomorrow, regardless of your opinion of the person elected, there are regulations that govern the military and comments on the Commander in Chief. As military members we give up some of our rights in order to serve as protectors of this great nation. I urge all of you to become A-Political tomorrow night and remember the oath you swore to protect and defend the constitution.

In April of 2008 a member of the forum posted a poll asking people what their political views were. Though I cannot attest to its validity and from a scientific point of view it is a less than accurate way to measure this type of information, it is interesting the data it does give us and the fact it was posted by a forum member. After analyzing the content of this off-topic forum I can say through observation the majority do seem to hold to these beliefs.



A vocal minority disagrees with this mindset and does their best to make sure they are heard even at the expense of their reputation on the forums. This can be seen in the poll below attacking one of the more ‘liberal’ members of the forum.



It is through these posts in the last year that you can really see the push for conformity on the forum and when this does not occur it almost always instigates a debate. However, it is not even sided so the minority gets shut down pretty quick.

Gas Man on 11 April 2009 - 10:28 AM

nsplayr, on Apr 11 2009, 03:02 AM, said:

Another good story that I didn't hear about until I read it just now:

President salutes former prisoners of war

<http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123143763>

:salut: to them all too

Good job BO! You made April 9th Former Prisoner of War Day. That says a lot about such an honored group of men. I mean, it just shows the respect BO has for them to go and name a day after them. I thought maybe he didn't like them when he decided to skip their inauguration party. I mean, what says I'm sorry and I respect you more than something as unique as naming a day after them. Good thing he didn't put it in May because May is National Egg MONTH . Eggs have an entire month to honor them! Also Dec 10th was taken as National Gay day.

A few more dates that were already taken:

- * National Caviar Day--July 18
- * National Escargot Day--May 24
- * National Deviled Egg Day--November 2
- * National Fritters Day--December 2

Overall I'd just like to thank the President for taking some of the most brave and honored men and cheapening them by giving them a "day". I heard if he pays \$24.95thhe can name a star after them too. Until he names 2009 National Former Prisoner of War Year I'm not impressed.

This idea that the topic of politics (and anything remotely politically related such as the economy) is the driving force behind the last large increase in posts over the last year was not one of those focuses of the research questions, so I did not spend a lot of time on analyzing it. Thus this is only an assumption, however, it is something that could prove interesting in further study.

Answering the Research Questions

There are a few things to consider in respect to answering the research questions provided. First, this being an off-topic forum, those who participate are not obligated to post anything with any sort of relevancy to their work, field, or day-to-day lives. Second, while there is a certain security in the anonymity of the internet this is a public forum and both of these cases can create environmental bias where people can go from one extreme to the other regarding censorship and truthfulness of their statements. Lastly, this is one forum of many on this particular site and thus I am only seeing a portion of the interactions that occur amongst the members who post.

Question One

1. Does the community tend to foster rational debate and discussion or not?
 - o *Is it better to stand out as an individual or conform to the group?*

While it seems it would be easy to be able to answer whether or not something was a discussion or a debate, in an online context this is simply not the case. Many times what appears at first as a debate, is simply a misunderstanding of tone or context due to the discussion occurring via computer mediated communication.

Because the larger concern was to understand traits of individuality versus conformity and the role of rational debate and disagreement in the group dynamics, I took this idea a step further and considered whether or not people tended to conform to the group and what happened when they did not. This helped me to better define debates versus misunderstandings. To that point, the themes of assertiveness, sub-groups and politics as discussed in the qualitative overview section were contributing factors to the ideas of conformity/individualism and discussion/debate.

Additionally, the point needs to be made that though there were cases where individuals were called out for not conforming, this in effect allowed for another example of group conformity as it resulted in others siding with the person who initiated the confrontation.

Of the 530 topics that were reviewed, 202 (38%) expressed conformity of the group. Of those 202 topics, 54 (27% of these topics and 10% of all) elevated to some sort of debate as the example shows below.

Original Post

FallingOsh Posted 04 April 2008 - 07:50 AM

The ACLU is suing the Department of Corrections and warden of Wyoming State Penitentiary because Muslims are having to skip meals to pray.

Reply

Joe Posted 04 April 2008 - 08:25 PM

Swingin, on Apr 4 2008, 09:00 PM, said:

Lighten up Francis, nobody's throwing insults.

I believe that prisoners should not be forced to choose between either meals or the practicing of their religion, whether it be Christianity, Islam, or whatever else. In my mind all that is left to debate is whether this is happening or not.

The issue is that these inmates are given 20 minutes from the time the tray is placed in their cell to finish the meal, and some are claiming that if they have already started prayer then they have to either disr their prayers or risk busting the 20 minutes. Also at issue is receiving a meal during a fast that ends at sundown, before sundown.

Whether or not religion is being used to game the system is something the prison staff and the warden need to decide and of course we'd have no way of knowing that. I'm just tired of the fear-mongering alarmists who whine on about how their civil liberties are being trampled because of a dude who wants to finish his tater tots after, and not during his prayers.

Would you agree that you forfeit certain rights when you are sentenced to prison for BREAKING THE LAW??!?!?! Seriously...eat your fuking tots when everyone else does. If

your religion is that important to you, pray in your cell before or after dinner. If we let them open this door, where does it stop.

Reply

Joe Posted 04 April 2008 - 08:33 PM

Swingin, on Apr 4 2008, 07:58 PM, said:

That has nothing to do with it. Nowhere in the constitution is the issue of Harvard's gym policy mentioned. You're that same guy who floods my inbox with "Obama is a Mulsim, he swore into the Senate on the Koran" spam, aren't you?

No, I wouldn't. What's your problem man? You don't like my opinion so you try to insult? What do you do that makes you so much better?? Just curious.

Joe Posted 04 April 2008 - 09:13 PM

"We" and "them?" No, that's not the problem. You're the problem. Too freaking sensitive. Yea, THEM. I said it. The jerk Muslims that think we should bend to their ways. THEM. Fuk THEM. Sorry you have a problem with that. You're sounding more like THEM in every post you make.

Question Two

2. Does the culture demonstrate traits indicative of those that would provide negative feedback to their bosses or is it more indicative of individuals more likely to remain silent when disagreeing?

Considering the issues of off topic subjects and anonymity of the Internet, it is difficult to accurately answer this question solely based on the interactions that occur in this forum. By marking every thread that dealt with reactions to leadership of any sort, I was able to determine that out of 530 topics only 68 or 13% had any connection at all. There was no thread that directly addressed question. However, there were threads that addressed reactions to those in leadership positions to which they did not directly report including people outside of the Air Force. Additionally, the threads demonstrated several ways of passively disagreeing such as demotivational posters, homemade music videos, or blatant acts such as wearing the wrong color of socks as mentioned below.

In the example below, a forum member posts an email he got from leadership on upcoming uniform inspections.

M2 Posted 01 June 2009 - 11:08 AM

Although this no longer applies to me, I got a copy anyway...

Quote

All,

FYI/FYA. As the 37th TRW prepares for their upcoming inspection they are taking a hard look at individuals for compliance with uniform/appearance rules as well as other common customs and courtesies. There are personnel on the lookout for individuals violating the rules. Violators are being written up and

handed tickets for violations. I don't expect any of you are violating the rules but below is a list of infractions from the ticket (most, but not all, pertain to while in uniform:

AFI-36-2903

Pockets unbuttoned

Hat on indoors

Hat off outdoors

Hands in pockets

Walking/talking on cell phone

Eating and drinking while walking

Glasses on top of the head

Jogging with headphones

Items sticking out of cargo pocket

Unserviceable uniform items

Backpack/bag on the right shoulder

ABU hat ranger rolled

Not wearing a required uniform item

Unauthorized uniform item

Unauthorized hair items (female)

Hair not in standards

Driving and talking on cell phone

Running with no shirt on (males)

Trousers improperly bloused

Unauthorized colored socks

Unauthorized color T-shirt

Unauthorized jewelry

Customs/courtesies

Not saluting officer

Not saluting a staff car

Disrespect to national anthem

Failing to stand for a officer

Not on the ticket but passed to me by the 37 TRW Command Chief's office:

Failing to pay proper respect during the service medley played at 1200 on Fridays

This is a matter of great importance to the 37 TRW for their inspection but proper wear of the uniform and observance of customs and courtesies should be as natural as breathing to all of us.

R/

Col *****

What, having your finger up your nose (or head up your ass) is not prohibited?
Apparantly not!

The service medley thing on Fridays is also a new one on me. They actually expect folks in uniform to stand at attention under the full onslaught of the southcentral Texas summertime sun while they play the service medley? Well, sorry guys, I will be the civilian that walks around you and keeps on trucking.

Everytime I get another email like this, I am a little more happier that I retired three years ago.

Multiple Replies:

MKopack Posted 01 June 2009 - 11:36 AM

M2, on Jun 1 2009, 11:08 PM, said:

Unauthorized colored socks

So much for my blaze orange hunting socks on Blues Monday...

Mike

...knew a guy who did that years ago during an FTD 'graduation' with the Colonel. O-6 didn't notice, but the instructor nearly passed out when he did.

Bergman Posted 01 June 2009 - 12:27 PM

Let's start an official contest to see who can get ticketed (YGBSM, btw) for the greatest number of violations at once??

Case of beer to the winner!

Capt4fans Posted 01 June 2009 - 02:54 PM

And hopefully my Wg/CC won't pick up on that memo. Although I'm sure the "Fun Burgler" already has it in his in box waiting to send it off to "All Personnel"

Hueypilot812 Posted 01 June 2009 - 04:38 PM

08Dawg, on Jun 1 2009, 12:08 PM, said:

Why does the Air Force have such a stick up it's collective ass about running with headphones? It's not as if a driver can't see when in your PT gear with that big huge reflective target on your back.

Interesting...I'm trusted to fly and instruct in a C-130 with an Iraqi who's never flown the Herk before, and hasn't flown an airplane of ANY kind in 3 years, monitor two radios, listen to crew members calling out checklist items in broken English, talk to tower and whoever-the-f*ck-else who is speaking in broken English and Arabic...

Yet apparently I don't have the SA to jog on base with my headphones and avoid getting run over.

It is easy to see both from this question and the previous one the members of this forum do not have a problem expressing their opinion on things both mundane and service oriented. However, based on the data available I am unable to expressly state they would give negative feedback directly to their superior.

Question Three

3. Do the actions of this online community of Air Force pilots indicate a culture that is more or less likely to provide 'bad news' up the chain of command?

As with the last question and for the same reasons, this one was also hard to definitively answer. Using the same methodology, I determined first which topics had any relevance and out of 530 topics only 38 or 7% applied and of those 16 or 42% would report and 22 or 59% would suppress.

On reporting bad news up the chain of command, this forum is not conducive to admitting personal failure or being a part of a group that has fallen short in some way (refer back to the Making Fun theme for more on this). This means the environment is biasing the content posted. However, if one felt someone below them in rank had failed to do their job correctly, especially if it negatively affected them, they would report it as shown by the example below.

Egochecks 07 June 2007 - 12:10 PM

How can I (or should I) file a complaint about a civilian gate guard who felt the need to be rude to my 7 month pregnant wife?

Long story short, we have a new car, still has dealer plates and we're still waiting on the insurance cards. Last week not an issue at the gate. Today, my wife with a valid ID issued from the same base tries to get back on base for a housing appointment and is denied. If she needs proof of insurance fine she'll get it. But in the process my wife shouldn't have to call me because some dude at the gate is being completely rude to her. If you need the paper work, fine, don't be an ass. (Yes, she's pregant but I know the difference, this guy was being an ass.) If it was just me screw it he's just a dick but it's my pregnant wife and I'm pissed.

So hence the questions, who do I talk to, is it worth it and will it matter? Thanks.

A little further down the thread, there is this exchange:

Herk Driver on 08 June 2007 - 09:41 AM

Toro, on Jun 8 2007, 01:53 PM, said:

2) Don't go to their supervisor - go to your commander and have him deal with it.

Toro, great post.

But having been an SP supervisor, I would prefer that the individual come talk to me directly. That whole keeping things at the lowest level possible construct works just fine most of the time. However, I would not be against having my CC talk to the other CC if the my approach didn't get anywhere. Everything is not a CC issue, IMHO.

Personal preference, I suppose.

On the subject of suppressing, again, no one directly came out and said they have done this or would do it and this is most likely due to environment bias. The closest to suppressing would be actively looking out for one another instead of reporting as the following example shows.

Fury220 on 20 August 2007 - 08:28 PM

Just on a bro-to-bro level here...

You might want to tell your friend to photoshop the picture so some important details aren't visible: The tail codes (EN) and his parachute number.

Also, be very careful when you intermix USAF airplanes, cameras, and the internet. The 80FTW doesn't take too kindly to its solo students bringing cameras aforum.

Pilots as Influencers of Culture

Though these questions may not be able to be answered through direct concrete examples via this off-topic forum, I contend there is still a case to be made that pilots are influencers of Air Force culture.

Shein's Leadership Mechanics

Edgar Schein is an organizational psychologist and in his book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, (Schein 1996) he addresses the ways in which leaders embed and transmit culture. In analyzing the forum, I used the following criteria to tag each thread with one of these five methods.

Attention, Measure, and Control

By virtue of being posted on this forum the topic at hand was given attention and thus this was the default attribute.

Reactions to Critical Incidents and Organizational Crisis

This included threads where the poster stated a perceived crisis

Allocation of Rewards Resource

This included investments, purchases, (rewarding themselves) as well as receiving awards, rewarding others, and rewards others received.

Role Modeling, Teaching, Coaching

This included anytime a community member took on one of these roles on the forum and as a secondary piece it also included anytime a community member looked up to someone else.

Criteria for Hiring and Firing

This included comments about those in positions they did not feel were deserved as well as noted promotions and firings.

Application to the Forum

The following is the break down of each of these mechanics across the 530 threads. Please note that there were cases were more than one mechanic applied to a single thread.

- Attention

- As stated above the very fact the thread was posted at all meant that its subject matter was given attention.
- Out of 530 threads only 3 received absolutely no replies, which means that in 527 cases at least one other person paid attention to the thread.
- Most common topic: military followed by sex, politics, and alcohol.
- Reactions to Critical Incidents
 - A total of 56 threads (10%) were posted in reaction to some perceived crisis.
 - Most common topic: politics (with the subtopic of economy)
- Allocation of Rewards
 - Only 35 threads (6%) dealt with rewards.
 - Most common topic: advice on how to spend/save money or what to spend it on
- Role Modeling, Teaching, Coaching
 - Excluding Attention, Role Modeling was the most used at 76 threads (14%).
 - Most common topic: Military
- Criteria for Hiring and Firing
 - A total of 64 threads (12%), mentioned hiring or firing.
 - Most common topic: Military followed by politics

Though it might seem logical to go through and list separate instances for each of these, the following is a much more powerful example in that it embeds all of these mechanics into a single rhetoric that was written to the forum members not only by a pilot who was promoted to a leadership position within the last two years, but also one that is a moderator of the forum.

ClearedHot posted 27 July 2008 - 09:41 PM

Ok, I've been drinking bourbon and after 18+ years it's time for a rant to you young dummies out there. I am sure some will scoff and a few more will certainly roll in on me, so let me launch a pre-emptive f*ck you up front, I don't care, deal with it.

Yes I am old and I have probably been promoted beyond the rank of usefulness, but I've seen a few things along the way and I am going to share them whether you like it or not.

I will give my disclaimer up front; yes I've been to school a few times and endured the Air Force Koolaid funnel, but at least in my pea brain, I've kept perspective and still consider myself a warrior. I could give a rats ass about scarves, especially when the air conditioning in our building is not always the best, which is why I've never said a word about your sleeves being rolled up, and not only do I condone Friday morale patches, I wear mine with pride. Given that perspective, there are a few things that make me want to mercilessly clown the offenders on the following axioms;

1. Grow the f*ck up! Ok I get it, you are 20 something and you made it through years of training, upgrades, Weapons School and you are at the top of your game. That being said there is no....I repeat NO freaking reason to be an idiot. Step out of your testosterone filled melon for a second and truthfully tell me how you would react to seeing one of your bright and shiny instructors in his corvette sliding sideways at 80 MPH through the main intersection to the front gate. Was that supposed to be cool? If you will do something like that when you think no one is watching, what are you doing in the jet when I am not around? Hear me clearly, I want you to be aggressive, I

want you to think about killing our enemies and doing as much as possible with the equipment the American taxpayers have purchased for you...Hell I want your fangs poking through the bottom of the cockpit when the balloon goes up. HOWEVER, I also expect a small amount of common sense and the personal integrity to know when to “push it up” for the right reasons and when to drive like a normal human being so I don’t have to waste my nonexistent free time keeping your ass out of a sling with the Wing/CC.

2. Take some personal responsibility for your own career. I didn’t make the rules, I can’t change the rules, all I can do is compete you within those rules. I know some of you profess not to care about getting promoted, I have also had a few of you moping in my office when you did not get picked up for school. Of course luck and timing can play a role and yes sometimes butt snorkelers get a leg up (although they usually crash spectacularly), but you are not doing anything to help me or more importantly yourself. Do you think I enjoy sitting in my office 14 hours a day working on OPRs and PRFs when I should be out flying with you and teaching the young guys. I would like to see how your Shakespearian skills would transform “Flew 83 tac lines, restocked the squadron snack bar, and contributed to CFC into a working OPR. I am NOT saying you have to volunteer to be the wing voting officer, but for the love of god give me some details about those 83 lines. You are doing god’s work training yourself and others to protect democracy. Take 30 seconds and write some of that crap down so I can leave my crap hole office before 2000 each night and perhaps eat dinner with my family and tuck the kid into bed once in a while.

3. If I have put you in a position of responsibility, try being a leader. Chances are that if I made you a Flt/CC or an ADO, it was not for the purpose of creating more work for myself. See bullet #2 about OPRs, but interject the careers of the folks that work for you. Take a few minutes out of your busy schedule of talking about porn and American Idol and try writing something more than “Johnny is a good pilot”. I fully understand that everyone can’t be a general. Trust me I’ve worked up close and personal with the dudes at the very top and I don’t want their job. HOWEVER, unless you want the shoe clerks running the show (which might happen anyway), we need to promote someone who understands what we do and can lead.

4. Make a difference. Not everyone is as smart as you are. While it is far easier to help the dude who learns quick than it is stick it out with the dude who struggles, you are failing if you overlook the kid with heart. Some of you are getting just enough experience to become a little jaded and it is almost comical to watch you make fun of a new kid as he struggles a bit. How much would it hurt your ego to learn that many of us old timers said the exact same thing about you just a few short years ago. I promise you it is far more rewarding to help the dude with heart, and when the light bulb comes on, the reward is something that will remain with you forever.

5. Try expanding your mind. Kudos to the dude who just wants to fly his plane around the flagpole everyday. In years past we would probably survive with a bunch of dudes like that. However, today we are in the fight of our lives. We are engaged in two combat theaters, our senior leadership has been removed, we are being minimized as a service, we are most certainly facing a large reduction in our budget, our airframes are old and tired, our people are worn out, and many of our adversaries have found a way to asymmetrically defeat our technological advantage. The bad guys are determined and more importantly, they are our-breeding us 12:1. Enjoy this little factoid I recently saw in a presentation. Something like 5% of our kids are born gifted. Reference countries like India and China...they produce more “gifted” kids each year than we do kids all altogether. Unless you want this country and our way of life and more importantly the way of life of our children to go screaming down the shitter, you need to understand the application of war a little bit more than aiming five mils high on a proximity round delivery. Try reading a real book about war and strategy, we are going to need your experience someday and since you volunteered to be a professional officer, try acting like one.

I have reached the pinnacle of a very mediocre career. This is the job I always wanted and I could care less what happens after this. In fact, unless it is something that is a perfect fit for my family, I will retire and let the next moron try to lead you.

I genuinely love each one of you bozos and I would do anything for you. When the balloon goes up, I won't tell you what to do, I will show you and lead the way and I will expect you to be on my wing as we fight like stormtroopers of the apocalypse knocking on the gates of Armageddon.

That is all.

Conclusion

Though the Squadron Bar is a data rich environment with culturally driven social interactions specific to pilots, the Air Force, and military in general, it is its off-topic nature that prohibits it from being directly applicable to the research questions presented here. Additionally, issues such as anonymity and environmental bias, with respect to the context of the forum being public and on the Internet, also prove to be problematic in that these things directly influence the subject matter as well as the types of interactions that occur.

I have tried to overcome these concerns by taking a more holistic approach to the content available and presenting it in its broader cultural context by expanding on overarching themes that emerged from the data. These in turn can be used not only to help explain hypothesis on Air Force culture, but also be places to start from for further research.

Suggestions for Further Research

Primarily, while anonymous content analysis can be very useful, I highly suggest a more interactive research approach with interviews, surveys, and participant observation. These methods, while at first they may cause the group to alter their actions, would result in a much more in depth understanding of the group. Even with this more interactive approach, the research can still be carried out online.

Secondly, I suggest extending the data source to multiple forums and including a mixture of on and off-topic subjects. One of the biggest drawbacks to this particular research design was the restriction to one forum and the fact that the focus of that forum was off-topic subject matter.

Finally, given a more interactive and extended approach I suggest a longer timeline be allotted for data gathering and analysis. While a virtual ethnography may appear to be easier at first glance due to the fact one can conduct it from a desk chair, it is in fact very intensive because it is an always-open field site with interactions occurring all the time. That and given its textual nature where every single interaction is recorded and archived, the effort it takes to sift through that data is actually very demanding, perhaps even more so than being physically at a field site.

All of that being said, I do not feel this particular study was a wasted effort. Without having had previous knowledge of the field site or the group being studied, there would have been no way to know whether or not it could accurately answer the research questions put forth. The fact that it does not is just as telling as if it had, and should be one of the points considered if further research were to occur.

Personal Thoughts

I feel as if I have spent over two years with the members of this forum all within the last four months and I did it all without so much as introducing myself. This was very much a learning experience both in terms of learning more about the Air Force and in seeing the last two years of events through the eyes of another culture. As with every project I take on it was also educational in terms of methodology, approach, and research design. Looking back there are a few things I would have done differently and I will apply the lessons I learned through this experience to future projects. I want to thank my client for giving me this opportunity and look forward to any feedback he or any other reader may have on the results of this study.

About the Researcher

Diana Martin will receive her Masters of Science degree in Applied Anthropology specializing in Business (Organizational), Cyber, and Design Anthropology as of May of 2010. Her previous research studies have included work on cyber culture including gamers and social network users as well as work for clients such as RedHat (The Fedora Project), General Motors, Motorola, and the Texas Denton County Health Department. She can be contacted at diana [at] cyber-anthro.com for more information.

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Terms and Phrases

I collected several terms during my analysis, however, of those only a few show up in the examples I have provided in the report. I have listed these terms below to help better explain some of the quotes above.

ABU: Airman Battle Uniform

Ref: <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/airforce/a/abu.htm>

Academy/USAFA/Zoo: U.S. Air Force Academy - The Air Force Academy is both a military organization and a university. Much of the Academy is set up like most other Air Force bases, particularly the 10th Air Base Wing, but the superintendent, commandant, dean of faculty and cadet wing are set up in a manner resembling a civilian university.

Ref: <http://www.usafa.af.mil/information/baseinfo/>

Airman: Single Air Force member.

Ref: <http://usmilitary.about.com/cs/airforce/a/aforganization.htm>

Buff: B-52 Ref: <http://www.baseops.net/militarypilot/glossary.html>

CC: Commander - Ref: <http://www.airforcewriter.com/acro.htm>

CFC: Combined Federal Campaign - Ref: <http://www.airforcewriter.com/acro.htm>

Choke Yourself: Possibly originated from the movie Full Metal Jacket

Ref: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093058/quotes>

Gunnery Sergeant Hartman: Bullshit! Get on your knees scumbag!

Gunnery Sergeant Hartman: [Pyle drops down to his knees]

Gunnery Sergeant Hartman: Now choke yourself.

Private Gomer Pyle: [Pyle wraps his own hands around his throat]

Gunnery Sergeant Hartman: Goddamn it, with MY hand, numb-nuts!

Gunnery Sergeant Hartman: [Pyle reaches for Hartman's hand]

Gunnery Sergeant Hartman: Don't pull my fucking hand over there! I said choke yourself; now lean forward and choke yourself!

Drinking the Kool-Aid: to become a firm believer in something, to accept an argument or philosophy wholeheartedly or blindly

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drinking_the_Kool-Aid

FTU: Formal Training Unit – Ref: <http://www.baseops.net/militarypilot/glossary.html>

LPA: Defined on the boards as -

Riddler, on Jun 23 2007, 05:25 AM, said:

Probably a dumb question for most of you, but my casual buddies and I were talking about this... what is the "LPA"?

Bishop Posted 23 June 2007 - 01:46 AM

Lt. Protection Association, from what I understand its just all the LT's in a squadron banding together to not get screwed over (to much at least) someone once used an analogy on this board that likened it to joining a gang once your in prison so you don't become someones girlfriend. Someone that knows more will likely chime in.

Ref: http://www.flyingsquadron.com/forums/index.php?/topic/11442-so-there-i-was/page_view_findpost_p_132763

OPR: Officer Performance Report

SA: Situational Awareness

SA has been recognized as a critical, yet often elusive, foundation for successful decision-making across a broad range of complex and dynamic systems, including aviation and air traffic control.

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Situation_awareness

Shoe Clerk: Military insult used primarily in the Air Force to describe services, personnel, finance and other support staff. This term is primarily used by aviators. It is more limited than the Army equivalent "pogue", in that not all non-combat, non-flying airmen are labeled as shoe clerks.

"We can't carry loaded weapons anymore because some f***ing shoe clerk is afraid we'll accidentally shoot ourselves."

"That retard shoe clerk got on my case about not having my PT shirt tucked in."

Ref: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=shoe%20clerk>

Shut up and color: Mind one's own business, keep one's head down, do as one is told.

Ref: http://www.doubletongued.org/index.php/dictionary/shut_up_and_color/

SNAPs: Sensitive New Age Pilots – used in a derogatory fashion.

Ref: <http://www.fighterpilotuniversity.com/index.cfm/2008/1/21/SNAP-Intervention>

Squadron: Two or more flights form a squadron. The squadron is the lowest level of command with a headquarters element (example, a Squadron Commander, or Squadron First Sergeant). In the Air Force, a squadron commander is generally in the rank of Lt Col (O-5), although smaller squadrons may be commanded by majors, captains, and sometimes even lieutenants. Squadrons are usually identified both numerically, and by function. An example would be the 49th Security Forces Squadron, or the 501st Maintenance Squadron.

Ref: <http://usmilitary.about.com/cs/airforce/a/aforganization.htm>

USAF: United States Air Force

Wing & Wing CC: Two or more groups compose a Wing. There is only one Wing on an Air Force base, and the Wing Commander is quite often considered to be the "Installation Commander." There are two types of Wings: Composite and Objective. Composite Wings operate more than one kind of aircraft. Individual composite wings can have different missions.

Ref: <http://usmilitary.about.com/cs/airforce/a/aforganization.htm>

Appendix Two: “...Makes Enron Seem Transparent”

[Franklin Spinney] has devoted great energy to attacking...a Pentagon bookkeeping operation that makes Enron seem transparent.

- Bill Keller, *The New York Times*, 10 March 2002

Builder views the Air Force as the service most closely tied to corporate America as it worships at the altar of technology.³²⁵ This close tie may be one reason the Air Force is often seen as having less a military culture and more a corporate one. Builder sees this difference from other services displayed starkly even in the Air Force corridor of the Pentagon:

...the Air Force corridor has taken on the look of the modern corporation.

Portraits of past corporate executives mounted on designer wall panels line a hall that might well lead from the board room to the CEO's office is any “Fortune 500 executive suite.” The image is of corporate taste, stability, and above all, power.

If these corridors are harbingers of the future, then the Air Force may be changing from an adventure to a business.³²⁶

While the Air Force may have closer ties to corporate America and may fervently worship at the altar of technology, it is certainly not alone. All corridors in the Pentagon are linked by the needs of the services to secure financial support for services and to procure weapon systems in order to accomplish their missions. It is this central process of the Pentagon that arguably provides the most corporate of experiences for all military services as service organizations provide their requirements, jockey for budget allocations, and provide briefings designed to convince “the board” that an investment in a particular weapon system or program will be good for the company. One might expect

a display of the corporate culture and its failings, if there is one, to be found here at the wellspring of the individual services where money is allocated.

Services compete for limited resources much as departments compete for allocations in any company. Military services theoretically compete for money to fund systems that allow them to best accomplish their missions. As part of this process they must convince decision makers that their request is valid and that their chosen system is the best among options. Builder explains:

When the competing alternatives pose high stakes for the institutions involved, then there is an incentive—and much more maneuvering room in systems analysis than in operations analysis—to bias the assumptions, suppress unpalatable alternatives, or choose the models that give the desired answers.³²⁷

Franklin Spinney, former Air Force officer and veteran DoD analyst of nearly thirty years, has argued for decades that this maneuvering has been consistently employed in the Pentagon. He states “Planners appear to be deceiving themselves about future budget requirements.”³²⁸ In Congressional testimony in 2002 Spinney states that the DoD routinely cooks the books year after year, and describes an accounting process for weapon systems purchases in language eerily similar to descriptions of Enron’s own overly optimistic prediction and accounting practices.³²⁹ Spinney states:

...the Pentagon's bookkeeping systems do not comply with legal requirements of the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990... The CFO Act requires government agencies to pass annual audits of the links between an executive agency's expenditures and the legally enacted appropriations authorizing those expenditures.³³⁰

He explains the data used to project budget costs “cannot pass an audit and the data used in its planning projections are unreliable, arbitrary and, in important cases, systematically biased to grossly understate the future consequences of current decisions.”³³¹ Further Spinney explains that weapon system purchases are made through consistently overly optimistic predictions of program costs using “theoretical data as opposed to actual production experience.”³³² He explains the incentives that lead to the initial overly optimistic calculations designed simply to get the weapon system production started. Once the system is started the contractor can begin creating production facilities and they spread the plants through the political districts to encourage political top cover. He states, “The goal is to raise the political stakes before the true costs of the front-loaded program become apparent.”³³³ The costs for the programs then increase resulting in a service inability to purchase the quantities of the weapon system desired. In this way the capability of the service is limited as it is not able to afford the numbers of aircraft planned. The end result is what he calls a “plans/reality mismatch.”

Spinney then provides the bottom line that eluded Enron:

Without reliable information, there can be no confidence that the required matchup between the Defense organism and its environment has been or will be achieved. When such a condition of uncertainty persists, the interaction of chance with necessity guarantees that it is only a matter of time before dangerous mismatches creep insensibly into the relationship between organism and its environment. When this occurs, the unreliable information in the database creates a kind of virtual reality that disorients decision makers, yet keeps them busy, thereby blocking corrective action, while the internal activities shaped by their

decisions become progressively disconnected from and vulnerable to the threats and constraints in the real world.³³⁴

This description is reminiscent of Enron's woes. During its bankruptcy trial, an Enron executive performed an audit using generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) instead of the creative and overly optimistic theories previously used to establish the health of the company. According to the Enron restructuring officer his restatement of finances "would require about \$14 billion in write-offs related to all accounting errors" and "another \$8 billion to \$10 billion write-down of risk management assets."³³⁵ Had proper accounting been conducted earlier, Enron could have made proper decisions that would have helped the company. Similarly, Spinney recommends the DoD freeze its programs and perform such an audit while implementing proper accounting methods. He writes:

While programs are frozen, the audit agencies of the Defense Department will undertake a maximum effort to do comprehensive financial audits of the expenditure control system, the FYDP database, and the assets assigned to each organization. One of their main goals would be to build a solid foundation for assembling a DoD-wide double-entry accounting system for tracking transactions, matching transactions to appropriations, and building an effective management accounting system so decision makers have the wherewithal to know what is going on inside their own organization.³³⁶

Echoing the proper analysis of Enron's books using standard accounting procedures which revealed its crippled financial state, Spinney writes "Taken together, these re-

priced budget estimates would become the new DoD baseline budget scenario, which will require substantially larger budgets than the FY 2003-2007 FYDP approved by the President sent to Congress.”³³⁷

Like the culture of Enron that served to reward traders for completing deals rather than seeing those actually completed in the future while realizing projected profits, Spinney shows that systemic processes in the DoD serve to get weapon systems started without giving a realistic look to the financials in the future.³³⁸ He says planners use theories to justify optimistic budget predictions showing weapons systems will get cheaper over time but that “Considering that the declines predicted have *not* materialized in the past, this assumption also appears to reflect unrealistic optimism.”³³⁹ Spinney states that fixing these problems will take leadership and willpower, as people tend to ignore the future for more immediate concerns and career ambitions.³⁴⁰ He explains that those who do not ignore the budget problems, like Enron’s Kaminski, are isolated “and dismissed as a pessimist, critic, or obstructionist.”³⁴¹

Spinney describes the high-pressure atmosphere of budget planning in the Pentagon as high pressure with tight deadlines where the trees are lost for the forest. He describes the planning, programming, and budgeting process as:

If there ever was a description of ‘organized anarchy,’ this is it...How can decision makers rationally respond to the changing conditions in a planning blizzard? The answer is that they cannot! Adjustments are made on an ad hoc, piecemeal basis and the resulting confusion provides an environment that naturally encourages the distorting micro perspective.³⁴²

According to Salter, employees of Enron felt similarly as evidenced by an employee attitude study. Salter writes:

From associate to vice president, employees complained of instability. In their own words: “The left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing.” And “there is a sense of chaos in our everyday work. It’s a symptom of the lack of an overriding strategy at the top, and it’s starting to define practically everything.”³⁴³

The tolerance for perception engineering is found at both the lowest and highest levels of Air Force culture from the airmen documenting performance all the way up to the Pentagon’s acquisition of weapon systems to fight its nation’s wars. A higher operations tempo derived from “doing more with less” may be ensuring the service does less with less without the time to step back and evaluate the process.

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- ¹⁴⁷ Note: The student is dubbed “Patch” in a sarcastic reminder that he is not a Weapons Officer and should remember he is a student pilot.
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- ¹⁵¹ Ibid., Capt “Shark” Garland states, “The point is this is a fraternity that you are attempting to enter. As a student you haven't entered it yet” and “[T]hese guys first walk in the door you can tell that they're basically petrified. This is when they walk into the fraternity. This is when they join the club, right here.”
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²⁸⁰ Note: While anecdotal, such negative role modeling was evidenced by a four-star general with a KC-135 background during a commander call I attended. The general was asked by one officer if he had any information on the poor state of computer support organizations (network issues had several times led to a ceasing of flying directly impacting the mission). The General responded by discussing cyber threats from North Korea and then laughed and said to the front row of commanders, "When you're a general you can answer any question you want." The message that he was unconcerned with mission impacting problems was heard loud and clear. The general's identity has not been provided to comply with non-attribution policy.

²⁸¹ *United States Air Force Core Values*, 11.

²⁸² Reuters, "Air Force Reprimands General For Numerous Sexual Affairs," *The New York Times*, 23 December 2004.

²⁸³ Nicole Gaudiano, "Different spanks for different ranks - A general engages in

misconduct with numerous subordinates. A staff sergeant allegedly dates a student. Only the NCO is court-martialed. Is justice being served?," *Air Force Times*, 14 February 2005.

²⁸⁴ Thomas E. Ricks and William Branigan, "Air Force Reprimands Its Former Top Lawyer; Improper Relationships With Women Cited," *The Washington Post*, 23 December 2004.

²⁸⁵ Nicole Gaudiano, "Different spansks," 14 February 2005.

²⁸⁶ Josh White, "General Accused Of Harassment Is Demoted; Air Force Report Says Hassan Made Overtures to Female Subordinates," *The Washington Post*, 9 February 2006.

²⁸⁷ Michael Hoffman, "Donley disciplines Moseley over socializing with contractors," *Air Force Times*, 19 October 2009.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Lt Col Paul Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship," *Armed Forces Journal*, 27 April 2007, <http://www.afji.com/2007/05/2635198>.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² John Harman, "Accountability is back," *Air Force Times*, 23 November 2009.

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²⁹⁴ Carl H. Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome*, 21.

²⁹⁵ John Hillen, "Must U.S. Military Culture Reform?"

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Jonathan C. Dowty, *Christian Fighter Pilot*, 46.

³⁰⁰ Jeffrey York, "Why We Lie," 22.

³⁰¹ Note: In an MSNBC poll asking if users agreed with the ban on pregnancy, 28.9% of respondents said they did not agree with the ban. MSNBC, "Do You Agree with the Army General in Iraq Banning Pregnancy Among Military Personnel," (accessed 12 January 2010), http://world-news.newsvine.com/_question/2009/12/18/3650165-do-you-agree-with-the-army-general-in-iraq-banning-pregnancy-among-military-personnel.

³⁰² Teri Weaver, "U.S. Personnel in Iraq Could Face Court Martial for Getting Pregnant," *Stars and Stripes*, 19 December 2009,

<http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=66764>.

³⁰³ The Associated Press, "Commander to Rescind a Provision on Pregnancy," *New York Times*, 25 December 2009.

³⁰⁴ John Hillen, "Must U.S. Military Culture Reform?"

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War*, 32.

³⁰⁷ Gregory L. Vistica and Evan Thomas, "Sex and Lies," (*Newsweek*, 2 June 1997), 26.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ryan D. Kelty, "Military Privatization and Implications for Changes in Power Relations Among the State, Military, and Society," (Presented at the Annual Meeting of American Sociological Association, May 2009), 6.

³¹⁰ *Aviation Week & Space Technology* 169, “Clean Up the Air Force,” (Editorial, 7 July 2008), 74.

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³¹² Gayle Putrich and William H. McMichael, “Air Force loses control,” *Air Force Times*, 21 July 2008.

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³¹⁴ P.W. Singer, “Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry and Its Ramifications for International Security,” *International Security* 26 (Winter 2001-2002), 203.

³¹⁵ P.W. Singer, “Corporate Warriors,” 205.

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³¹⁷ P.W. Singer, “Corporate Warriors,” 215.

³¹⁸ Ronald R. Sims, “Linking Groupthink to Unethical Behavior in Organizations,” 653.

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³²¹ Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War*, 39.

³²² *Ibid.*, 119.

APPENDICIES

³²³ Carl H. Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome*, 34.

³²⁴ Ronald R. Sims, “Linking Groupthink to Unethical Behavior in Organizations,” 653.

³²⁵ Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War*, 19.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

³²⁸ Franklin C. Spinney, *Defense Facts of Life: The Plans/Reality Mismatch*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 138.

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³³⁰ *Ibid.*

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³³⁵ Malcolm S. Salter, *Innovation Corrupted*, 46.

³³⁶ US House of Representatives, *Statement to the Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs and International Relations Committee on Government Reform* by Franklin C. Spinney.

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³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

³³⁹ Franklin C. Spinney, *Defense Facts of Life*, 138.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 178.

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