

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

DISCOVERING AIR FORCE IDENTITY:
AIRPOWER AND INNOVATORS

by

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Jack Sine graduated from the University of Dayton with a Bachelor's of Electrical Engineering and entered the Air Force in 1991. He has a Masters of the Arts in Military Studies, Air Warfare, from American Military University and a Masters of the Arts in National Security Affairs from the Naval Post Graduate School. Lieutenant Colonel Sine served in a myriad of roles including F-16 instructor pilot and flight examiner, electronic combat systems engineer, Air Staff subject matter expert and requirements chief for air superiority weapons, program element manager for the USAF's munitions war reserve material, congressional liaison, and commander of the 80th Fighter Squadron, Kunsan AB, ROK. Lieutenant Colonel Sine is a command pilot with over 2,000 total hours—280 of those in combat.



Abstract

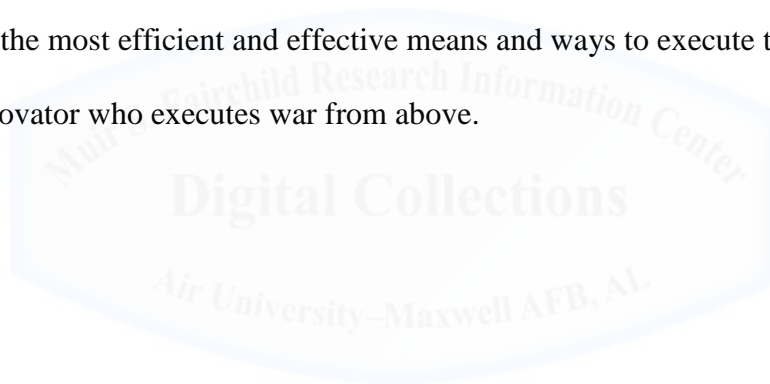
In terms of defining a single, unifying identity, the Air Force suffers from its own success. Constant innovation and successful execution created a service of such mission and technological diversity that inculcating and conveying a single Air Force identity is both difficult. Furthermore, complex technologies and missions require Airmen to dedicate entire careers to their functional specialties at the expense of cross-functional experience and collaboration. As a result, the Air Force today appears to be more of an aggregate of airpower capabilities than a single, unified service with a common self-awareness centered on airpower.

The good news is that there is a common, albeit complex, Air Force culture. The very existence of the Air Force as a separate service resulted from a group of men who self-identified themselves as innovators. They were professionals who sought to find more effective and more efficient ways and means to meet their country's defense requirements. They were Airmen who recognized the war-fighting potential that existed in the third dimension and embraced new technologies to increase the power of their nation. They were innovators with an air-mindedness that they applied to executing war from above. Today, the Air Force is still a service of air-minded warriors.

However, the pursuit of technical competence tends to deny Airmen the space required to ensure that every Airmen understands airpower in its broadest sense. The pursuit of competence in highly complex functional areas combined with the "do more with less" attitudes that accompany resource constrained environments robs them of the professional space to learn and collaborate across functional areas. They become pilots, space officers, or intelligence specialists first and Airmen second. In order to push a single Air Force identity back to the forefront of the Airman's psyche, the Air Force must recalibrate its education system to push

responsibility for comprehensive professional education back to the commanders and make it a constant career endeavor rather than an occasional career interruption. Furthermore, the Air Force's senior leaders must relieve Airmen of lower priority requirements in order to free time for the cross-function collaboration that generates the kind of innovation that has defined the Air Force since its inception.

As the mantra goes, the one constant in the Air Force is change. New technologies, new missions, and new methods constantly tempt the service to seek out new identities and redefine its culture. However, in the dynamic world of high-technology warfighting, one thing has not changed in over a century of airpower, the Airman. The Airman is an air-minded warrior who constantly seeks the most efficient and effective means and ways to execute the mission. The Airman is an innovator who executes war from above.



INTRODUCTION

If every Marine is a rifleman, what is every Airman? If the Army represents presence, “boots on the ground,” then what does the Air Force represent? If the sailor defends the sea lanes and projects American power around the world, what does an Airman do?

Ask a Marine, and she knows exactly what it means to be a Marine. Ask an Airman, and the definition will be contingent on his time in service and specialty. Today, the Air Force struggles to realize a true, unifying organizational identity. Studies lament the lack of Air Force identity and the symptoms that accompany it while e-mails, brown papers, and white papers¹ circulate poking fun at one community or the other, complaining about occupationalism, or decrying functionalism.² The authors offer many reasons for the Air Force’s struggle with its identity: airpower zealotry, obsession with technology, expansive mission sets, youth of the service, and even uniform confusion. Whatever the causes, the U.S. Air Force has drifted away from the concrete, singular identity that delivered its independence as a service in 1947.

¹ A White paper is a formal background or position paper that is distributed for general consumption. A brown paper is an informal, often satirical paper that circulates informally.

² A brief list of books and studies covering Air Force identity includes: Scott A. Bethel, Aaron Prupas, Tomislav Z. Ruby, and Michael V. Smith, “Developing Air Force Strategists: Change Culture, Reverse Careerism.” *Joint Force Quarterly*, 58, 3rd Qtr 2010, 82-88; Carl H. Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome: The Role of Air Power Theory in the Evolution and Fate of the U.S. Air Force* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003); Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Carolyn Chu, Brandon Dues, and Laura L. Miller, *Cultural Themes in Messages from Top Air Force Leaders, 2005-2008*, Documented briefing to United States Air Force (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2010); Colin S. Gray, *Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Research Institute, 2009); Nancy R. Kirk, *Air Force Core Identity and its Impact on Retention*, Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1 April 2002); Philip S. Meilinger, *Airpower Myths and Facts* (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 2003); James M. Smith, “Air Force Culture and Cohesion: Building an Air and Space Force for the 21st Century,” *Airpower Journal*, 12 (Fall 1998): 40-53; Jeffery J. Smith “Air Force Organizational Change: Tracing the Past—Mapping the Future,” PhD. diss. (Washington State University, 2010); Michael Robert Thirtle, *Seeing the Lighthouse—As Simple As the ASBC? Facilitating Organizational Change in the U.S. Air Force*. PhD diss. (RAND Graduate School, 1999); William C. Thomas, “The Cultural Identity of the United States Air Force,” *Air and Space Power Journal—Chronicles Online Journal* (30 Jan 04), <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/cc/thomas.html>, accessed 20 Jan 2012; Lynne E. Vermillion, *Understanding Air Force Culture*, Research Report (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, 1 April 1996), and Mike Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals: The Problem of Air Force Leadership 1945-1982* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1998).

The goal of this paper is to distill a unifying single-phrase definition as effective at defining the Air Force to the layman as “every Marine a rifleman” is for the Marine Corps. It proposes answers to the three questions: What is an Airman? What does the Air Force represent? What does an Airman do? This analysis will begin with a view of the history and manifestations of occupationalism and functionalism in the Air Force.³ Next, it will attempt to answer these three questions from two perspectives, one based on mission and one based on culture. Then it will close with brief recommendations for improving the Air Force’s sense of identity.



³ For the purpose of this analysis, functionalism refers to identity attributed to a functional area of expertise. For example, personnel functions define a functional area as does security forces, fighter pilots, and space officers. Occupationalism is used in this analysis to refer to the tendency to place functional priorities over those of the greater organization to include career development and promotions.

WHY IS IDENTITY IMPORTANT?

The fly and they fight; they strike a blow for country while dashing through the skies, man's last geographical frontier. The military airman is, therefore, most favored of all uniformed men. He must recognize his great responsibility and the tremendous implications which flow from an acknowledgement of these facts.

- Lt. Gen. Henry H. Arnold and Brig. Gen. Ira C. Eaker⁴

For the purposes of this analysis, identity provides three things.⁵ First, organizational identity elicits commitment among its members. Especially in the military, individual commitment to fellow members, to units, and to the organization as a whole produces increased levels of performance and teamwork with synergistic effects. Second, organizational identity provides a framework for common, internal understanding of roles and missions. Identity, for good or bad, outlines what is and is not a responsibility of the organization and prioritizes resource allocation based on this common understanding. Lastly, identity provides a clear image for the organization to project externally; it defines areas of responsibility and articulates the resources it requires. In sum, identity clarifies why the organization exists and what the organization does for both internal and external audience.⁶

How did the Air Force become distracted?

The Air Force's founding fathers created the service with a clear understanding of why the identity of the Army Air Corp was so distinct that it had to be an independent service. Early Airmen like Billy Mitchell, Claire Chennault, Hap Arnold, and Ira Eaker recognized the potential

⁴ Henry H. Arnold and Ira C. Eaker, *Army Flyer* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1942)

⁵ There is an enormous body of work on organizational theory in both the military and business fields. This paper considered: Colonel Mike Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals*; Colonel Jeff Smith, *Air Force Organizational Change: Tracing the Past—Mapping the Future*, specifically chpt 2; Major Nancy Kirk, *Air Force Core Identity and its Impact on Retention*; Lieutenant Colonel James M. Smith "Air Force Culture and Cohesion: Building an Air and Space Force for the 21st Century," *Airpower Journal*, 12 (Fall 1998): 40-53; Simon Sinek, *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009).

⁶ Smith, James, 41.

of airpower for the future of warfare.⁷ Carl Builder, in his study, *The Icarus Syndrome*, describes the early Air Force pioneers as a group of Army officers who envisaged airplanes as a means to overcome the two-dimensional nature of ground warfare. For these Army airmen, the airplane represented the capability to strike at the heart of the enemy without having to fight through its defenses or suffer long, drawn out wars of attrition. The airplane and the potential it represented offered a unique, efficient solution to an ancient problem of warfare.⁸

Foundational airpower thinkers like Hap Arnold understood the true potential of airpower independent of the technology used to exploit it. For example, during World War II, Arnold investigated the potential of rockets and tested the first remotely piloted aircraft able to carry ordnance over hundreds of miles.⁹ For Arnold, airpower represented much more than applying airplanes to war; it promised a way of conducting warfare more efficiently. He professed to Theodore von Karman, first chairman of the Scientific Advisory Group:

I see a manless Air Force...I see no excuse for men in fighter planes to shoot down bombers. When you lose a bomber, it is a loss of seven thousand to forty-thousand man-hours, but this crazy thing they shoot over there [the V-2 rocket] takes only a thousand man-hours.¹⁰

⁷ The histories of airpower and the men who created the air force are plentiful. For this analysis, the author focused on Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome*; Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals*; Arnold and Eaker, *The Army Flyer*; Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995); Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Airpower: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force 1961-1984* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1989); B. Chance Saltzman and Thomas R. Searle, *Introduction to the United States Air Force* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Airpower Research Institute, College of Aerospace Doctrine Research and Education and Air University Press, 2001); Neil Sheehan, *A Fiery Peace in a Cold War: Bernard Schriever and the Ultimate Weapon* (New York: Random House, 2009); and Vicki J. Rast, *The Air University Pantheon of Air, Space, and Cyberspace Power Thinkers* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2009).

⁸ Builder, *Icarus Syndrome*, 34.

⁹ Builder quotes H.H. Arnold from his book, *Global mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 74-76, describing Arnold's first pilotless bombs, the Bugs, in Builder, *Icarus Syndrome*, 159.

¹⁰ Sherry quotes von Karman from his autobiography, *The Wind and Beyond*, 271. Sherry, 187.

Arnold tasked him to investigate “manless remote controlled radar or television assisted precision military rockets.”¹¹ Brilliantly prophetic, Arnold understood airpower’s potential as a means of meeting the military’s mission that put little of its nation’s blood and treasure at risk.

However, even in these formative years, the seeds of identity ambiguity began to germinate. The Army Air Corps crafted airpower theory with a focus not just on the airplane but a specific airplane, the bomber. Entering World War II, the passions of the strategic bombing campaign focused airpower theory almost solely on strategic bombing. The resulting excitement and success of the air effort eclipsed Arnold’s vision of airpower that went beyond airframe and pilot.

Then in 1947, Congress created the United States Air Force pulling its leaders from the ranks of the Army’s airmen. These air warriors represented the most experienced in the art of war as executed from the air: the strategic bomber pilots. The early airpower leaders and theorists were men not only drawn by the allure of flying but by the promise of a new and more effective way of executing the mission. In a profession of discipline, rigor, and structure, they represented a certain irreverence for the status quo.¹² As Col Jeff Smith argues, their rising sense of uniqueness and slow recognition by traditional Army leadership led to a counter-culture “allegiance that began circumventing their Army allegiance, and created an environment of us-versus-them.”¹³ These men matured technically and professionally as mavericks: airmen within a ground-oriented organization.

At its creation, the Air Force endured a metaphorical “traumatic emotional event” as it transitioned from a counter-culture within the larger Army to its own service. The irreverent

¹¹ Sherry quotes von Karman autobiography, Sherry, 187.

¹² Brigadier General Robert C. Givens (US Air Force Air Combat Command), phone interview by author, 6 October 2011. See also General Arnold’s description of this attitude in the *Army Flyer*, Arnold and Eaker, 5.

¹³ Smith, Jeffery, 151.

Army pilots became leaders in a new service. But, the conviction and faith in flying among the masses of airmen centered on the airplane, not the theory of airpower as envisioned by Arnold. Even as the Air Force progressed into the nuclear age and considered the prospects of ballistic missiles, the senior Air Force leaders continued to be bomber pilots with a dedication to the efficacy of the bomber. Epitomized by General Curtis LeMay in his assessment:

the Air Force had to structure itself so that its primary objective...should be to win the battle against Soviet Air Power.” This meant a bigger and better SAC because “the bomber airplane is the best delivery vehicle” to triumph in this “battle against Soviet Air Power.”¹⁴

The new military department started as a service led by men unconsciously aware that their own journeys began with a desire to avoid conventional thinking, to tackle the linear problems of surface warfare with the non-linear thinking of airpower—to go over the obstacles, not through them.¹⁵ Consciously, however, they were the pilots. Pilots took charge of the Air Force.

Occupationalism, functionalism and the cultures of the community

Airpower today represents a diversity of technologies covering a broad array of missions unmatched by the other services.¹⁶ Consider the myriad of technologies: fighters, bombers, airlifters, tankers, satellites, remotely piloted aircraft, surveillance aircraft, command and control, computers and networks, combat search and rescue, and ballistic missiles. Few of these technologies and the missions they execute overlap with the others. They are distinct and so specialized that an Airman will spend an entire career reaching a high level of expertise; little

¹⁴ Sheehan quoting General Curtis LeMay, 145. SAC stands for Strategic Air Command, the Air Force’s major command charged with strategic bombing, nuclear weapons, and ballistic missiles.

¹⁵ The phrase “go over obstacles, not through them” was coincidentally used by three individuals in three separate interviews: Major General Lori Robinson (US Air Force Office of the Legislative Liaison), phone interview by author, 3 November 2011. Brigadier General Givens, interview; and Mr Simon Sinek. interview by author 1 November 2011.

¹⁶ This observation made during interview with Major General Robinson, and three different congressional staffers.

time is left to become familiar with other disciplines. Furthermore, Airmen in each specialty tend to become relatively homogeneous in the way they think and act, tackle problems, relate to peers, and communicate. Therefore, the tendency to coalesce within one specialty, one tribe, is not just a matter of clique behavior but one of bureaucratic survival.

Just as the Air Force founders identified with their airframe, so too do the functional communities in the Air Force identify with their technologies. These communities become micro-services with little interaction or coordination except at the staff level. And in times of shrinking resources, these communities entrench within their own identities, thereby creating an aggregation of functionalized tribes or “in-groups” as Colonel Jeff Smith describes them.¹⁷

In recent history, the trend of consolidations around functional areas has created tangible effects: aircraft maintenance units separated from the flying units in 2002; personnel functions consolidated away from squadron commanders and into separate support squadrons in 2008; communications and computer support personnel moved out of squadrons and into separate squadrons in 2009; and network support and finance personnel consolidated out of wing and base units to Air Force-level organizations in 2009. The justifications for these consolidations and movements included personnel reductions, decreases in operations funding, and a desire to “take care of our own” by having leaders in the functional areas assume responsibility for career development and progression of their own. As a result, functional tribes fortified their “in-group” identities.

Even before the recent trend of functional consolidation, Air Force senior leadership recognized that tribalism had reached a crisis level in the mid-1990s. The fall 1996 CORONA directed that the Air Force initiate the Aerospace Basic Course, ASBC.¹⁸ Targeting young

¹⁷ Smith, Jeffery 49-51.

¹⁸ The CORONA is a tri-annual meeting of the Air Force’s most senior leaders.

officers with one to two years of service, the course aimed to infuse a common understanding of the Air Force mission. Specifically, it sought to address five deficiencies that the CORONA identified:

- A lack of understanding of the Air Force core values
- A lack of appreciation of the Air Force core competencies
- The inability to responsibly advocate how 21st century aerospace power can contribute to joint military operations
- The existence of careerism among officers from different commissioning sources and Air Force specialty codes
- A misunderstanding of the importance of the teamwork concept within the American military¹⁹

Consider these five deficiencies in the context of the three requirements for identity outlined in the introduction: as a whole, these five deficiencies equate to the absence of common identity.

ASBC sought to establish in its newest officers the Air Force's singular identity before they had the opportunity to offer full allegiance to their functional community's in-group. In 1999, Michael Thirtle's research found that while the intent of the ASBC course was sound and did achieve some degree of success, it was lacking in the pursuit of its objectives.²⁰ The Air Force terminated ASBC in 2011 for fiscal reasons, choosing instead to incorporate the objective of "teaching the family business" into the Squadron Officers School.²¹ Now, instead of learning the family business in the first two years, Air Force officers spend their formative years remaining strictly within their tribe and do not have the opportunity to learn the "family business" until the six to nine year point of their careers.²²

¹⁹ Thirtle, iii.

²⁰ Thirtle, Chpt 7, 185-187.

²¹ Colonel Louis Dupuis, Vice Commander, USAF Squadron Officer's College, interview by author, 11 October 2011; and Scott Fontaine, "Officer-School Shuffle," *Air Force Times* (25 July 2011, 15-16).

²² Officer's are typically sent to SOS in-residence at the 5-7 year point of the careers. The new SOS course beginning in 2012 increases from five to eight weeks [check length] to incorporate ASBC curriculum. Fontaine, 15-16.

WAR FROM ABOVE: AIRPOWER AND AIR-MINDEDNESS

We have the enemy surrounded. We are dug in and have overwhelming numbers. But enemy airpower is mauling us badly. We will have to withdraw.

- Japanese infantry commander

Situation report to headquarters, Burma. World War II²³

The definition of airpower illustrates the problem of Air Force identity. Does the Air Force's mission define airpower, or does airpower define the Air Force's mission? Considering this question requires an understanding of airpower—a perspective from outside the United States may be helpful. Air Commodore Jasit Singh, of the Indian Air Force, states:

The air power of a nation may be conceived today to denote the sum total of its aviation and related capabilities. In the context of military power, and as distinct from land and sea power, air power denotes the ability to project military force by or from a platform in the third dimension above the surface of the earth....the third dimension includes outer space: and air power encompasses the exploitation of space.²⁴

What is key in this definition is the emphasis of employing military force in the third dimension starting just above terra firma and extending infinitely upwards; in short, this is “war from above.”²⁵ Also important to note is that this definition does not make airpower exclusive to a service, rather, it is defined by the domain in which it operates.

However, does defining airpower strictly in terms of a domain really offer a true understanding of the intrinsic meaning airpower? General Ronald Fogleman suggests that airpower is not as easy as just understanding that military operations in the third dimension is airpower, rather, there is something intangible about operating in this domain:

There are still those who fail to stand back and reflect on the fact that air assets operate in the one medium that surrounds the earth and that touches 100 percent of the earth's population, political capitals, and centers of commerce. Because of

²³ Charles M. Westenhoff, *Military Airpower: A Revised Digest of Airpower Opinions and Thoughts* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2007), 11.

²⁴ Jasit Singh, *Air Power in Modern Warfare* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1985), xvi.

²⁵ Brigadier General Robert Givens offered this phrase to emphasize that air power must be conceived in terms of warfighting capability. Givens, interview.

the long history of surface warfare and, perhaps, of our very existence on land, air power is not an easy concept to grasp.²⁶

General Fogleman's perspective suggests that airpower is much more than the physical operation within its domain, but also entails a deeper complexity involving the implications and applications of exploiting the domain of the third dimension. Understanding this complexity requires what Hap Arnold referred to as "air-mindedness."²⁷

Airpower demands a certain breadth of vision that goes beyond understanding a continuity of events serially, as war on terrain suggests—there are no phase lines or break points.²⁸ What truly separates airpower from sea and land power is the ability to modulate its intensity and application almost instantly. For example, the same communications satellite may be relaying video from Afghanistan to operators in Nevada, planning between the National Command Authority and a combatant commander, and a conversation between a soldier in Qatar and his family in Georgia all simultaneously. A bomber may interdicts lines of communications in one moment and then shift in seconds to support a ground unit in a tactical scenario in the next. Airpower represents an agility, rapidity, and reach that extend beyond conventional, land-based thinking.²⁹

Air-mindedness

Therein one finds the difficulty with Air Force identity. Understanding airpower is not innate. As General Fogleman's thought expresses, there is something different and unique that goes beyond everyday life. Major General Lori Robinson relays an anecdote from the 2011

²⁶ General Ronald Foglemen, 1997. As quoted in Westenhoff, 11-12.

²⁷ Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine Organization, and Command*, 14 October 2011, 18.

²⁸ Interviews with Robinson, Givens, and Sinek. Also Dr. Mark Conversino (US Air Force Air War College), interview by author, 14 October 2011.

²⁹ Reference AFDD 1 for the Air Forces doctrinal definition of air power and discussion of air-mindedness. AFDD 1, 11-20.

Department of Defense Posture Hearings to drive home this point. When the Chief of Naval operations began his testimony, he referred to a map that had been handed to all the congressional members present for the hearing. The map had markings for the locations of all the naval assets throughout the world with the intent of visually emphasizing the Navy's capacity to project power globally. The CSAF did not have any such map. Major General Robinson asks rhetorically, how does the Air Force show its power projection capability on a map? How can the Air Force represent on a map the ability to launch an aircraft or a missile from the American Great Plains and strike any target in the world in a matter of minutes? How does the Air Force represent the capability to observe from space any corner of the earth's surface at anytime? The ability to fully grasp the breadth of capability and the depth of power projection that airpower provides is, as Major General Robinson emphasizes, air-mindedness.³⁰

An Airman indoctrinated with air-mindedness includes within her expertise an understanding of airpower in General Fogleman's description. For example, an Army infantry unit defends an airbase with a different paradigm than that of an Air Force Security Forces unit. The former executing a base security mission thinks in terms of the threat on the ground and the threat to the base itself. They do not operate conceptually in terms of the threat to the aircraft flying in and out of an air base. The Security Forces unit understands the threat from the ground not only to the base but also to the aircraft flying in and out of the base. Only the latter is trained to protect and advise aircraft operating in their area of responsibility. Security Forces Airmen, the Air Force's infantry, operate with an air-mindedness that incorporates the implications of airpower.³¹

³⁰ Robinson, interview.

³¹ This comparison reflects an actual event as explained by Lt Col Glen Christensen. In January 2005, a team of Air Force Security Forces replaced a unit from the 1st Infantry Division executing defense of an airbase in Iraq. Not longer after, a duty officer from the Tanker and Airlift Control Center (TACC) at Scott Air Force Base called for the

Airmen as airpower

With a working definition that transcends the physical domain and an understanding of the conceptual underpinnings required to fully understand the implications of airpower, answers to the three questions posed above emerge suggesting a paradigm for Air Force identity. The Air Force represents power exercised flexibly, agilely, and unrestricted by the bounds of terrain or oceans.³² Aviators within other services may understand this concept, but the Air Force alone is the service dedicated to exploiting it fully. Airmen execute war from above and in doing so possess a common mentality, air-mindedness.

What is an Airman? Simply put, an Airman is a military professional who operates within her expertise with a certain air-mindedness. An Airman appreciates the complexities of airpower and exhibits a working understanding of its implications for the greater mission.

What does the Air Force represent? It is “war from above,” but thoroughly understanding the complexity of this phrase requires air-mindedness in itself. Ultimately, the Air Force represents air-mindedness, the ability to fully understand and exploit airpower.

What does the Air Force do? The Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) answers this for us in his CSAF Vector 2011:

While we conduct many missions, there are four unique Air Force contributions that define us—gaining control of air, space, and cyberspace; holding targets at risk around the world; providing responsive intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); and rapidly transporting people and equipment across the globe.³³

status of the airbase as part of standard procedure for airlift missions into the combat theater. The TACC duty officer was surprised to get information about threats to aircraft commenting that it was the first time he had received this information from that base. Lieutenant Glen Christensen, interview by author, 10 December 2011.

³² AFDD 1, 19.

³³ General Norton A. Schwartz, Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, *CSAF Vector Check 2011*, 4 July 2011, 3.

Without diving into the ambiguous and obscure lexicon of U.S. joint doctrine, the Air Force delivers air power—it executes war from above.

What does this suggest for an Air Force identity? In sum, the combination of the concepts of “war from above” and air-mindedness define Air Force identity from the perspective of delivering airpower. Does this provide the Airmen with an ideal that will induce a commitment to the organization? Certainly, the concept of air-mindedness produces an in-group understanding that creates a foundation of commonality among members of the Air Force. Air-mindedness implies a common framework of understanding that allows agreement on roles and missions, training requirements, resource priorities, and promotion.

However, airpower and air-mindedness involve a degree of complexity that cannot be assumed immediately upon joining the service. These concepts require a fair amount of investment in educating and indoctrinating new members to ensure understanding. Similarly, projecting these concepts as an Air Force identity presents difficulties with external audiences. For example, the debates regarding the F-22 program, both in terms of capability and quantity, suffered from an inability to effectively project the Air Force identity. Air Force leadership allowed external entities to draw them into debates about specific technology and costs rather than a discussion of Air Force missions and contributions to the joint warfighter.³⁴

Communicating the complexities of airpower, as General Fogleman observed, is not an easy task.

³⁴ Conversino, interview.

EVERY AIRMAN AN INNOVATOR

Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not on those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur.

- Giulio Douhet³⁵

As discussed above, airpower implies the desire to, physically and metaphorically, go over an obstacle rather than through it. As the history of the Air Force suggests, Airmen tend to be individuals pre-disposed to solving problems in unique and creative ways. Hap Arnold and Ira Eaker described Airmen as, “impatient and ill-tempered toward those of less imagination and vision who could not pierce the veil of the future and read the things which they saw.”³⁶ The founders of American airpower quickly accepted a new technology (the airplane) and sought ways to adapt it to their craft (war) to find better, quicker, more efficient ways to fulfill their mission. They were innovators.

Indeed, the saints of American airpower were zealots of innovation; their zeal for the new and better way perpetuated through Air Force history to become a tenet of its culture today. Air Force history is replete with examples as grand as nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles and as localized as an airman devising a more efficient means to transport tires into theater.³⁷

Innovation describes the very history of the Air Force. Technology, the airplane, provided the means through which the founders developed new ways to do execute their mission. Innovation itself became a defining trait that set them apart as a separate in-group from the Army.

³⁵ Worden, 238.

³⁶ Arnold and Eaker, 5.

³⁷ This is reference to an anecdote offered by Simon Sinek. He highlighted a story about a Senior Airman, with three to four years of service, who had saved the Air Force literally millions of dollars in air transport costs by devising a cage system to transport aircraft into theater. For Sinek, the real indication of the Air Force’s culture of innovation was the great pain the base commander took to boast about this Airman’s accomplishment to include introducing him personally to visitors to the base. The base commander highlighted innovation as a source of pride and a tenet of his organization by showcasing the innovation and its source to an external audience.

What is an Airmen? Every Airman is an innovator.³⁸ From its inception and through its history, Airmen continue to seek out more efficient and effective ways to meet its mission.

What does the Air Force represent? It is not enough to just say that the Air Force is an innovative organization. The Air Force represents an organization predicated on innovation. At the highest levels of the organization, dissenting opinions are given fair hearing. The most junior members of the organization are not only free to express new ideas, but are celebrated across and outside of the organization for doing so.

What does the Air Force do? Even in the context of the four Air Force contributions General Schwartz describes, innovation explains an intrinsic element of the culture of the Air Force. In Operation DESERT STORM, Colonel John Warden's air planners targeted Iraqi Air Defense's Sector Operations Centers not by targeting them directly to destroy them individually but rather by destroying the power stations that supplied electricity to them, rendering them all useless. The Air Force fielded Predator remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) first as ISR platforms to provide persistent surveillance. Later, weapons were integrated onto the platforms to allow for immediate targeting so the ground commanders watching targets through the RPAs did not have to wait for fighters or bombers to fly in to neutralize high value targets. The B-52, still the backbone of the Air Force nuclear bomber fleet, now also provides close air support to ground commanders exploiting their endurance and enormous weapons capacity. And GPS guidance integrated into cargo airdrops allow airlifters to deliver supplies directly to soldiers in the field, thus reducing the risk of collateral damage and improving security. Innovation is the one activity that cuts across the entire Air Force enterprise.

³⁸ This phrase was repeated, almost verbatim, by a number of airpower practitioners and academics interviewed separately for this analysis. Interviews with Robinson, Givens, Sinek, Conversino. Also, Dr. Robbie Samanta-Roy (Senate Armed Services Committee), 13 October 2011.

However, innovation in and of itself does not provide the framework for internal understanding of Air Force roles and missions. While the Air Force does embrace a culture of innovation, the concept of innovation as a singular identity is not sufficient to define a warfighting organization. Similarly, innovation as identity becomes problematic for communicating Air Force roles and missions externally. Recalling the map designating the locations of the Navy fleets around the world, an Air Force defined only as an organization of innovators risks losing relevance in terms of independent contributions to national security. If the Air Force is just a service of innovation, why can it not be reorganized under the supervision of another service?



RECOMMENDATIONS

The checklist is not a substitute for the full text of the flight manual.

- Stan Eval “famous aviator”³⁹

The importance of clearly establishing an Air Force identity cannot be over emphasized. The implications of identity ambiguity include less cohesive warfighting organizations, decreased morale, confused and divisive internal struggles over resources, and ineffective attempts to preserve resources required for the mission. Clear identity stretches the Airman’s sphere of innovation to consider the entire Air Force rather than constraining it within the boundary of the tribe.

The first recommendation is to reinforce Air Force identity through education in the first one to two years of an Airman’s career. Air Force installations already teach a First Term Airman’s Course (FTAC) for new enlisted Airmen that introduces them to, among other things, Air Force culture. Given the end of ASBC, this model may be used for first assignment officers as well. With some modifications to the FTAC syllabi, first assignment officers can attend this course, or parts of it, to receive an introduction to the “family business.” Since most bases already conduct FTAC courses, the costs for this would be minimal.

Next, given that the first session of officer professional military education (PME) after commissioning will not be until the six to nine year point in an officer’s career, the Air Force must substitute some form of professional development to ensure tribal cultures are not permitted to trump greater Air Force identity. Wing commanders today have, for the most part, abdicated their responsibility for mentoring young officers. Occasional commander calls or officer’s calls, op-eds in the base paper, and “all personnel” e-mails are not suitable replacements for education. One model used in the Army includes regular (bi-weekly or monthly) officer professional

³⁹ Westenhoff, 4.

development sessions conducted at the platoon, company, and battalion level based on the lesson content that ranged from capabilities briefings to leadership case studies to research papers. Applied to the Air Force, wing commanders should implement regular, wing-level PME for all Airmen. By bringing Airmen of various career fields together regularly, the commander will establish a habit of sharing and learning identity rather than reviewing it every six to nine years in formal PME.

Finally, the perpetual motto of the organization experiencing resource reductions, “do more with less,” has become a code for “work longer hours.” However, many of the functional communities have reached their breaking point. Without relief from statutory, regulatory, and policy requirements, Air Force functions turned to even greater functional consolidation. One means of combating this trend is to admit that Airmen cannot do more with less. Senior leaders must relieve wings and functions of lower priority requirements to free up space for greater cross-function collaboration and greater inter-function cohesion. The Air Force’s AFSO 21 already provides a construct and a process for seeking these efficiencies. However, AFSO 21 aimed at removing functional responsibilities and requirements must begin at the Air Staff directorate level and not exist just at the wings where it remains a boutique management technique.

Major efforts are not required to establish and maintain identity across the service. Ultimately, the Air Force must establish that professional military education is primarily the commander’s responsibility, not Air University’s. Only the commanders can establish unit-level priorities that emphasize time for education and out-of-tribe collaboration. Formal PME courses every six to nine years in an Airman’s career is not sufficient to fortify the lessons of Air Force identity that will immunize the service against the pitfalls of functionalism.

CONCLUSION: IT DEPENDS

Air power is indivisible. If you split it up into compartments, you merely pull it to pieces and destroy its greatest asset—flexibility.

- Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery⁴⁰

Air Force identity lies somewhere within the two identities expressed above. The concept of air-mindedness perhaps best represents the Air Force's historical and present identity. However, the concept suffers from a complexity that presents challenges for indoctrinating new members. It also involves a depth of understanding that complicates communications external to the organization. Innovation best describes Air Force culture from its inception, but does not address the warrior culture that a military service must also maintain.

The Air Force suffers from its own success. Its successful innovation and execution created a service of such mission and technological diversity that it becomes too difficult and unhelpful to try to consolidate airpower into one simple explanation. Reactions to diminishing resources over the last few years are testament to this struggle for common identity. Tribes continue to consolidate and stove-pipes become more entrenched just as the Air Force needs to find greater synergy and efficiency. The termination of ASBC, while perhaps the right fiscal decision, increases the risk of tribalism as young officers spend their professional formative years learning the culture of their tribe before they fully absorb the culture of the Air Force.

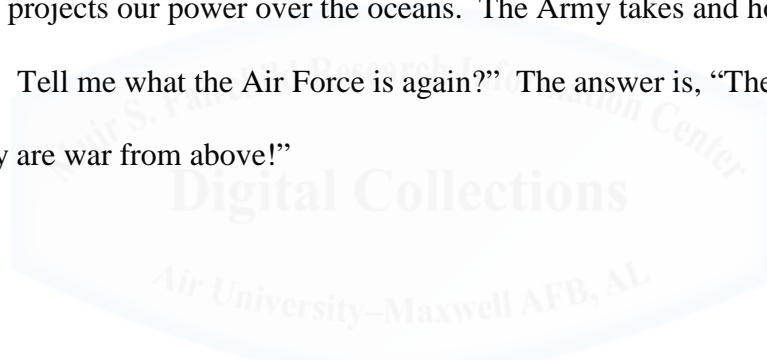
The good news is that there is a common, albeit complex, Air Force culture. The very existence of the Air Force as a separate service resulted from a group of men who self-identified themselves as innovators. They were professionals who sought to find more effective and more efficient ways and means to meet their country's defense requirements. They were Airmen who recognized the war-fighting potential that existed in the third dimension and embraced new

⁴⁰ Westenhoff, 13.

technologies to increase the power of their nation. They were innovators with an air-mindedness that they applied to executing war from above. Today, the United States Air Force is a service defined not by its tools but by its Airmen: air-minded warriors

AIRPOWER!

Imagine the President sitting in the oval office the day after his inauguration. He is a politician with no military experience and little understanding of it. After enduring a long in-brief from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on his duties and responsibilities, he asks, “Ok, remind me again...the Marines are my 911 force, every Marine is a rifleman. The Navy defends the sea lanes and projects our power over the oceans. The Army takes and holds ground; they are our presence. Tell me what the Air Force is again?” The answer is, “They are our innovators. They are war from above!”



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