MILITARY MEDALS:

AMERICAN STRATEGIC CULTURE & AIR POWER

BY

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF

THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES

FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES

AIR UNIVERSITY

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

JUNE 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

This paper views military medals as cultural artifacts and as a means of examining America's values and beliefs toward air power. The methodology is largely based on historian John Lynn's model from his 2003 book, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture.* Lynn's model examines the relationship between strategic culture (society and the military's set of values, beliefs, and assumptions of how war should be fought) and the realities of warfare. Lynn argues that strategic culture rarely matches the reality of war, and more often, the strategic culture is at odds with the character of war. Lynn's model identifies four forms of rejection that societies and militaries exhibit when the strategic culture does not match the character of war: perfected reality, alternative discourse, extreme reality, and refusal to consider war. An examination of military medals as cultural artifacts reveals that the United States has had a dynamic relationship with the use of air power—supporting it and rejecting it depending on culture, technology, and circumstances.

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Introduction

Historian Colin Gray writes, "In air power the American way of war has found its perfect instrument."[1] Gray and others described the American way of war as a set of unique preferences that define how Americans like to fight their wars. Americans prefer to take the fight to the enemy and view war as an anomaly. They prefer to fight quickly and decisively to return to the normal state of peace. Americans prefer an industrial approach that combines firepower and technology. Moreover, Americans like to turn their wars into crusades by taking the moral high ground and demonizing their enemies. Finally, Americans prefer to minimize casualties on both sides of the conflict.[2] Given these preferences, it is not surprising that America has led the world in the development of air power – its technological evolution has been guided by these values and beliefs. In theory, drone warfare should represent the pinnacle of an American way of war: it takes the fight to the enemy, it combines state-of-the-art technology and firepower, it maintains a normal way of life back home, it is used to hunt terrorists that are often characterized as moral enemies, and it uses precision weapons to minimize casualties. However, American attitudes and beliefs towards air power, including drones, may be more complex than many scholars suspect.

On February 13, 2013, outgoing US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced the creation of a new military medal – the Distinguished Warfare Medal (DWM). The medal sought to recognize the "extraordinary achievements" of Airmen participating in cyber and drone warfare in the post-9/11 era. The DWM's criteria deliberately excluded

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[1] Quoted in *On Limited Nuclear War in the 21st Century*, ed Jeffrey Larson et al. (Stanford Security Studies. 2014) 251.
[2] Hew Strachan, *The Changing Character of War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 436.

the common requirements associated with other combat medals, such as heroism, gallantry, and bravery. Rather, the DWM's criteria focused on significant accomplishments demonstrated during battle, but without the requirement of being physically present on the battlefield. Secretary Panetta wrote in the accompanying memo:

> The DWM provides an avenue to recognize appropriately extraordinary direct impacts on combat operations warranting recognition above the Bronze Star Medal. Since September 11, 2001, technological advancements have, in some cases, dramatically changed how we conduct and support combat and other military operations. Accordingly, the DWM award criteria intentionally does not include a geographic limitation on award, as it is intended to recognize Service members who meet the criteria, regardless of the domain used or the member's physical location.[3]

The DWM ignited a huge controversy that garnered national media coverage. Veterans groups acknowledged the DWM was a worthy medal, but disagreed on the precedence it was given over the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. Service members were also upset over the medal's precedence, with many turning to social media to vent their frustrations. The public was so outraged over the idea of a combat medal for service members that are not actually in combat that over 100,000 people signed a petition to repeal the medal on the White House's website. In response to this controversy, 39 members of Congress went to the floor to denounce the new medal.

One month later, the new Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review the medal. In April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the repeal of the medal and the creation of a new device to attach to existing medals. Secretary Hagel explained:

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[3] Leon Panetta, Secretary of Defense, memorandum, 13 February 2013.

Utilizing a distinguishing device to recognize impacts on combat operations reserves our existing combat medals for those Service members, who incur the physical risk and hardship of combat, perform valorous acts, are wounded in combat, or as a result of combat give their last full measure for our nation.[4]

The controversy surrounding the DWM is an interesting social phenomenon because it challenges Gray's assertion that air power is the perfect instrument for the American way of war; something about drone and cyber warfare did not fit well into America's conception of war. If the controversy was over the medal's ranking, why was it repealed altogether and not merely given a new position below the Bronze Star and Purple Heart? Furthermore, the DWM was not the first non-combat medal to outrank the Bronze Star and Purple Heart; the Distinguished Service medals are unrelated to combat yet outrank both. If the precedence argument was not the actual reason, then why was the DWM controversial and subsequently repealed? Does the controversy suggest the American way of war is at odds with drone warfare?

This is the type of question cultural historians try to answer. Cultural historians seek to understand social phenomena related to war by studying the strategic culture of a society. Strategic culture is the set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior a group shares regarding the use of force to achieve security objectives. Historian John Lynn writes, "Strategic culture derives from civil values and practices as well as from military conceptions and capabilities."[5] Therefore, strategic culture is the sum of two parts: societal culture and military culture. At the societal level, strategic culture represents the values and beliefs

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[4] Charles Hagel, Secretary of Defense, memorandum, 15 April 2013. http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/PR%20and%20CJCS%20Memo%20DW M.pdf
[5] John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*. Rev. and Updated ed. (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2004), xx.

regarding the use of force; for example, when the state should go to war (*jus ad bellum*) and what is permissible in war (*jus in bello*). At the military level, strategic culture represents the values and beliefs on how wars should be fought.

Some cultural historians view strategic culture as a society's "discourse on war" because it changes over time and there is rarely a universal set of values, beliefs, and assumptions throughout an entire population. While it would be beneficial to know and understand all of a society's (and military's) values and beliefs, all that can be examined are the verbal, behavioral, and material expressions, and thus, their "discourse."[6] On the topic of warfare, there is rarely a consensus because there are often segments throughout society and the military with dissenting values and beliefs. Within the military, each branch has its own unique set of values, beliefs, and assumptions regarding war. Therefore, strategic culture is never static; rather, it evolves slowly over time and in response to the changing character of war.

One of the greatest challenges cultural historians face in determining a strategic culture is identifying the most salient beliefs and attitudes that comprise it at any given point in time.[7] Identifying these values and beliefs can be difficult. Jules Prown writes:

> Certain fundamental beliefs in any society are so generally accepted that they never need to be articulated. These basic cultural assumptions, the detection of which is essential for cultural understanding, are consequently not perceivable in *what* a society expresses. They can, however, be detected in the *way* in which a society expresses itself, in the configuration or form of things.[8]

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[6] Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, xx.

[7] Thomas G. Mahnken, "United States Strategic Culture," (Washington DC: Science Applications International Corp, 2006), 4.

[8] Jules D. Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterhur Portfolio*, Vol 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1982), 4.

When societies and militaries do speak about their values and beliefs, they tend to put a great deal of cultural spin on them.[9] A society may say they value and believe in some ideal, but in reality, their behavior seems contradictory. What scholars seek is a less subjective and more objective way of determining what those values and beliefs are.

Cultural Artifacts

One objective approach focuses on studying a group's material expressions, known as cultural artifacts - the physical, tangible objects that reflect the values and beliefs of a group. Cultural artifacts are like an iceberg floating in the water – they are easy to see, but there is much more to them beneath the surface. Understanding the meaning of an artifact can be difficult. Only a member of the group, or someone that has studied the group, can explain the values and beliefs that an artifact represents. While a society may say it values and believes in something, its artifacts speak to its true beliefs. Therefore, the benefit to examining artifacts is that they can offer an honest reflection of a society's values and beliefs.

Military medals, such as the DWM, are cultural artifacts that reflect the values and beliefs of American strategic culture. If a society and the military value and believe in a style of warfare, they will create a medal to honor it. Conversely, if a society does not value or believe in a style of warfare, it will not create a medal to honor it. If there is a controversy over a medal, it may suggest that the medal is attempting to honor one value that goes against another value or belief. By focusing on military medals, it is possible to glean an honest assessment of the values and beliefs a society and military hold towards warfare.

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[9] Prown, "Mind in Matter," 4.

This paper attempts to assess air power's place within American strategic culture by examining several aspects of military medals. First, the creation of a new medal often occurs after a change in warfare that cannot be adequately honored by any pre-existing medals. If the Department of Defense (DoD) feels the need to honor this change, it will create a new medal. Second, the reception of this new combat medal may indicate the attitude towards the change in warfare. Finally, it is important to examine who is eligible for the medal and the medal's criteria. By focusing on these aspects of military medals, it is possible to paint a picture of American values and beliefs as they relate to air power.

There are four characteristics of medals that suggest they are cultural artifacts. The first is that military medals serve a more symbolic than utilitarian purpose. Their value is based on the meaning that a society applies to them, not the inherent worth of the metal and cloth from which they are made. In fact, the symbolic value societies apply to military medals enhances the medal's cachet. Today, military medals are exalted symbols in American society. They are one of the few symbols in the United States to garner protection from the Federal Government. Title 18, Part 1, Chapter 33, Section 704 of the US Code, more commonly referred to as the "Stolen Valor Law," threatens imprisonment of those who fraudulently wear combat military medals to gain honor or any other tangible benefit.[10] In 2004, presidential candidate John Kerry found himself embroiled in controversy over his decision to throw away his Vietnam medals during an anti-war protest. When asked why he did so, Kerry responded that throwing the medals away was the best way "to renounce the symbols which this country gives, which supposedly reinforces all the things that they have done, and that was the medals

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[10] House, *Stolen Valor Act*, H.R. 258, 112th Cong, 2013.

themselves."[11] Veterans' groups felt betrayed by this action and many pundits argued that it cost Kerry the election. Military medals, protected by law and able to influence presidential elections, are powerful symbols in American society.

The second reason military medals are cultural artifacts is that they have become universal symbols that can be found across many different societies. Throughout different times and places, societies have adorned their warriors with some sort of object to honor their accomplishments. As the character of war changed during the Napoleonic era, commanders sought a way to motivate and reward conscripts. Napoleon once said, "Men fight for bits of ribbon and metal. If I had enough bolts of fabric, I could rule Europe."[12] In 1782, George Washington created the first official military medal in the United States, the Badge of Military Merit, which could be earned by enlisted men – a reflection of America's belief that all men were created equal. Washington espoused the democratic beliefs behind the medal, writing, "the road to glory in a patriotic army and free country is thus opened to all."[13] Washington's medal, however, never gained popularity because American culture generally dismissed medals as being "too European." Over time, the wear of medals upon the chest of the service member became a common demonstration of one's accomplishments in war. Today, brightly colored medals are a sort of hieroglyph that proudly display the rich history of a service member's accomplishments.

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[11] Jim Rutenberg and James Dao, "1971 Tape Adds to Debate Over Kerry's Medal Protest," *New York Times*, 26 April 2004, http://www. nytimes.com/2004/04/26/us/1971-tape-adds-to-debate-over-kerry-s-medal-protest.html

[12] B. G. Burkett and Glenna Whitley, *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation Was Robbed of its Heroes and its History*, (Dallas, TX: Verity Press Inc., 1998), 352.

[13] Colonel Frank Foster & Lawrence Borts, *A Complete Guide to All United States Military Medals 1939 to Present*, (SC: MOA Press, 2005), 5.

The third reason military medals are cultural artifacts is that their ranking correlates to specific values and beliefs within a strategic culture. There is a clearly defined precedence for all military medals. In Western societies, the highest-ranking medals are typically placed to the top and left of all other medals. Many of the values represented by medals are common throughout all warrior cultures. The most prestigious medals tend to honor valor followed by medals that honor some meritorious act or service. Below this category are campaign medals that honor participation in combat followed by service medals that recognize other notable achievements. This prioritization – valor, meritorious acts, campaign participation, and notable achievements – is a universal reflection of what a warrior culture values and believes. As such, a general rule of thumb is that medals are loosely rank-ordered in accordance with a society's and the military's values and beliefs.

The fourth reason military medals are cultural artifacts is that they exhibit what is called "interpretative flexibility." The notion of interpretive flexibility implies that the same artifact can simultaneously reflect multiple values or beliefs. What is interesting about medals is that they are artifacts with clearly defined meaning - the criteria states what is required to earn a medal - yet, many medals still exhibit interpretive flexibility. The Bronze Star is an excellent example. In 2012, two enlisted finance personnel from the Air Force received the Bronze Star for their meritorious administrative service while deployed to Afghanistan. This awarding sparked a controversy among critics who claimed the two Airmen were never in any real danger and therefore undeserving of a combat medal.[14] The salient point that was missed by critics from the Army was that the criteria for the Bronze Star seek to honor *either*

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[14] Amaani Lyle, "Air Force officials clarify Bronze Star approval process" Defense Media Activity, 24 April 2012, http://www.af.mil/News/Article Display/tabid/223/Article/111308/air-force-officials-clarify-bronze-star-approval-process.aspx

heroism *or* meritorious service. Because of the medal's interpretative flexibility, however, the Army associates the Bronze Star with heroism while the Air Force associates the medal with meritorious service. The Bronze Star's dual criteria conflates heroic and non-heroic acts, which dilutes the medal's prestige for truly heroic acts. This creates a great deal of interpretative flexibility and the medal tends to be controversial. Interpretative flexibility is a key hallmark of cultural artifacts and military medals are no exception.

Military medals are cultural artifacts because they serve a symbolic purpose. The symbolism of the military medal is universal across many different cultures along with the values they tend to honor. Yet the meaning of an individual medal is unique to a given group because medals often exhibit interpretative flexibility, meaning a medal can reflect a different set of values and beliefs between groups. Finally, the ranking of military medals correlates to the values and beliefs of a society, with the highest-ranking medals representing the dominant values and beliefs. By viewing military medals as cultural artifacts, it is possible to use medals as a window into a society and military's strategic culture.

Chapter 1

The Framework:
John Lynn's Model

Analyzing strategic culture requires a framework, and historian John Lynn's book *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* contains an excellent model. The thesis of Lynn's work is that strategic culture influences the character of war because it dictates when, how, and why societies go to war.[1] In turn, the character of war influences and changes the strategic culture. The result is a feedback loop, a sort of co-evolution, where strategic culture shapes the character of war and the character of war shapes strategic culture. The first part of Lynn's model suggests the values and beliefs of a strategic culture represent an idealized conception of what war should be. At the societal level, the strategic culture reflects the values and beliefs of *when* a state should go to war and *what* is permissible in war. Society's discourse on war often becomes the laws and conventions relating to *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. At the military level, the discourse on war reflects the values and beliefs of *how* the military should fight in war and this discourse often becomes military doctrine.

The second part of Lynn's model focuses on the character of war, the objective reality of how a war is actually fought. The character of war changes in response to the social, political, technological, and historical contexts in which it occurs. These two parts form "an essential feedback loop between culture and reality… cultures try to change or control reality to fit conception, while reality modifies the cultural discourse to better match the objective facts of combat."[2]

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[1] Lynn does not use the term "strategic culture" throughout his work, but rather the term "discourse" to refer to the way a state's political and military institutions conceive of and deal with armed conflict.

[2] Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, 360.

Sometimes the character of war closely parallels the strategic culture, such as the Gulf War in 1991. At the societal level, the prevailing discourse on war was expressed in the Powell Doctrine that stipulated the conditions for when the United States should go to war. At the military level, the prevailing discourse on war was expressed in the Air-Land Battle Doctrine that envisioned countering a Soviet invasion using integrated ground and air forces. The character of the Gulf War was so closely aligned with the strategic culture that in the aftermath, the strategic culture remained largely unchanged. More often, however, the character of war does not match the strategic culture.

When the character of warfare is significantly different from the strategic culture, it often leads to a type of psychological disjuncture and a form of rejection. Edgar Schein's work on culture explains the tendency of humans to reject certain realities that go against their most fundamental assumptions and beliefs. According to him, when reality does not match our expectations, it:

> ...temporarily destabilizes our cognitive world and releases large quantities of anxiety. Rather than tolerate such anxiety levels, we tend to want to perceive the events around us as congruent with our assumptions, even if that means distorting, denying, projecting or in other ways falsifying to ourselves what may be going on around us.[3]

Lynn classified four types of rejections that tend to occur when the character of war diverges too far from the strategic culture: perfected reality, alternative discourse, extreme reality, and refusal to consider war. Figure 1 below is a visual rendering of Lynn's Model. The red lines suggest a mismatch between the strategic culture and the character of

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[3] Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed., (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 28.

war; the green lines depict the four forms of rejection that occur because of this mismatch.

Figure 1. Depiction of Lynn's Model
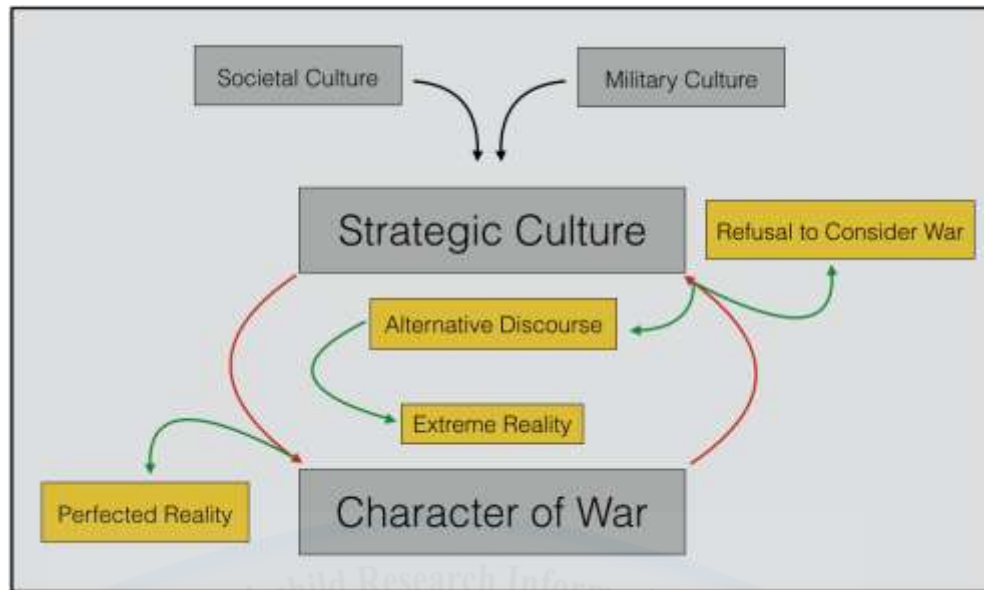
Source: Author's original work

Perfected Reality

The first type of rejection, perfected reality, suggests that when the character of war is at odds with the strategic culture, societies and militaries may go so far as to substitute a more perfected reality that better adheres to their values and beliefs. For example, Lynn argues that during the Middle Ages the idealized chivalric discourse on war diverged from the reality of *chevauchée* (a medieval method of raiding in which enemy territory was pillaged and burned). Chivalry was a strategic culture with an idealized notion of warfare centered on the institution of knighthood. Lynn writes, "Warrior values of prowess, courage, honor and loyalty provide the heart of chivalry."[4] Prowess referred to the combination of bravery and expertise in a field, such as horseback riding in the case of knights. A knight's honor was tied to how well he lived by

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[4] Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, 80.

the chivalric code. The reality of the Hundred Years' War, however, saw the regular use of the *chevauchée* as a means of waging war and was severely at odds with the chivalric code. Aristocratic society formed a more perfected reality in the form of the tournament as means of rejecting the reality of the *chevauchée*. The tournament was a contest that conformed better to the aristocratic discourse on war. Tournament participants were limited to only knights and served as a public stage for prowess, courage, and honor. The tournament served a cultural need. Societies create a perfected reality because the way they fight is so important to their conception of themselves and they need a way of acting out their values.

Alternative Discourse

The second and third forms of rejection, alternative discourse and extreme reality, are related and occur when the strategic culture is too rigid and the character of war is too far at odds with it. An alternative discourse can form when a new technology radically redefines how wars are fought. The technology can advance faster than the discourse on how best to use it. Within the military, the technology may be resisted if it creates a sort of existential crisis. Lynn uses the example of the English acceptance of the longbow compared to France's reluctance to do the same during the 100 Years' War. The English armed peasants with the longbow while the French insisted on using mounted knights in accordance with their chivalric culture. In 1346, 1356, and 1415, the French were defeated because of their reluctance to embrace the longbow and forgo French chivalry.[5] The advent of the longbow, and its use by English peasants, represented an alternative discourse that went against the prevailing discourse of aristocratic French chivalry.

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[5] Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture,* 367.

Extreme Reality

The presence of an alternative discourse can lead to the third rejection, an extreme reality. When this occurs, the character of war moves to the extreme because the laws and conventions that limited violence in the original discourse do not apply in the alternative discourse. Again, this can happen when a new technology redefines warfare. It can also happen when the necessity for victory overrides the debate on the moral justifications for extreme uses of violence. Lynn cites several examples of an alternate discourse that led to an extreme reality. One, in particular, was the poor treatment of Native Americans by US soldiers during the Indian wars of the 19th century. The conflict against the Native Americans did not constitute a "normal war" and therefore the implicit rules and norms that typically restricted the use of force did not apply. The alternative discourse on how to fight Native Americans eventually led US soldiers to an extreme reality – the wide-scale massacre of Native Americans.[6] If the war against the Indians had been viewed as "real war," then the means used would have likely been restrained by the prevailing conventions.

Refusal to Consider War

The fourth type of rejection is the refusal to consider war. This form of rejection occurs when a society or the military completely discounts a particular kind of fighting and refuses to incorporate it into their discourse. Lynn describes the hallmark of this mechanism as simply meeting "the situation with ad hoc measures in an attempt to deal with a situation that the military has no intention of accepting as something it will have to deal with in the long term."[7] Lynn suggests

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[6] Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, 368.
[7] Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, 369.

counter-insurgency is a type of warfare that America continuously refuses to consider "real war." He goes on to write, "most American officers regarded the combat that continued after the defeat of Saddam Hussein's regular forces as something basically different from war."[8] This refusal to consider counterinsurgency as real war arrested the military's development and adoption of new doctrine and training.

Lynn's Model as a Framework

To tie it all together, Lynn's model offers a framework for exploring the relationship between American strategic culture and air power. This paper explores this relationship and looks for the presence of these four forms of rejection by focusing on a particular cultural artifact – in this case, military medals. Medals offer a window into the relationship between strategic culture and the character of war because medals are an honest reflection of the values and beliefs that form a strategic culture.

The following methodology provides a framework for analysis. First, I will examine the societal and military discourse on war by focusing on the creation of new military medals. Next, I will compare the strategic culture to the character of war by focusing on the awarding of military medals. Third, I will determine if the strategic culture was congruent with the character of war or if any of the four forms of rejection were present.

The following case studies focus on three pivotal periods in air power history: the introduction of air power (1903 – 1918), the development of strategic bombing (1919 – 1945), and the use of air power as a political tool (1946 – present day). Within each period, an examination of military medals suggests that America's strategic culture

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8 Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, 361.

has at times aligned with air power and at other times been at odds with its use.

During World War I, the harsh reality of an intractable war of attrition along the Western Front, characterized by indiscriminate killing via machine guns, artillery, and poison gas, was drastically at odds with the strategic culture. To help cope with these realities, many societies and militaries sought to create a more perfected reality in the skies above. This rejection manifested itself in the "Knights of the Air," the fighter pilots who transformed the war into something more aligned with the strategic culture by offering a romantic, chivalrous approach to warfare. As the first case study shows, Western societies heaped their most prestigious medals upon fighter pilots because they represented a more perfected reality, despite the minor impact they had on the outcome of the war.

During the interwar period, America's discourse on war was sharply divided. The main body of the Army argued future wars would still be won by soldiers on the ground. The alternative discourse, advanced by the Army Air Corps, favored strategic bombing as the most effective method to fight and win a war. The second case study shows that the clash between these two discourses resulted in a flurry of new medals, as proponents of each discourse sought to reaffirm their values and beliefs. The alternative discourse of strategic bombing was put to the test in World War II. The reality of the war was in stark contrast to this discourse and strategic bombing proved far more difficult than Airmen had originally expected. Lynn's model suggests that when an alternative discourse does not match the reality, it can morph into an extreme reality. During World War II, the alternative discourse of strategic bombing eventually evolved into an extreme reality, indiscriminate bombing, which culminated in the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan. The fact that so many prestigious medals were awarded to aircrews, even as strategic bombing metastasized into indiscriminate

bombing, suggests that American strategic culture truly believed the bombing was justified.

Since the end of World War II, American strategic culture has maintained a Clausewitzian paradigm that is often at odds with the realities of modern warfare. Specifically, traditional combat occurs less often because force is rarely used to defeat an enemy on the battlefield in the classical sense. Rather, force is more often used for a variety of other purposes, such as deterring war and coercing adversaries. The military rejected this change and largely dismissed the new uses of force by refusing to consider them "real war." Since the Vietnam War, the awarding of combat medals that honor valor has decreased, despite years of prolonged warfare. This is not because service members are no longer demonstrating bravery on the battlefield. Rather, it is because fewer service members have fought on a traditional battlefield, thus lowering the number of opportunities to earn a combat medal for valor. A look at the creation of new military medals since World War II shows that American strategic culture has struggled to grapple with the evolution of modern combat.

Chapter 2

The Knights of the Air (1903 – 1918):
A Perfected Reality

European strategic culture in the 19th and at the turn of the 20th century is often referred to as "the cult of the offensive."[1] Largely influenced by Napoleon, Carl von Clausewitz, and then Antoine-Henri Jomini, both the societal and military discourse assumed war would be quick and decisive. This assumption led to a belief that offensive solutions to security problems were the most effective. Clausewitz heavily influenced the Prussian and later German military's discourse on war. While the principles of *On War* were incorporated into the military discourse, they were often incorporated incorrectly. Throughout the course of his 128 chapters, Clausewitz wrote about the nuanced relationship between the passion of the people, the reason of the government, and the role of chance on the military. Yet the military discourse on war focused largely on two principles from the very last chapter: "act with utmost concentration of aim and of force" and "act with utmost speed."[2] Unfortunately, one of Clausewitz's strongest principles – the superiority of the defense over the offense – was overlooked by German planners. Barbara Tuchman wrote, "Clausewitz, a dead Prussian … had combined to fasten the short-war concept upon the European mind. Quick, decisive victory was the German orthodoxy."[3] In August of 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II reassured troops as they boarded

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[1] Stephen Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security* 9, no. 1 (1984), 58.

[2] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 617.

[3] Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August,* (New York: Dell, 1963), 130.

trains for the front lines, "You will be home before the leaves have fallen from the trees."[4]

The reality of World War I was starkly different from the idealized notions shared amongst the western strategic cultures. The war was neither quick nor decisive. Millions of soldiers lost their lives in a horrific war of attrition. The war was devoid of chivalry. Michael Sherry writes about how armies became engines of impersonal destruction in which soldiers were merely cogs in the machine.[5] Lee Kennett provides a poetic portrayal of how society and the military viewed the reality of World War I:

> The war they came to know must have seemed a monstrous aberration, with the individual disappearing into the mass, and the masses trading ponderous and indiscriminate blows; death was anonymous and the sacrifices were made collectively. Such battles were not made for individual feats of heroism that could fire the public's imagination.[6]

Kennett goes on to conclude, "The public, too, needed its gods, its heroes."[7] Just as the reality of the *chevauchée* had violated the medieval chivalric discourse, the reality of trench warfare had violated the discourse on modern warfare. Moreover, just as kings and knights created a perfected reality in the form of the tournament, a similar perfected reality was found in the skies above the trenches.

Several historians have argued that the airplane in World War I was of little operational importance. Malcolm Smith writes, "One would search in vain to discover instances in which [airplanes] dramatically

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[4] Tuchman, *The Guns of August,* 130.

[5] Michael Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 20.
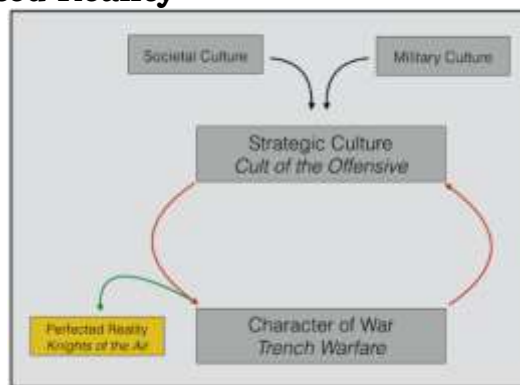
[6] Lee Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 159.

[7] Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918,* 158.

affected the course of battle or campaigns."[8] Artillery accounted for more deaths than bullets, bombs, or poison gas. As a result, artillery observers in airplanes and balloons provided the most utility. Aerial artillery spotting warned of enemy advances and helped ensure offensives did not prevail. The fighter aircraft's role was to guard the observation aircraft and the bomber's role was largely indecisive.[9] Yet it was the fighter pilot that captivated imaginations.

The aerial dogfight became a modern version of the knight's tournament because it offered a more perfected reality. Pilots demonstrated their bravery and expertise on a stage five thousand feet above the battlefield. As Kennett writes, "air victories were attributable to men, not to the machines they flew, as if to underline the contrast with the ground war, where deadly machines dominated."[10] While air power provided little military benefit, it served a greater cultural need by offering a perfected reality. Sherry writes, "Far from appearing as an extension of the slaughter of modern war, air power seemed to many people one way to escape from it."[11] Both Sherry and Kennett refer to fighter pilots of this time as "knights of the air." Figure 2 below depicts these "knights of the air" as a perfected reality:

Figure 2: A Perfected Reality

Source: Author's original work

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[8] Quoted in Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, 220.
[9] Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, 221.
[10] Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, 159.
[11] Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 21.

World War I Medals

Societies and militaries awarded fighter pilots many prestigious medals for their acts because they represented a perfected reality that better conformed to the strategic culture. Kennett writes, "honors and acclaim flowed to the fighter arm, and the public heaped adulation on those individual fighter pilots."[12] Despite having little impact on the overall course of the war, societies nonetheless honored fighter pilots with their most prestigious medals. The awarding of medals was largely related to a pilot's aerial victories, or kills, as the "fighter ace" system came into being during World War I. Some attribute the first use of the term to a French newspaper describing the first pilot to shoot down five German aircraft.[13]

Each society developed its own scoring and criteria for the ace system and these highlighted the differences of each culture and their experiences. The Germans initially awarded the title of ace after five (later 10) aerial kills but had very strict guidelines for what constituted an aerial kill and how it was confirmed. A German pilot was only credited with a kill if he alone brought the enemy aircraft down. The Germans were the first to use the aerial war as a means of propaganda to garner public support for the war. The Allies, on the other hand, were far more casual in their criteria and allowed "shares" in which credit for a kill could be given to more than one pilot. Generally speaking, the title of ace was also given to a pilot for five aerial kills. The French followed the Germans' lead in using the air war as a means of raising public support. The British, however, largely resisted this tendency to popularize the air war and felt that bomber pilots were as deserving as medals as fighter pilots. The British were reluctant to focus on the individual pilots at all;

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12 Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, 161.
13 Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, 12 & 162.

it was the unit, not the individual that was important. The Americans, who were the most isolated from war and late to enter it, tended to celebrate the accomplishment of pilots in a manner similar to Great Britain. Thus, there was a correlation to how strongly each society celebrated the air war as a more perfected reality and the number and degree of medals awarded to pilots. Germany and France, the two countries locked in a stalemate on the Western Front, had the greatest need for a more perfected reality in the skies above, and therefore, bestowed their highest honors upon fighter aces.

Within the German Empire, no new medals were created to honor pilots; the Empire used their preexisting medals to honor aviators. The highest-ranking military medal was the *Pour le Mérite.* The first pilot to earn the *Pour le Mérite,* (a French term meaning, "for merit"), was Max Immelmann for his eight aerial kills. Germany made the awarding of the medal quite a public display and soon after Immelmann's awarding, the medal became known as the "Blue Max." Another notable recipient of the Blue Max was Manfred von Richthofen, more commonly known as the "Red Baron" who went on to accrue 80 kills. The threshold for the Blue Max increased as the war progressed, rising from eight to twelve, then sixteen, and finally twenty by the end of the war.[14] By the war's end, Germany had awarded the Blue Max to German aviation personnel 81 times, with nearly 60 of those being fighter pilots and only nine being observers.[15]

The second highest-ranking medal was the Iron Cross. Within the German Luftwaffe, the term *Kreuzschmerzen,* which translates into "Cross ache," referred to pilots who ached for the Iron Cross.[16] Germany

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[14] Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918,* 163.
[15] Terry Treadwell and Alan Wood, *German Knights of the Air, 1914-1918,* (London: Brassey's, 1997), 5-7.
[16] Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918,* 167.

had nearly 400 aces from World War I.[17] Nearly all were awarded the Iron Cross. Historian Peter Fritzsche writes, "the air heroes more resembled the movie stars of the 1920s than the medieval knights or Napoleonic generals with whom they were often compared."[18] The public's favorable attitude towards the awarding of these prestigious medals and the disproportionate number awarded to fighter pilots suggests that aerial dogfighting represented a more perfected reality for the Germans.

In France, fighter pilots were similarly awarded the two highest-ranking medals, the red *Légion d'honneur* (Legion of Honor) and the *Croix de Guerre* (Cross of War). Similar to Germany, France did not create new medals for fighter pilots but rather used these two preexisting medals. France had far fewer aces than Germany, with most estimates close to 175.[19] French pilots also wanted the glory associated with these medals. Kennett writes, "'We were hoping for glory,' said a French pilot, 'why not admit it?' And to him and to many of his comrades, glory came in the form of a red ribbon..."[20] Each kill a French fighter pilot earned after his fifth was published in the newspapers. However, as the number of fighter aces increased, so too did the requirements for these medals. Bomber pilots were eligible for these awards, but usually for only for aerial kills – rarely for the bombing itself. Kennett continues:

> There was a similar imbalance in the distribution of the
> French Legion of Honor. In the summer of 1917, Jacques
> Mortane lamented: 'People are surprised if an ace doesn't

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[17] Norman Franks, Frank Bailey, and Russell Guest, *Above the Lines: The Aces and Fighter Units of the German Air Service, Naval Air Service and Flanders Marine Corps, 1914–1918*, (London: Grub Street Publishing, 1993), 7.

[18] Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 76.

[19] Norman Franks and Frank Bailey, *Over the Front: The Complete Record of the Fighter Aces and Units of the United States and French Air Services, 1914-1918*, (London: Grub Street Publishing, 2008), 22.

[20] Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, 167.

have the Legion of Honor after his seventh or eighth victory, but they find it perfectly natural for a bomber pilot to not have it when he has flown eighty night missions...[21]

France's celebration of dogfighting can be seen through the fact that, like Germany, it bestowed its highest honors upon fighter pilots. And, like Germany, this suggests that aerial dogfighting represented a more perfected reality.

The British elite were reluctant to adopt the ace system because they believed praising fighter pilots would produce resentment and demoralize bomber and reconnaissance pilots. The most prestigious medal, the Victoria Cross (VC), was awarded 627 times in World War I but only 19 times to aviation personnel.[22] British pilots often complained that their deeds went unnoticed and unsung.[23] The entire United Kingdom had roughly 1,045 aces, defined as those with more than five kills. Yet, the awarding of the VC was drastically lower than France and Germany's awarding of their most prestigious medals. While the Iron Cross and the Blue Max were awarded for sustained superior performance, the VC was usually awarded for an individual act of courage. Soon after the war ended, Great Britain created a new medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), to specifically recognize acts of valor and courage while flying in combat. Approximately 1,100 DFCs were awarded.[24] The reality of World War I in Great Britain, and throughout its commonwealth, differed from France and Germany in that the fighting took place outside of its borders. The British population's only real exposure to violence came from the German bombing raids.

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[21] Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, 161.

[22] Department for Communities and Local Government, "First World War Victoria Cross Recipients," 30 May 2014, https://www.gov.uk/ government/publications/first-world-war-victoria-cross-recipients

[23] Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918*, 155.

[24] Nick Carter and Carol Carter, *The Distinguished Flying Cross and How It Was Won*, (London: Savannah Publications, 1998), 12.

This difference may explain why Great Britain sought to recognize both fighter and bomber pilots through the creation of the DFC. In short, because the war was largely fought outside its borders, Great Britain may have had less need than Germany and France to create a more perfected reality.

The United States was even further removed from the war than Great Britain. The majority of American pilots were flying with the British and French before the US officially entered the war. The US ultimately adopted France's ace system. The US had 120 aces: 17 flew with France, 53 with Great Britain, and 50 with the United States. Of the 50 US aces, 42 received the Distinguished Service Cross, the second-highest military award.[25] Of the 123 Medals of Honor awarded for actions World War I, only seven were aviators, but unlike the other countries, the majority (four of the seven) honored observers while just three went to fighter pilots.[26] This is in sharp contrast to the ratio of Legion of Honor medals awarded by France where 16 American aces out of 120 earned France's highest honor.[27] Although there were calls to create a new medal, just as the newly formed Royal Air Force had done with the DFC, the United States did not create its own aviation medal after the war. The US did create two new medals for soldiers after the war; the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) and Citation Star (later renamed the Silver Star) provided means of recognizing combat heroism that was of a lesser degree than that which warranted a Medal of Honor.

In conclusion, societies created a more perfected reality in the skies above the harsh realities of the intractable trench warfare below.

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[25] "The Aerodrome: Aces and Aircraft of World War I," 22 March 2017, http://www.theaerodrome.com/index.php

[26] Barrett Tillman, *Above and Beyond: The Aviation Medals of Honor*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 12-13.

[27] "The Aerodrome: Aces and Aircraft of World War I," 22 March 2017, http://www.theaerodrome.com/index.php

The two societies that experienced the brunt of the actual fighting, Germany and France, had the greatest need for this perfected reality. As such, these two nations showered their "knights of the air" with their most prestigious military medals. The two societies more removed from the war, Great Britain and the United States, had slightly less need for such a perfected reality. These two nations also honored their aces with prestigious medals but only rarely bestowed their highest honors on pilots and when they did, they honored all types of pilots – not just fighter pilots.

Chapter 3

Strategic Bombing (1919 – 1945):

An Alternative Discourse & Extreme Reality

Upon conclusion of the Versailles Treaty, American military planners returned to a peacetime stance but continued to theorize about the future of war. At the societal level, American strategic culture during the interwar period was influenced by democratic liberalism. Author E. H. Carr argues that President Woodrow Wilson's optimistic, utopian worldview represented the zeitgeist of the period.[1] Despite good intentions, this belief system carried with it a darker side that created a unique dichotomy in American strategic culture. Samuel Huntington explained the implicit assumptions embedded within democratic liberalism:

> The American tends to be an extremist on the subject of war: he either embraces war wholeheartedly or rejects it completely. This extremism is required by the nature of liberal ideology. Since liberalism deprecates the moral validity of the interests of the state in security, war must either be condemned as incompatible with liberal goals or justified as an ideological movement in support of those goals.[2]

Paul Kecskemeti of RAND argued in 1958 that because democratic cultures view wars as crusades, they hold a deep-seated conviction that war cannot end until the "evil enemy" has been eradicated.[3] George

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[1] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919 – 1939,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 6.
[2] Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Practice of Civil-Military Relations,* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957), 151.
[3] Quoted in Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations,* (4th ed. New York: Basic Books, 2006), 111.

Kennan similarly stated, "A war fought in the name of high moral principle finds no early end short of some form of total domination."[4] This fundamental assumption, that victory in war could only be obtained through an unconditional surrender of the enemy, was stitched into the fabric of American strategic culture. Furthermore, it guided the entire American discourse on war during the interwar period. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Thomas Mahnken writes "Franklin D. Roosevelt and his commanders were of one mind that the war must lead to the overthrow of the German, Japanese, and Italian governments that had started the war."[5]

The American assumption that an enemy had to submit to an unconditional surrender coupled with the inability of ground forces to achieve such a victory in World War I sowed the seeds of an alternative discourse – strategic bombing. The prevailing discourse on war had long been to use ground and naval forces to invade or besiege and overthrow the ruling government. The stalemate of World War I, however, had led many to question this discourse. Furthermore, American strategic culture was weary of fighting another global war. World War I was "the war to end all wars" and Americans were not interested in spilling more blood and treasure in another war. The shortcomings of the prevailing discourse and America's weariness to fight made strategic bombing even more appealing. James Smith writes, "The traditional operations by Army and Navy forces that enjoyed centuries of tradition, lessons learned, and accepted strategies would be confronted and challenged by air power."[6] Strategic bombing offered a solution to the paradoxical nature of democratic liberalism: if forced to fight, bombing allowed for the

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[4] Quoted in Mahnken, "United States Strategic Culture," 7.
[5] Mahnken, "United States Strategic Culture," 8.
[6] James Smith, "Limited Nuclear Conflict and the American Way of War," in *On Limited Nuclear War in the 21st Century*, ed. Jeffrey Larson et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 276-278.

annihilation of an "evil enemy" without the associated costs in blood and treasure. Furthermore, in a democracy, the government is assumed to act based on the will of the people. Thomas Hippler argues that this line of reasoning led Giulio Douhet, who was actually a pacifist, to develop his theory of bombing cities. Hippler writes, "Douhetism also implies a more specific political philosophy – assumptions on the nature of the social bond in modern societies, and about the state, citizenship and political values."[7]

Strategic bombing also appealed to other aspects of American strategic culture, namely a faith in technological solutions. Merritt Roe Smith writes, "Technology and science not only became the great panacea for everyday problems; they also stood for values at the core of American Life."[8] Strategic bombing promised to save American lives by winning the war singlehandedly, thus obviating the need for a dangerous ground invasion. John Mearsheimer once said, "Substituting technology for manpower is a time-honored solution which certainly has a rich tradition in the United States."[9] These beliefs were supported by the amazing rate of technological change that occurred during the interwar period. The 1920s, often referred to as the Golden Age of Flight, saw amazing advances in aircraft technology and a public captivated by dramatic record-setting feats in the air. Charles Lindbergh was awarded the nation's highest decoration - the Medal of Honor – for his flight from New York to Paris. Tami Davis Biddle, author of *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare,* summarized America's technological optimism, writing

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[7] Thomas Hippler, *Bombing the People: Giulio Douhet and the Foundations of Air-power Strategy, 1884-1939,* (Cambridge: Military Histories, 2013), 114.

[8] Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx, eds., *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism,* (Boston, MA: MIT Publishing, 1994), 23.

[9] John Mearsheimer, "Prospects for conventional deterrence in Europe," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* August 1985, 161,

"Technology (in a self-proclaimed 'high-tech' nation) seemed to make all things possible and, equally, seemed to solve all problems."[10] Air power also represented an approach to warfare that relied on vast resources and robust industry, two more hallmarks of American strategic culture. James Smith writes, "The United States was resource rich, and that allowed industrial answers to many questions of capability and power."[11]

This combination of assumptions, values, and beliefs allowed strategic bombing to flourish as an alternative discourse during the interwar period at the societal level. However, as Lynn warns, alternative discourses often evolve free from the moral discourse that restricted and guided the use of force in the previous discourse. This is not to suggest that the discourse on strategic bombing did not address concerns over the morality of bombing. In fact, another important aspect of American strategic culture is its excessive "moralism and legalism," as George Kennan put it.[12] The allure of bombing was that it promised to lower the loss of American service members, but it risked raising the number of enemy civilians killed which went against American democratic ideals. Once again, Americans turned to technology to solve the paradoxes of democratic liberalism. This time, the technological solution lay in the concept of "precision." If bombing could be precise, many theorists believed the number of civilians killed could be reduced and the bombing would be morally justified. At the time, the Norden bombsight, which promised an unprecedented degree of accuracy, was one of the most expensive weapon development programs in history.[13] The cost was worth it; American strategic culture had created an alternative discourse

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[10] Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 161.
[11] Larson, On Limited Nuclear War, 247.
[12] Quoted in Mahnken, "United States Strategic Culture," 7.
[13] Malcolm Gladwell, "The strange tale of the Norden bombsight," TED Talk, July 2011, https://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_gladwell

in strategic bombing that promised to defeat an evil enemy without the risk of losing ground forces and in a way that minimized civilian casualties. At the societal level, strategic bombing was a reflection of America's values and beliefs.

At the military level, however, the Army did not subscribe to the alternative discourse of strategic bombing. While the Army did seem to agree that unconditional surrender was a requirement, Army leadership strongly disagreed on air power's role in securing such a surrender. To the Army, air power was subordinate to and supportive of the soldier on the ground. The strategic bombing discourse was a threat to the predominant discourse the Army had enjoyed for centuries. Air power advocate Colonel Billy Mitchell wrote in 1918:

> The day has passed when armies on the ground or navies of the sea can be the arbiter of a nation's destiny in war. The main power of defense and the power of initiative against an enemy has passed to the air.[14]

Mitchell, driven by a desire to see an independent air force, sought out to prove that bombing was both precise and strategic in nature. In 1921, he orchestrated the bombing of a captured German battleship, the SMS *Ostfriesland,* to prove his point. The successful and public display bolstered the argument for precision bombing within the nation's discourse. In 1926, Mitchell's disparaging statements against the Army and Navy led to him being court martialed for insubordination. He used the trial as another opportunity to champion publicly the promises of precision bombing. Following the court martial spectacle, the struggle between these two discourses, the preexisting versus strategic bombing, could be seen in the creation of new military medals. Supporters of each

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[14] Quoted in Jeffrey Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force*: *Tracing the Past, Shaping the Future,* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 43.

discourse, in an attempt to assert their values and beliefs, advocated for the creation of new medals.

In response to Mitchell's accusations, President Coolidge asked his friend, Wall Street banker Dwight Morrow, to chair a board to investigate the status of aviation in the United States.[15] Senator Hiram Bingham, a former lieutenant colonel in the Army's Signal Corps, joined the board and inserted a recommendation to create a new medal – the Distinguished Flying Cross. Bingham had previously tried to get the medal through Congress but support was tepid and resistance from the Army and Navy was strong. President Coolidge, however, was receptive to the board's findings and Congress passed the Air Corps Act in 1926, which officially created the American version of a DFC. The criteria for the DFC sought to recognize "heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight." In March 1927, President Coolidge signed Executive Order 4601, which limited the award to service members only. Following the passage of the Air Corps Act, the Army attempted to subvert and delay the medal's introduction by refusing to develop regulations for its issuance.[16] In May 1927, Congress wanted to award Lindbergh the first DFC and so the design of the medal was rushed. The members of the commission that were tasked with developing the medal felt the rushed design was "not worthy in general conception and execution of the high honor it was intended to signify."[17] The Army, on the other hand, believed the design was sufficient.

In response to the creation of the DFC, the Army advocated for the creation of new medals to reaffirm the values and beliefs of its service.

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[15] Charles Downs II, "Essays, Papers & Addresses," Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation, 22 March 2017, https://coolidgefoundation.org /resources/essays-papers-addresses-13/

[16] Fred Borch III, *Medals for Soldiers and Airmen: Awards and Decorations of the United States Army and Air Force*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2013), 83.

[17] Borch, *Medals for Soldiers and Airmen*, 84.

Section 11 of the Air Corps Act of 1926 also included legislation to create a new Army medal - the Soldier's Medal. The criteria for the Soldier's Medal sought to recognize "heroism not involving actual conflict with an armed enemy of the United States." The Soldier's Medal was given a rank-order below the DSC and DFC. The Army also wanted to change the Citation Star that was created after World War I. A report from the Army War College in 1925 explained how the small size of the star had led many Soldiers to believe that it did not "serve as evidence of a grateful nation and people with attendant stimulation to patriotism."[18] In 1931, the Army succeeded in converting the Citation Star into a new medal - the Silver Star. The criteria for the Silver Star was "gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States." The only difference between the Silver Star and the pre-existing Distinguished Service Cross criteria was that the Silver Star was for "gallantry" and the DSC was for "extreme heroism." Therefore, the Silver Star brought the number of different medals recognizing combat heroism to three: the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Silver Star. The Silver Star was rank-ordered below the Distinguished Service Medal and above the DFC. The Silver Star was only eligible for members of the Army; the Navy and Marine Corps did not adopt the medal until 1942.

In 1932, General Douglas MacArthur released General Order No. 3 to revive George Washington's Badge of Military Merit in the form of a new medal – the Purple Heart. MacArthur sought to deny posthumous awards of the Purple Heart because "To make it a symbol of death, with its corollary depressive influences, would be to defeat the primary

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[18] Quoted in Frederic Borch III and William Westlake, *The Silver Star: A History of America's Third Highest Award for Combat Valor*, (Tempe, Arizona: Borch and Westlake Publishing, 2001), 4.

purpose of its being."[19] The medal had two separate criteria stated in Army Regulation 600-45 by two separate paragraphs labeled "a" and "b." The "a" paragraph stated the medal sought to honor members of the Army that "perform any singularly meritorious act of extraordinary fidelity or essential service." The "b" paragraph stated that "a wound, which necessitates treatment by a medical officer...may be construed as resulting from a singularly meritorious act or essential service."[20] After the medal's passage, nearly 78,000 men applied for the medal, with less than 1,200 citing an act of "fidelity or essential service." The majority applied on the basis of the "b" criteria, for wounds they incurred during World War I. The interpretative flexibility of the Purple Heart meant that most came to view the Purple Heart as a medal solely for combat-related injuries. The dual criteria for the Purple Heart explains why it was originally placed below all of the other combat medals. In 1985, Congress passed an act to move the medal's position up, to below the Bronze Star.[21] Like the Silver Star, the Navy initially took the position that the Purple Heart was solely an Army medal and did not adopt the decoration until 1942. On 28 April 1942, the Army reversed MacArthur's original policy and announced that the Purple Heart now would be awarded to "members of the military service who are killed...or who died as a result of a wound received in action...on or after December 7, 1941."[22]

Throughout the interwar period, the Army tried to get another medal created to honor noncombat meritorious achievement - the Meritorious Service Medal (MSM). Recommendations for the MSM were submitted to the Quartermaster General in 1937, 1941 and 1942. The

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[19] Frederic Borch III and F.C. Brown, *The Purple Heart: A History of America's Oldest Military Decoration.* 1st ed. (Tempe, Arizona: Borch and Westlake Publishing, 1996), 8.
[20] Borch and Brown, *The Purple Heart,* 7.
[21] Foster & Borts, *A Complete Guide to United States Medals*, 70.
[22] Borch and Brown, *The Purple Heart,* 9.

MSM was not created, but Congress did pass an act creating the Legion of Merit in 1942.[23] Like the proposed MSM, the Legion of Merit was a noncombat medal honoring meritorious achievement. The Legion of Merit was placed below the Silver Star and above DFC, which was a high-ranking position for a noncombat medal. The new medal brought the total number of medals honoring meritorious achievement to three: the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, and the Soldier's/Navy and Marine Corps' Medal.

On May 11, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9158, which created the Air Medal. The justification for the new award was expressed by the Secretary of War, "The Distinguished Flying Cross is available only for heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight... It is, however, important to reward personnel for meritorious service [in flight]."[24] The criteria for the Air Medal sought to recognize "any member of the US Armed Forces who distinguishes himself by heroism, outstanding achievement, or by meritorious service while participating in aerial flight." The Air Medal was intended to be awarded for a lesser degree of heroism or achievement than the DFC. Initially, both awards were considered "scorecard medals," meaning they were given out automatically for certain accomplishments. For example, 20 combat missions often equaled one Air Medal and five Air Medals equaled one DFC. Although naval aviators were eligible for the Air Medal, "the numbers never approached those received by the Army Air Force amidst the European bombing campaigns."[25]

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[23] The Institute of Heraldry, *Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army*, Decorations and Medals: Legion of Merit, 17 March 2017.
[24] The Institute of Heraldry, *Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army*, Decorations and Medals: DFC, 17 March 2017.
[25] Foster & Borts, *A Complete Guide to United States Medals*, 72.

In response to the creation of the Air Medal, the Army once again demanded another new medal. Colonel Russel Reeder proposed the creation of a "Ground Medal" to honor the sacrifices and contributions of soldiers on the ground in the same fashion the Air Medal recognized the contributions of aviators. The proposal eventually made it to the White House and on February 4, 1944, President Roosevelt promulgated Executive Order 9419, which created yet another new medal - the Bronze Star. The criteria for the Bronze Star read "any person who... has distinguished himself by heroic or meritorious achievement or service, *not involving participation in aerial flight*, in connection with military or naval operations against an enemy of the United States" (emphasis added). The Bronze Star brought the total number of medals related to the combat heroism of Soldiers to four. The Bronze Star was rank-ordered above the Air Medal. After the War, the Army conducted a review of the number of Air Medals awarded compared the number of Bronze Stars awarded and determined "a huge disparity existed and many soldiers who deserved the award for their service had not received it." In September 1947, the Bronze Star was authorized by the Army to any troops that participated in several major campaigns. Additionally, in 1945, the Army created a "V" device to attach to the Bronze Star to distinguish recipients that earned the award for valor from those that earned the award for meritorious service.[26] Table 1 below lists the combat medals and their criteria as of 1945.

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[26] Foster & Borts, *A Complete Guide to United States Medals*, 69.

Table 1: US Military Combat Medals as of 1945

Medal (Rank Ordered)	Degree of Valor	Degree of Meritorious Achievement	Aerial Flight Eligible?	Combat Required?
Medal of Honor	"Gallantry"	N/A	Yes	Yes
Distinguished Service Cross	"Extraordinary Heroism"	N/A	Yes	Yes
Distinguished Service Medal	N/A	"Exceptional Meritorious Service"	No	No
Silver Star	"Gallantry"	N/A	Yes	Yes
Legion of Merit	N/A	"Exceptional Meritorious Conduct"	No	No
Distinguished Flying Cross	"Heroism"	"Extraordinary Achievement"	Yes	No
Soldier's Medal	"Heroism"	N/A	No	No
Bronze Star	"Heroic"	"Meritorious Achievement"	No	Yes
Purple Heart	"Wounded in Armed Conflict"		Yes	Yes
Air Medal	"Heroic"	"Meritorious Service"	Yes	Yes

Source: Author's original work

There is little written about what prompted the explosive growth in medals during the interwar period. One explanation is that it was an indirect result of the struggle between the two discourses: the belief that wars were fought and won on the battlefield versus the belief that strategic bombing offered a way to overfly the battlefield and win the war decisively. Carl Builder argues that the US military services have "unique personalities" that are influenced by, among other things, concerns of their self-worth and insecurities about their legitimacy and relevancy.[27] Perhaps the creation of so many new medals was an attempt by the Army to address concerns of its waning relevancy and future role in a major war. It is interesting to note that during the same period that saw the creation of seven new medals for Soldiers, the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) created two, and the Navy only one.

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[27] Carl H. Builder, Rand Corporation, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 17.

During the interwar period, the alternative discourse on strategic bombing appealed to many of the values and beliefs of American strategic culture writ large. The idea of precision bombing offered a technological and industrial approach to warfare that could quickly bring about victory while simultaneously minimizing service member casualties and civilian deaths. By the onset of World War II, these values and beliefs had culminated in the theory of high-altitude daylight precision bombing (HAPDB). As Biddle explains, "American airmen had a genuine, unshaken conviction in their theory of air war" because it addressed the ethical concerns raised about bombing.[28] Sherry writes:

> The crucial element was not simply faith in American technology. Nor was it precisely faith in air power. It was faith in the idea of air power... Belief in the victory of intimidation or in the swift, surprise conquest had long allowed proponents of air power to evade troublesome moral and strategic issues.[29]

The ethical concerns were never fully addressed, which according to Lynn, typically is the case with alternative discourses. Strategic bombing, like other alternative discourses, tended to evolve freely from the rigors of the moral debates and implicit assumptions that had restricted the use of force in the predominant discourse. There were some half-hearted attempts to draw boundaries, pass laws, and create accepted norms on bombing. The 1923 Hague Convention prohibited bombing unless it was against a "legitimate military target." This created a thin line between justified and unjustified bombing. In September 1939, President Roosevelt asked the leaders of Germany and Great Britain to agree that under no circumstances would anyone bomb an

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[28] Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 209.
[29] Sherry, *Rise of American Air Power*, 115.

enemy's civilian population. All parties agreed.[30] The realities of World War II, however, would soon force the alternative discourse of strategic bombing to face the realities of warfare.

As Lynn's model suggests, when the character of war is too much at odds with an alternative discourse, it may lead to an extreme reality. This proved to be the case in World War II. Biddle begins her book by stating, "The history of strategic bombing in the twentieth century is a history of the tension between imagined possibilities and technical realities."[31] During World War II, strategic bombing was unable to live up to its idealized conceptions. As the war progressed, the Americans became desperate. Biddle describes the Americans' frustrations and subsequent departure from the strategic bombing discourse:

> The Americans, too, would encounter vast problems as they tried to fight the war from high altitude. Not only did American bombers fail to achieve a prompt decision, but, in 1942-43, they seemed to have little impact on the enemy. Indeed, by late 1943 the Anglo-American CBO was all but grounded by the strength of German defenses. Allied air planners scrambled for a solution, eventually finding their way to tactical changes that salvaged the air offensive. By 1944 both the numbers and capabilities of Anglo-American bombers had increased dramatically, and a campaign of increasing fury and intensity would, by 1945, lay waste to German and Japanese cities and industry in an unprecedented campaign of death and destruction that has been hotly debated ever since.[32]

The gradual escalation of the war and the shortcomings of the strategic bombing fostered an extreme reality - indiscriminate bombing. Figure 3 below depicts the alternative discourse on strategic bombing and the extreme reality of indiscriminate bombing.

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[30] Strachan, *The Changing Character of War*, 92-93.
[31] Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 11.
[32] Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 2.

Figure 3: Alternative Discourse & Extreme Reality
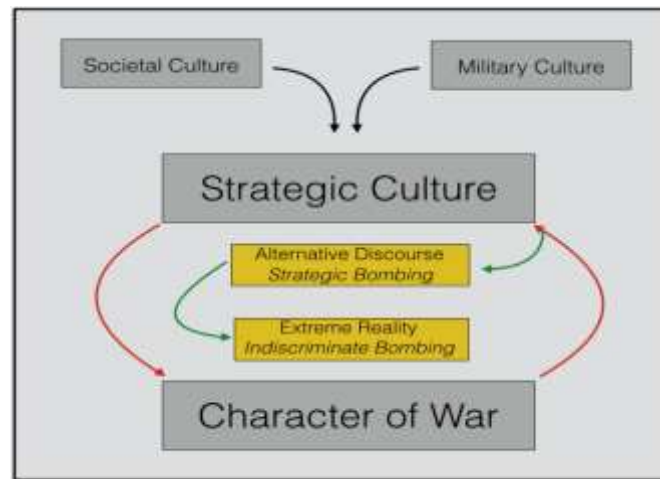
Source: Author's original work

During the CBO's first year, frustrations caused the Americans to abandon the tenets of HAPDB. The USAAF had believed that tightly flown formations of bombers could penetrate the German defenses, but the reality proved otherwise. The infamous October 1943 Schweinfurt raid against German ball bearing plants saw 198 of 291 bombers shot down or damaged.[33] Even when the American bombers were able to get through the German defenses, they still faced the challenge of finding and hitting their designated targets. The Norden bombsight proved to be far less accurate at high-altitude compared to the sterile conditions in which it was designed and tested. Weather also hampered the ability of crews to acquire their targets. By November 1943, a frustrated General Arnold allowed crews to begin bombing in the blind. He did not, however, sanction the use of term "blind bombing" because he knew it went against the values of the American public and preferred to use the term "radar bombing."[34] That same year, Arnold also allowed crews to begin dropping incendiary bombs, which could yield more damage and required less accuracy. At this point, Biddle argues, the USAAF was

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[33] Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 224.
[34] Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 228.

essentially resorting to the same indiscriminate bombing approach the British were using, which the Americans had initially rejected.[35]

The British discourse on bombing is worth mentioning because it highlights the similarities and differences between the two strategic cultures. Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, the commander of British Bomber Command, had come to believe that bombing cities was superior to the "panacea approaches" of trying to target specific nodes of the enemy's war-making industry. The British, who had already been bombing the Germans for two years, were not on a "lower road" compared to the "high road" the Americans sought through HAPDB; rather, they were merely further along the same road, heading towards the same extreme reality. Because of this head start, or perhaps due to their closer proximity to the bombing, the British public would eventually come to see the indiscriminate bombing as unjustified and immoral. A public opinion poll showed less than 45% of Londoners approved of the bombings.[36]

Once the USAAF abandoned HAPDB, it became easy to rationalize indiscriminate bombing because extreme realities are guided by the logic of necessity. The nadir of this extreme reality, in the European theater, occurred in February 1945. With Germany on the verge of defeat, nearly a thousand bombers struck the city of Dresden with a mixture of high explosives and incendiary bombs. Biddle describes the attack as routine and unexceptional because there was nothing unique or unusual in the planning of it because by that point, strategic bombing had metastasized into an extreme reality, free from any of the original values and beliefs that had restricted and guided the principles of HAPDB. The February attacks left 25,000 – 40,000 dead and the entire city in rubble despite providing very little strategic advantage. Historian Frederick Taylor concluded his study on the raid by writing, "Wild guesstimates –

[35] Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 229.
[36] Vera Brittain quoted in Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars, 255.*

especially those exploited for political gain – neither dignify nor do justice to what must count, by any standards, as one of the most terrible single actions of the Second World War."[37]

A similar evolution took place in the Pacific theater. The introduction of the vaunted B-29 Superfortress promised a return to HAPDB in the campaign against the Japanese mainland. The commander of XXI Bomber Command, Brigadier General Haywood Hansell, opposed indiscriminate fire bombing and instead implemented HAPDB raids against Japan beginning in November 1944.[38] After two months of poor results, Major General Curtis LeMay replaced Hansell. General LeMay quickly abandoned the HAPDB approach and adopted low-altitude, nighttime fire bombing raids against the Japanese cities.[39] By March, B-29s were dropping M-47 napalm-filled bombs and M-69 incendiary cluster bombs on top of Japanese cities. In one of the first raids, sixteen square miles of Tokyo were burned out and as many as 80,000 Japanese people were killed.[40] The nadir of this extreme reality in the Pacific theater occurred in August 1945, when the US dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In both theaters, military decision makers justified the bombing on the basis that it would hasten the end of the war and decrease the numbers needed for an invasion, thereby decreasing the overall number of lives lost. LeMay and Harris often made this moral, utilitarian argument and justified indiscriminate bombing as a means to a quicker end of the war. Michael Walzer writes, "The argument used between 1942 and 1945 in defense of [indiscriminate] bombing was utilitarian in

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[37] Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 509.
[38] Bill Yenne, *Hap Arnold: The General Who Invented the U.S. Air Force*, (Washington DC: Regnery History, 2013), 212-216.
[39] Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 266-267.
[40] Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 277.

character, its emphasis not on victory itself but on the time and price of victory."[41] Walzer's harsh criticism of this argument is that the assumption of "unconditional surrender" was never questioned by the military's senior decision makers or US political leaders. Did Germany and Japan have to be completely defeated to the point of unconditional surrender? Because it was assumed that unconditional surrender was a requirement, it was easy for these leaders to allow strategic bombing to morph into indiscriminate bombing because they assumed the only alternative was a dangerous, costly, and lengthy invasion. Therefore, while LeMay and Harris argued the ends justified the means, Walzer argued the ends themselves were never justified.

World War II Medals

By turning now to look at military medals, it is possible to assess the truthfulness of the beliefs behind strategic bombing. The awarding of medals to bomber crews for indiscriminate bombing might suggest that bombing was in line with American values and beliefs. Conversely, the denial of such awards might suggest the opposite. It is important to note that this assessment does not support any argument over the morality of bombing. The point is not to determine if bombing was right or wrong. Rather, it simply assesses whether Americans viewed the bombing as in line with its values and beliefs. As Walzer puts it, "strategy, like morality, is a language of justification."[42]

The British public, largely unaware at first of the realities of fire bombing, initially accepted Harris' line of reasoning, or at least ignored its implications. Several British Lancaster bomber crewmembers won the VC early on in the war. However, by early 1945, as accounts of the fire

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[41] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 260.
[42] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 13.

raids began to surface, British attitudes shifted. Condemnations mounted and the public denounced firebombing as nothing more than terror bombing. Prime Minister Winston Churchill sought to downplay the bombing. He did not mention Bomber Command in his victory speech and barely mentioned it in his six-volume account of the war.[43] After the war, Harris and the men of Bomber Command were denied even a campaign medal. Harris believed the denial stemmed from a deep-seated bias in favor of ground and especially naval forces. Harris wrote:

> Whenever the armies succeed in doing anything more useful and spectacular than a retreat, a medal is immediately announced for them. When Bomber Command carries on the offensive alone for two years no medal is struck for them – and a share in one is only awarded as an afterthought for crews only.[44]

Harris' crews were not denied a medal for the parochial reasons he suspected; they were denied a medal because British citizens were ashamed of what they had allowed them to do. Walzer argues that Harris had a right to be angry. He notes, "they did what they were told to do and what their leaders thought was necessary and right, but they were dishonored for doing it, and it suddenly suggested that what was necessary and right was also wrong."[45] The British were guilty of allowing the pressures of war to push strategic bombing to an extreme reality and then disowning the aviators after the fact. Walzer concludes his argument by suggesting that when societies are hard-pressed in war and have to ask soldiers to do terrible things, they have a responsibility "to look for some way to reaffirm the values they have overthrown" once the fighting ends.[46]

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[43] Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 260.
[44] Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 261.
[45] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 325.
[46] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 325.

The US did not condemn indiscriminate bombing to the same degree as the British. American bomber crews were awarded campaign medals and other prestigious medals. On the European front, the European Africa Middle East (EAME) Campaign Medal was awarded to service members for participation in 17 different campaigns throughout the theater. Of these 17 campaigns, the Air Combat campaign covered operations from December 7, 1941 through September 2, 1945. Crews from Eighth Air Force and others were awarded the EAME. The Asiatic Campaign Medal covered 21 different campaigns throughout the Pacific theater. One of the 21 campaigns covered was the Air Offensive, Japan. The dates of coverage for this campaign, April 17, 1942 through September 2, 1945, corresponded to the first and last bombing operations against Japan: the Doolittle raid on Tokyo and the bombing attacks on Japan. Crewmembers from XX and XXI Bomber Commands were awarded the campaign medal for their participation in these attacks.

In addition to the campaign medals, Airmen were also awarded many prestigious medals. A total of 53 Medals of Honor were awarded for in-flight combat actions, which represented 12 percent of the total number awarded in World War II. By service, the Army Air Forces (AAF) earned 36, the Marines 11, and the Navy 6. Only 17 of the 53 were awarded to fighter pilots, a large shift in percentage from World War I. Of the 25 medals awarded in the European theater, 23 went to bomber crewmembers with only two to fighter pilots and zero going to troop carrier, liaison, or glider pilots. Barrett Tillman writes "The lesson could not be plainer: against 'the main enemy' in Europe, the AAF was about bombardment aviation."[47] In the Pacific theater, where naval aviation played a larger role, ten fighter pilots earned the top honor. Jimmy Doolittle was awarded the Medal of Honor for leading the Doolittle Raid

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[47] Tillman, *Above and Beyond*, 47-48.

on Tokyo. The B-17 would set a record that stands to this day as the aircraft that has produced the greatest number of Medal of Honor recipients.[48] The majority of these were awarded to pilots who remained on board a damaged aircraft in an effort to bring back crew members who were too wounded to bail out, and rarely for the bombing itself. Within the Army Air Forces, the citations for the 27 Medals of Honor awarded to bomber crews focused mainly on the bravery of the crew and gave little mention to the impact of mission. Conversely, the citations for the five fighter pilots all focused on the number of aircraft shot down by the pilot. Tillman writes, "It was service politics: the AAF lived and died by the self-defending bomber, and Medals of Honor to 'little friends' (meaning fighter pilots) might draw attention away from the 'big friends.' (meaning bomber crews)."[49]

The second highest honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, was also awarded for in-flight heroism. Paul Tibbets was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross immediately after he landed the *Enola Gay* – the aircraft that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan. His citation focuses on the significance of his accomplishment:

> He successfully dropped his bomb upon reaching the Target city, this single attack being the culmination of many months of tireless effort, training and organization unique in the Army Air Forces history, during which he constantly coped with new problems in precision bombing and engineering. The result of this attack was tremendous damage to the city of Hiroshima, contributing materially to the effectiveness of our strikes against the enemy.[50]

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[48] Tillman, *Above and Beyond*, 283.

[49] Tillman, *Above and Beyond, 95.*

[50] Hall of Valor Database, Military Times, 17 March 2017, http://valor. militarytimes.com/recipient.php?recipientid=33037

What is revealing about this citation is that it highlights the prevailing belief at the time that the nuclear weapon was merely another bomb, albeit more powerful. Even Churchill wrote before the bomb was dropped, "This new bomb is just going to be bigger than our present bombs. It involves no difference in the principles of war."[51] The fact that Tibbets was awarded a prestigious medal suggests that there was little concern within the Army Air Forces over the justification of dropping the nuclear bomb on Japan.

The two primary medals for aircrew, the DFC and the Air Medal, were awarded for valor or meritorious accomplishment. Many of the bombing missions were dangerous and the overall effect of any one bomb was undiscernible so the awarding of these medals tended to be automatic. The Army Air Forces awarded an estimated 126,000 DFCs while the Navy only awarded an estimated 21,000."[52] Estimates for the number of Air Medals awarded during World War II are as high as a million – though many of those were oak leaf clusters for subsequent awards. Once these medals became automatic, they lost most of their value as cultural artifacts. A crew was given credit for a combat mission regardless if they "shacked" their target or missed it by a mile. Therefore, a DFC or Air Medal was largely awarded just the same for HADPB as it was for indiscriminate firebombing. Had the decision been made not to award the medals for the indiscriminate bombing missions, then it would have strongly suggested that indiscriminate bombing contradicted American values. That was not the case.

The common perception following the war was that strategic bombing worked because the nuclear bombs forced Japan to surrender. A prevailing belief was that the atom bombs saved the loss of "1.5 million

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[51] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 95.
[52] Borch, *Medals for Soldiers and Airmen*, 85.

lives" that would have been lost had an invasion taken place.[53] The fact that the dropping of the bomb was celebrated by Americans, as seen by the awarding of a DSC to Colonel Tibbets, compared to the denial of any sort of medal for RAF Bomber Command speaks clearly to a fundamental difference between the two strategic cultures. On the one hand, the British did not believe the firebombing of Germany was justified because the country was essentially defeated and no longer a threat. The Americans, on the other hand, demanded the unconditional surrender of Japan, which created a false dilemma: if the US invaded, Japan would fight to the last man and millions more would possibly die in vain. Therefore, the US believed it was justified in its decision to drop the bomb, thereby ending the war quickly, with far fewer deaths.

This brings us back to where we began our discussion of American strategic culture during this period. American liberalism created a belief that wars should be fought only when some universal moral principle demanded it; and that a threat to democratic peace had to be thoroughly conquered and destroyed. This foundational assumption led many to believe that air power offered a suitable alternative to defeating an enemy compared to a dangerous, costly, drawn-out invasion. To quell their moral qualms over the killing of civilians, Americans put their faith into the technology of precision. When precision proved to be elusive in the harsh realities of war, the bombing discourse evolved into an extreme reality that focused solely on the logic of necessity. The extreme reality of indiscriminate bombing lacked the sort of moral discourse that could have restricted the use of force.

In the end, however, the perceived success of the nuclear bombs vindicated the beliefs so many had in strategic bombing's ability to defeat an enemy. Questions about the immorality of bombing were largely

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[53] Strachen, *The Changing Character of War*, 96.

dismissed. The awarding of military medals to bomber crews provides an honest expression of these beliefs. If the opposite had been true, had the Americans believed the bombing was unjustified, bomber crews would have been denied medals just as the British did to members of Bomber Command. In short, American democratic liberalism pitted two values against one another: the need to eradicate an evil enemy by securing a total victory against the need to maintain the moral high ground. In the end, the need to secure a total victory proved to be the stronger of the two.

In conclusion, American strategic culture during the interwar period was largely based on democratic liberal ideals. These beliefs turned any war into an ideological struggle to destroy some evil that threatened freedom. Given America's abundance of resources and strong industry, the country naturally turned to technology to provide a means of defeating an enemy without having to sacrifice a great deal of blood and treasure. Strategic bombing offered an appealing alternative discourse so long as the bombing was precise. The Army, however, was at odds with this discourse and the struggle between the two belief systems manifested itself in the flurry of new medals that were created during the interwar period. Once war broke out, strategic bombing was hard-pressed to live up to its idealized conceptions. As the war progressed and frustrations mounted, strategic bombing slid towards the extreme reality of indiscriminate bombing. This extreme reality culminated in the fire and nuclear bombing of German and Japanese cities. However, the perceived success of bombing justified the extreme reality for many Americans as seen by the fact that Airmen were awarded prestigious medals for their efforts.

Chapter 4

From Deterrence to Drones (1946 – Present):

A Refusal to Consider War

We never win, and we don't fight to win. We've either got to win, or don't fight it at all. When I was young, in high school and in college, everybody used to say we never lost a war. America never lost. Now, we never win a war.

President Trump
February 27, 2017

While it may seem odd to view the last 70 years of air power history as a monolithic era – a period that saw the introduction of ICBMs, stealth aircraft, precision bombs, drones and cyber weapons – the periods within this paper are defined by changes in American strategic culture. US strategic culture has remained largely unchanged since the end of World War II. In her book, *New and Old Wars*, Mary Kaldor suggests that America's rigid conception of war is an anachronism because it has remained static despite radical changes in the character of war. US strategic culture has maintained an idealized notion of warfare that believes warfare is a violent struggle between two or more nation-states over a geopolitical or ideological difference, the goal of war is often to capture and hold territory, and that battles are the decisive engagements of war. Air power's earliest enthusiasts often played to these beliefs by touting the decisiveness of strategic bombing. Kaldor refers to these assumptions about warfare as "old war."[1] Within US strategic culture, old war is often referred to as conventional war.

There is no universally accepted "conventional" style of warfare because it is entirely subjective; what may seem conventional to one

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[1] Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 1- 10.

society may seem unconventional to another. Many scholars focus on the means used to determine the degree of conventionality within a war. John Lynn did not explicitly define conventional warfare in his book, but a useful definition can be crafted using his model:

> When two societies have a similar strategic culture, they share the same implicit assumptions regarding the use of force; thus, in a war, they confront one another in a similar manner, agree upon the legitimacy of certain targets, tactics, weapons, and agree upon the outcome of the confrontation.[2]

Given this definition, conventional war is merely the existence of a similar paradigm of warfare between two warring societies. Kaldor goes so far as to argue there is a *Clausewitzian* paradigm that describes American (and Western) strategic culture. She writes, "Every society has its own characteristic form of war. What we tend to perceive as war, is, in fact, a specific phenomenon which took shape in Europe somewhere between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries…"[3]

Since 1945, Americans have developed a slew of terms to dismiss new forms of warfare as anomalies: *unconventional warfare*, *low-intensity conflict*, *irregular warfare*, *military operations other than war* (MOOTW), *hybrid warfare* and most recently *gray zone warfare*. The last term, gray zone warfare, is particularly interesting because it relates to the set of laws that govern the use of force in war. Laws, much like cultural artifacts, are a reflection of a society's values and beliefs. Within the US, the set of laws that relate to the use of force in war fall under Title 10 of the US Code. However, the reality of modern warfare has seen a remarkable rise in special and covert operations that fall outside of Title 10 and closer to Title 50 – the "gray zone" of the law. Despite whatever

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[2] This is the author's definition of "conventional warfare" based on John Lynn's model from his book, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture.*
[3] Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 15.

euphemism is popular at the time, these types of warfare have grown in prevalence since the end of World War II while the occurrence of conventional warfare has waned. However, as Kaldor argues, these "new wars" have struggled to replace the Clausewitzian paradigm. She concludes her chapter on old wars by saying "The irregular, informal wars of the second half of the twentieth century… represent the harbingers of the new forms of warfare… [and] the basis for new ways of socially organizing violence."[4]

One way of thinking about the relationship between American strategic culture and the reality of these new forms of warfare is a struggle between competing paradigms. Thomas Kuhn wrote about the evolution of paradigms in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*:

> The transition from a paradigm in crisis to a new one from which a new tradition of normal science can emerge is far from a cumulative process, one achieved by an articulation or extension of the old paradigm. Rather it is a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications. During the transition period, there will be a large but never complete overlap between the problems that can be solved by the old and by the new paradigm. But there will also be a decisive difference in the modes of solution. When the transition is complete, the profession will have changed its view of the field, its methods, and its goals.[5]

Kuhn's description is useful for understanding the competing relationship between America's Clausewitzian paradigm and the character of modern warfare. As Lynn writes, when the strategic culture is rigid and the reality is starkly different, societies tend to reject certain

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[4] Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 31.

[5] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 50th anniversary ed., (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 85.

styles of warfare by refusing to even consider them as legitimate forms of war – much in the way Kuhn argues scientists dismiss anomalies that do not fit within the prevailing scientific paradigm. Figure 4 below describes American strategic culture as operating under a Clausewitzian paradigm of conventional war; it uses Kaldor's term, old war, to summarize the strategic culture. The figure also shows the fourth type of rejection – refusal to consider war – to describe how the culture has responded to the changing character of war since 1945.

Figure 4: Refusal to Consider War
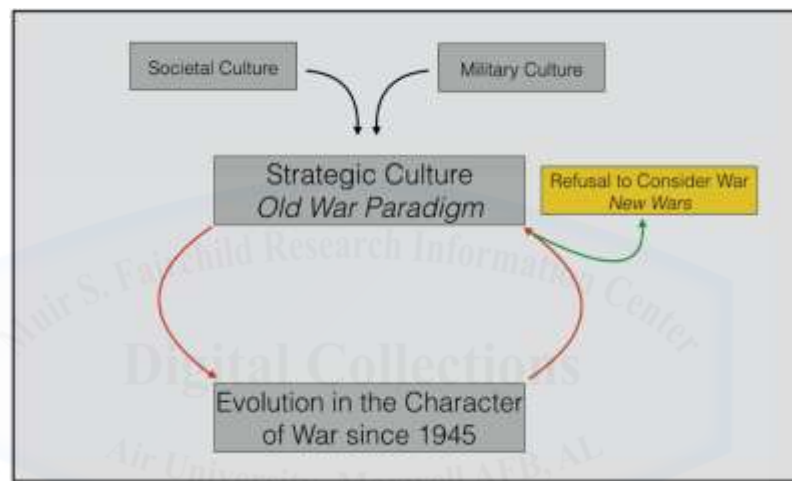
Source: Author's original work

Deterrence

At the beginning of the Cold War, the discourse over the Soviet threat intensified after the Soviets demonstrated their nuclear capabilities. Memories of Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor led many to fear a similar Soviet attack against the United States, and calls for a preventive war increased. However, a preventive war, according to military theorist Bernard Brodie, was only suitable when the enemy could not respond in kind and when total war was inevitable.[6] Brodie

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[6] Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 229.

argued in 1959 that nuclear weapons had radically upended the traditional belief of seeking total victory in war – a hallmark of the Clausewitzian paradigm. The awesome power of nuclear weapons meant that political leaders would increasingly *limit* their objectives in order to avoid the risk of a conflict escalating to an unlimited nuclear war.[7] As the United States' nuclear monopoly eroded, so too did the assurance that the United States could strike the Soviet Union and avoid a retaliatory attack. The risk of a nuclear war with the Soviets was too high to justify any attempt at defeating the Soviets in a general war. Rather, the focus shifted to deterring war.

Many Air Force leaders believed that being able to defeat the Soviet Union was the key to deterring war. To this end, the Air Force largely supported a deterrent strategy to the extent that it was also in line with its offensive strategy to "win" the war. The Air Force was far less enthusiastic about a deterrence-oriented strategy.[8] The Air Force had an institutional agenda, and belief, that a robust bomber force was the key to winning a general war against the Soviets and the service had secured the biggest piece of the budgetary pie for nearly a decade on the "selling power" of this belief.[9] The Air Force convinced policy makers that it needed a large bomber force to offset the Soviet superiority in ground forces during a general war. However, as Brodie argued, deterrence strategies did not require superiority but rather an ability to survive and retaliate after a surprise attack.[10] For this reason, creating a secure second-strike capability through long-range and sea-based missiles proved to be an incredibly effective deterrent, despite the Air Force's reluctance to embrace either.

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[7] Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, 312-313.
[8] Kaplan, *To Kill Nations*, 88.
[9] Kaplan, *To Kill Nations*, 139.
[10] Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, 303.

The Air Force's reluctance to embrace deterrence and its insistence on maintaining a war-winning strategy can be seen through the medals it created during the first two decades of the Cold War. The Air Force sought to reaffirm its beliefs by creating a slew of new combat medals from 1958 to 1965. The Air Force expressed its values by creating new medals that celebrated the type of war it wanted to fight – decisive air campaigns. The first was an Air Force version of the nation's highest award, the Medal of Honor.[11] The Air Force also created its own version of the second-highest medal, the Distinguished Service Cross, and aptly named it the Air Force Cross. The Air Force Cross sought to honor combat valor that was extraordinary but not quite deserving of the Medal of Honor. The first awarding of the Air Force Cross went to Major Rudolf Anderson, the only US service member to die in the Cuban Missile Crisis.[12] The Army's response in 1964 was the creation of the "V" device to attach to medals in order to denote medals earned for valor.[13] The proliferation of these combat medals was similar to the Army's attempt to reaffirm its values and beliefs by creating a spate of new medals during the interwar period. The creation of these new medals suggest that aviators believed the role of air power was to defeat an enemy through combat, even in the nuclear age. A 1954 report out of Air University concluded that total victory in the atomic age had not changed; the goal was still to compel the enemy to submit to American political will.[14]

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[11] Foster and Borts, *A Complete Guide to All United States Military Medals*, 67.

[12] Charles Cameron, "Alone, Unarmed and Unafraid Over Cuba: The Story of Major Rudolf Anderson Junior," (MA Thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2017), 97-98.

[13] Philip K. Robles, *United States Military Medals and Ribbons*, (Tokyo: Japan, Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1971.) 49.

[14] Edward Kaplan, *To Kill Nations: American Strategy in the Air-Atomic Age and the Rise of Mutually Assured Destruction*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2015), 86.

The lack of any new medals related to deterrence during the Cold War – a war that put deterrence on center stage – suggests that deterrence was not really considered on par with combat. The closest the Air Force came to honoring the importance of deterrence was through the creation of the Combat Readiness Medal. The original CRM was a short-lived medal, which sought to honor aircrew for any of the three conditions: serving within the threat envelope of enemy ground forces, serving as a missile operator, or for directly controlling an aircraft whose mission was to seek and destroy enemy targets. The original medal was given a high ranking, just below the Distinguished Flying Cross. Crews that operated and maintained ICBMs were initially eligible for the CRM. This meant that an aircrew member whose primary mission was deterrence was eligible for a medal that was on par with other prestigious combat medals. This would have indicated a major shift in Air Force culture. However, the criteria for the medal was quickly amended and its ranking lowered, suggesting that the prevailing discourse within the Air Force still refused to consider deterrence a valid form of warfare.[15]

Fifty years later, the Air Force finally created a medal to honor those that participate in the deterrence mission. The Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal was part of a series of reforms the Air Force took to overhaul its nuclear enterprise in the wake of several embarrassing mishaps. While a step in the right direction, albeit nearly five decades late, the medal was only a service level medal, which meant its ranking was well below combat medals. In fact, even the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal has a ranking above the Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal.

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[15] Foster and Borts, *A Complete Guide to All United States Military Medals*, 86.

Coercion

In addition to deterrence, coercion was another form of warfare that the Air Force dismissed as less than "real war" during the 1960s. Given the threat of nuclear escalation, many political leaders wanted to use military force in a more restricted fashion by limiting both objectives and means.[16] Many Air Force leaders reasoned that limited wars were not "real war," rather they were some sort of lesser conflict. To these airmen, their strategy for defeating the Soviets was more than enough to handle any "brush fire" war in some third-world country. The logic that a war-winning strategy could also successfully coerce in less intense conflicts led airmen to believe "the dog we keep to lick the cat can lick the kittens too."[17] According to Edward Kaplan, the Air Force argued three points regarding limited war: "the concept of stalemate was false and dangerous, while limited wars were unimportant and could be deterred or fought with general war forces."[18] The veracity of the airmen's conviction in strategic bombing "limited its validity and utility in other than general or total war between industrialized states."[19] Despite its dismissal of limited wars, the Air Force found itself fighting two limited wars in Southeast Asia after World War II.

During the Korean War, air power was used as a coercive instrument of armed diplomacy. A new approach, "air pressure strategy," was implemented in the second year of the war.[20] The strategy sought to coerce the Chinese by hitting high-value targets with the hope of forcing them into making concessions. The strategy required air power to be

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[16] Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, ix.
[17] Kaplan, *To Kill Nations*, 135.
[18] Kaplan, *To Kill Nations*, 136.
[19] James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 270.
[20] Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea*, 114.

restricted and applied incrementally. The Air Force resisted fighting with such restrictions. In his testimony to the Senate, Major General O'Donnell implied that the Korean War was not the type of conflict the US Air Force wanted to fight. He said, "This is a rather bizarre war out there and I think we can learn an awful lot of bad habits in it."[21] No new medal was created to honor airmen for their role in the air pressure strategy.

The first new combat medal created after World War II was the Korean Service Medal, instituted in 1950. The criteria for the medal required a service member to be present in a geographically designated combat zone for 30 consecutive days or 60 non-consecutive days. The criteria listed 20 different campaigns that constituted combat.[22] Of the 131 Medals of Honor awarded for the Korean War, six were for airmen: four Air Force and two Navy. Four of the six recipients flew fighters, reflecting the tactical nature of the war.[23] While there is no account of the number of Purple Hearts awarded for aviation, the Air Force awarded only 368 Purple Hearts out of the total 103,000 awarded by the DoD.[24]

Unlike military leaders who resisted classifying limited wars as "real war," civilian leaders increasingly linked air power to coercive diplomacy. The strategy of "gradual response" failed to coerce in large part due to the airmen's misunderstanding of what type of war they were fighting. In the south, they were fighting a guerilla war. In this type of war, bombing only galvanized resistance and was counterproductive. In the North, the Air Force tried to fight a conventional war using the dogma of strategic bombing against industrial targets. However, the North

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[21] Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea*, 1.
[22] Foster and Borts, *A Complete Guide to All United States Military Medals*, 102.
[23] Tillman, *Above and Beyond*, 196.
[24] Borch and Brown, *The Purple Heart*, 163.

lacked any meaningful industry and the South was not yet dependent on the North for supplies.[25]

The Air Force created the Vietnam Service Medal in 1965 and designated 17 campaigns that qualified for the medal.[26] In total, 240 Medals of Honor were awarded during Vietnam and aviation-related medals accounted for 19: ten Air Force, six Army, two Navy, and one Marine.[27] The Army awarded the Distinguished Service Cross 1,066 times while the Air Force's new version of the same medal, the Air Force Cross, was awarded only 180 times.[28] Over 153,000 Purple Hearts were awarded for the Vietnam War. Again, there is no way to differentiate those that were received for injuries incurred while flying, but the Air Force accounted for only 931 of the total.[29]

Idealized Warfare

Since World War II, there has been one conflict in particular where the reality matched the prevailing discourse – the Gulf War of 1991. The common excuse from aviators regarding air power's shortcomings during the wars in Korea and Vietnam was to blame the context of the wars, rather than to question critically their beliefs in strategic bombing. When aviators did reflect on the lessons learned from Korea and Vietnam, they focused on the aspects that conformed to their pre-existing beliefs. They focused on air-to-air combat and the bombing of industrial targets rather than acknowledge air power's struggle to coerce successfully in an

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[25] Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 118.
[26] Foster and Borts, *A Complete Guide to All United States Military Medals*, 105.
[27] Tillman, *Above and Beyond*, 215.
[28] Borch, *Medals for Soldiers and Airmen*, 42.
[29] Borch and Brown, *The Purple Heart*, 167.

environment with political restraints.[30] In his master's thesis, Joseph Doyle argued that the strength of this conviction led aviators to focus on the Yom Kippur War between Israel and the Arab states as proof that the Air Force's conception of warfare was still valid, rather than accept the harsh lessons learned from the Korean and Vietnam wars. Doyle wrote:

> The Yom Kippur War therefore represented an exemplar and affirming conflict fitted to American conceptions of war. Arab and Israeli forces engaged in 'profoundly regular' battles that constituted a kind of Second World War redux, on a miniature geographical scale. The conflict was impactful in its timing. It occurred immediately after the end of an 'uncomfortable' mismatch between the preferred American mode of conflict and an incompatible context in Vietnam.[31]

The high intensity, short duration, and decisive outcome of the Yom Kippur War was also a better match to America's strategic culture compared to the drawn-out and inconclusive wars in Korea and Vietnam. As a result, aviators pointed to the character of the Yom Kippur War as a justification for their idealized beliefs on how an air war should be waged in future conflicts.

The broader military discourse on war could be seen in the creation of Air-Land Battle doctrine, which envisioned a high-end fight against Soviet forces. To overcome the Soviets' superior number of forces, Americans would rely on technology to provide an advantage. John Warden's idea of simultaneously bombing the enemy's "centers of gravity" in order to achieve a decisive victory fit well within the Clausewitzian paradigm. The context of the Gulf War was a perfect match to American strategic culture. In fact, the ground war lasted only

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[30] Joseph S. Doyle, "The Yom Kippur War and the Shaping of the United States Air Force," (MA Thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2016), 102.
[31] Doyle, "The Yom Kippur, 101.

four days because of the enormous success air power had against Iraq's army as it fled up the infamous "Highway of Death."

The brevity of the ground offensive, however, resulted in very few combat medals being awarded. In fact, the Gulf War was the first war since the 1860s to not have a single recipient of the Medal of Honor. The Army did not award a single Distinguished Service Medal and only two Air Force Crosses were awarded.[32] Even the Purple Heart saw a drastic reduction in the numbers; 590 were awarded and the Air Force accounted for only 30. The reason is obvious – in order to earn the nation's highest honors, a service member must demonstrate valor, courage, and bravery in battle. However, since the Gulf War, the number of battles has waned, along with the number of opportunities (and need) for such courageous acts to occur – despite a prolific use of military force.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, some scholars argued air power had made war "immaculate."[33] Air power enabled the US to apply force without actually putting soldiers at risk. Benjamin Lambeth of RAND argued air power's greatest advancement during the last decade of the 20th century was its newfound ability to defeat an enemy's ground forces.[34] Air power, according to Lambeth, essentially replaced traditional combat. He wrote in 2000:

> Airmen should strive to articulate a more contemporaneous
> sense of what it means to "win" in today's joint operations…
> This canonical image of victory entails defeating an enemy's

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[32] U.S. Army Distinguished Service Cross, http://valor.defense.gov/ Recipients/Army-Distinguished-Service-Cross-Recipients/
[33] see Stephen D. Wrage, ed, *Immaculate Warfare: Participants Reflect on the Air Campaigns Over Kosovo and Afghanistan*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).
[34] Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Air Power*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 312.

ground forces in detail, occupying his territory, and controlling his population on an open-ended basis.[35]

The awarding of combat medals for valor, bravery, and heroism continued to decrease after the Gulf War because the character of modern war had changed. Fewer battles meant soldiers had fewer opportunities to display their valor. To illustrate this remarkable trend, consider the 3,400 Medals of Honor that have been awarded during the medal's 156-year history; during the last 40 years, 19 have been awarded.[36] After awarding 1,066 Distinguished Service Crosses to soldiers for fighting in the Vietnam War, the Army has awarded 30 DSCs since 1975.[37] Even the Air Force has had fewer reasons to recognize valor. After bestowing the Air Force Cross 180 times for actions related to the Vietnam War, the medal has only been since awarded 12 times.[38] This trend exists for other combat medals related to valor.

Combat has become so rare, that in March 2007, the Air Force created the Combat Action Medal to recognize any Air Force member that experienced combat. The criteria for the medal honored any airman who participated in combat, either on the ground or in the air. The medal did not honor valor, rather, simply being present and in danger during combat. Despite being a combat medal, it was given a position below several other non-combat related medals. The Combat Action Medal was ranked below the Air Force Commendation Medal.[39]

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[35] Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Air Power*, 312.
[36] These include 2 for Somalia, 13 for the war in Afghanistan, and 4 for the second war in Iraq.
[37] U.S. Army Distinguished Service Cross, Afghanistan War, 2001 – Present and Iraq War, 2003 – 2011. http://valor.defense.gov/Recipients /Army-Distinguished-Service-Cross-Recipients/
[38] U.S. Air Force: Air Force Cross Recipients, http://valor.defense.gov/ Recipients/Air-Force-Air-Force-Cross-Recipients/
[39] Air Force Combat Action Medal, Fact Sheet, published 4 August 2010, http://www.afpc.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/421918/ air-force-combat-action-medal/

As air power evolved, it made traditional combat (within the Clausewitzian paradigm) far less common. One aspect of American strategic culture is casualty aversion and air power certainly supports that belief. Another equally important aspect of America's strategic culture is its need to honor its warriors. Advances in air power, however, are pitting these two values against each other.

Persistent War

The last time the United States officially declared war was June 5, 1942, against the nation of Bulgaria. Since that last declaration, the US has increasingly used force in many ways that do fit within the Clausewitzian paradigm of conventional war. Force is no longer used simply to defeat an enemy on the battlefield; it is used as a means towards a variety of ends: deterrence, coercion, subversion, sabotage, espionage, counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and policing are just a few examples of the many uses of force that are often used today outside of the context of conventional war. Today, the United States is in a "constant state of conflict among nations that rarely gets to open warfare."[40] This type of persistent war appears at odds with the Clausewitzian paradigm of American strategic culture; a culture that prefers to declare war, fight a decisive battle, win, honor its heroes, and return to a normal state of peace. Author Rosa Brooks argued in 2016, "American political culture regards war as an occasional but regrettable necessity, at best, and more often as a tragic and avoidable failure."[41]

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[40] Joel Brenner, quoted in P.W. Singer and Allan Friedman, *Cybersecurity and Cyberwar: What Everyone Needs to Know,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 121.
[41] Rosa Brooks, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 348.

However, America's idealized notion of warfare is seldom the reality. Instead, the reality has been a significant increase in the use of special operations forces, drones, cyber, and other non-traditional uses of force that reflect the persistent state of war the US has endured since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. When Leon Panetta took over the CIA in 2009, he was "shocked to learn during his initial briefings for the CIA job that he would be, in effect, a military commander for a secret war."[42] These covert activities are often said to fall along a spectrum of conflict that is short of war. In essence, American strategic culture has refused to consider these modern uses of force as "real war."

The refusal to consider the character of modern warfare as "real war" could be seen in the universally negative reaction to the Distinguished Warfare Medal (DWM) in 2013. The amount of anxiety and vitriol the DWM produced, from veterans, service members, and the public, suggest that something about that medal struck a nerve. Veterans groups, including the Vietnam Veterans, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars took issue over the medal's precedence over other combat medals. John Rowan, the president of the Vietnam Veterans of America, released a statement:

> While we welcome the introduction of the new Distinguished Warfare Medal, we have serious disagreement with its ranking above both the Bronze Star for Valor and the Purple Heart... Sitting in front of a computer monitor, engaging in remote-control combat, simply does not compare to facing a real enemy shooting at you.[43]

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[42] Mark Mazzetti, *The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 221.
[43] Vietnam Veterans of America, Press Release, "The Distinguished Warfare Medal: Good Idea, Wrong Placement," No 13-3 (Febuary 20, 2013), http://archive.vva.org/PressReleases/2013/pr13-003.html

The veterans' response to the medal was similar to the Army's response to new medals for air power created during the inter-war period. Both groups sought to reaffirm their values and beliefs after a technological change occurred in the character of warfare.

Within the military, service members were quick to disparage the new medal as well. The satirical website Duffel Blog, popular among service members, posted four articles about the DWM in two months. One article titled "Drone Pilot to Receive First Air Force Medal of Honor Since Vietnam" was published before the DWM was proposed but went viral in the week after, being shared over 5,000 times on social media websites.[44] The comments section below the article served as a public forum for service members to share their thoughts on the medal. Many of the comments were disparaging towards drone and cyber operators. Some of the more humorous nicknames for the DWM included "the Chair-Borne Medal," "the Nintendo Medal," "the Distant Warfare Medal," and "the Purple Buttocks."

The public was also outraged by the medal, but for a wider variety of reasons. Some were against the medal because it honored the act of drone warfare, which they considered unscrupulous. Others simply believed that drone and cyber operations did not constitute combat, and therefore did not justify the medal's creation or precedence. A petition through the White House's "We the People – Your Voice in our Government" quickly attracted thousands of signatures. Part of the petition read:

> Under no circumstance should a medal that is designed to honor a pilot (who) is controlling a drone via remote control, thousands of miles away from the theater of operation, rank above a medal that involves a soldier being in the line of fire

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[44] G-Had, "Drone Pilot to Receive First Air Force Medal of Honor Since Vietnam," *Duffleblog,* 4 December 2012. http://www.duffelblog.com /2016/08/drone-sent-eo-incinerating-mostly-darker-skinned-militants/

on the ground. This is an injustice to those who have served and risked their lives and this should not be allowed to move forward as planned.[45]

The wording of the petition suggests that the public viewed the medal as detracting from the value of medals that sought to honor the danger of serving in combat.

Three weeks after the DWM's proposal, the new Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel attempted to defend the medal. In a response to Senator Patrick Toomey's criticisms of the medal's ranking, Secretary Hagel wrote:

> Since September 11, 2001, technological advancements have, in some cases, dramatically changed how we conduct and support combat and other military operations... The DWM reflects the evolving nature of warfare... There are numerous existing medals that may be awarded for non-valorous achievements, which are higher in precedence than the Bronze Star Medal... Only the Medal of Honor, Service Crosses, and Silver Star Medal are awarded solely for combat valor and each remains higher in precedence than the DWM.[46]

The following week, members of Congress took to the floor to demonstrate their disapproval of the medal. Representative Duncan Hunter proposed H.R.833, a bill to raise the Purple Heart's placement above the DWM. The bill attracted 130 cosponsors and had bipartisan support in the House of Representatives.[47] In the Senate, Senator Jon

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[45] Andrew Tilghman, "Petition asks for change to new drone medal" *Military Times*, 18 February 2013, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/02/18/drone-pilot-new-medal/1928833/
[46] Charles Hagel, Secretary of Defense, memorandum, 7 March 2013, https://www.stripes.com/polopoly_fs/1.211391.1363038015!/menu/standard/file/Hagel%20Drone%20Medal.pdf
[47] House, A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to require that the Purple Heart occupy a position of precedence above the new Distinguished Warfare Medal, H.R.833, 113th Cong, 2013.

Tester introduced a similar bill, S.470, along with 32 cosponsors.[48] Representative Hunter, a veteran, used the spotlight of the bill to voice his concerns:

> The (Distinguished Warfare Medal) is widely viewed as an award that undermines all other valor awards and the reverence for service members who face the dangers of direct combat. It's a fact that those who are off the battlefield do not experience the same risks. Pretending they do devalues the courageous and selfless actions of others, who, during combat, do the unthinkable or show a willingness to sacrifice their own lives... Acts of valor in Iraq and Afghanistan have been underrepresented, with only 11 Medals of Honor awarded.[49]

With the pressure from Congress mounting, Secretary Hagel felt compelled to respond. Just a week after defending the medal to Senator Toomey, Secretary Hagel order the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review the medal. On April 15, 2013, just two months after the DWM was proposed, Secretary Hagel announced the repeal of the medal. Secretary Hagel wrote:

> While the review confirmed the need to ensure such recognition, it found that misconceptions regarding the precedence of the award were distracting from its original purpose... The Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the concurrence of the service secretaries, have recommended the creation of a new distinguishing device that can be affixed to existing medals to recognize the extraordinary actions of this small number of men and women. I agree with the Joint Chiefs' findings, and have directed the creation of a distinguishing device instead of a separate medal.[50]

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[48] Senate, A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to require that the Purple Heart occupy a position of precedence above the new Distinguished Warfare Medal, S.470, 113th Cong, 2013.
[49] Congressman Duncan Hunter, "Hunter responds to DoD drone medal review," Press Release, 14 March, 2013, https://hunter.house.gov/press-release/hunter-responds-dod-drone-medal-review
[50] Hagel, memo, 15 April 2013.

Following the repeal of the DWM in April of 2013, the DoD undertook a sweeping review of its entire medal process. In 2016, the Pentagon unveiled two new devices that could be attached to a medal, the "R" and "C" devices. The criteria for the devices and the medals to which they could be attached were promulgated with the release of DoD Instruction 1348.33 on March 31, 2017.

The "R" device represented the replacement of the DWM. The criteria for the device reads:

> The "R" device is placed on multi-purpose Personal Military Decorations (PMDs) to denote the decoration was awarded for the direct hands-on employment of a weapon system or other warfighting activities that had a direct and immediate impact on a combat operation or other military operation... [but] that did not expose the individual to hostile action, or place him or her at significant risk of exposure to hostile action.[51]

The "R" device can be attached to eight different meritorious medals. These medals include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal, and the Joint Service Commendation Medal. The "R" device cannot, however, be attached to the Distinguished Flying Cross or Air Medal.

The "C" device was created to honor achievement under "combat conditions." The purpose of the device was to distinguish service members that served in a hostile environment but did not demonstrate valor. The criteria states that the service member must have been in significant risk of exposure to hostile action. The intent of the device is to be an "end of tour" award for a combat deployment. The "C" device can

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[51] DoD Instruction 1348.33, "DoD Military Decoration and Awards Program," 21 December 2016, 23.

be attached to ten different meritorious medals. The "C" device cannot, however, be attached to the Bronze Star.[52]

The "V" device, originally created in 1964, continued to honor valor for awards less than the Medal of Honor or Silver Star. The device can only be worn on medals that recognize valor, so the device is merely a way of distinguishing medals with dual-criteria: the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Air Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal and service-specific Commendation Medals. The new policy removed authorization for the "V" device to be worn on the Legion of Merit and the service-specific Achievement Medals.[53]

What was most surprising about the DoD's release of Instruction 1348.33 in the spring of 2017 is what did not happen – there was no controversy. The changes represented one of the most sweeping overhauls of the military's medal system since the system was first created in 1918. The document addressed the ambiguity surrounding several controversial medals by providing clearer guidance. Furthermore, the creation of the devices provided a means of distinguishing service members that have served in combat (C device), from those that have displayed valor in combat (V device), and from those that have directly contributed to combat (R device). Despite the significance of these changes, the public's reaction was rather muted in the weeks that followed at the time of this writing. The absence of controversy suggests American strategic culture is beginning to embrace the realities of modern warfare.

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[52] DoD Instruction 1348.33, "DoD Military Decoration and Awards Program," 22.
[53] DoD Instruction 1348.33, "DoD Military Decoration and Awards Program," 13.

Conclusion:
American Strategic Culture & Air Power

Summary

Throughout the twentieth century, the character of warfare fundamentally changed in part to advances in air power. By focusing on the evolution of military medals during the same period, this paper showed that American strategic culture has at times both accepted and rejected air power as an idealized form of warfare. Throughout air power's history, elements of all four of Lynn's rejections were present at some point.

In World War I, the harsh reality of trench warfare was drastically at odds with the strategic culture. To help cope with this difference, many societies created a more perfected reality in the skies above the battlefield. Fighter pilots were heralded as the "knights of the air" and societies adorned their heroes with prestigious medals. The fact that fighter pilots were given far more honors than bomber or reconnaissance pilots suggest that societies tend to honor valor in combat more than achievement.

During the interwar period, America's discourse on war was sharply divided between the Army and Army Air Forces. The Army wanted to reaffirm its values and beliefs in the importance of valor in combat by creating a spate of new medals. The Army Air Forces pushed for the creation of new medals to reaffirm its faith in an alternative discourse – strategic bombing. During World War II, the alternative discourse represented by strategic bombing morphed into an extreme reality – indiscriminate bombing. This extreme reality justified the firebombing of Germany and Japan and culminated in the dropping of two nuclear bombs on Japan.

After World War II, American strategic culture held on to a Clausewitzian paradigm despite radical changes in the character of warfare. The Air Force wanted to use air power to defeat an enemy while political leaders instead sought to use the threat of air power to deter war. In addition to deterrence, air power was increasingly used as a means of coercion. The Air Force viewed Korea and Vietnam as anomalies; both were wars whose context prevented the "correct" application of air power. The Air Force did not learn many lessons from those wars because the service refused to consider them "real war." The Air Force, however, did focus on the Yom Kippur War because its character closely matched the Air Force's idealized conception of warfare.

The closest any American war has come to its idealized conception was in 1991. The Gulf War was exactly the kind of war the Air Force wanted to fight. Advances in air power, however, made combat less prevalent. The Gulf War saw a sharp reduction in the awarding of prestigious combat medals. This trend continued into the twenty-first century despite the fact that America was in a state of persistent war. In 2017, in response to the controversy surrounding the DWM, the DoD overhauled the military's system of awarding medals. The benign response to these changes suggested that the discourse on war was beginning finally to show signs of accepting the realities of modern warfare.

Implications

The controversy over the DWM was supposedly related to the medal's ranking above the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. However, the DWM was not the first or only non-combat medal to outrank those two medals. Furthermore, if the controversy was truly over the medal's ranking, why was it not simply given a new position below the Purple Heart? Perhaps the whirlwind of the controversy made any milder

response less politically appealing. Nonetheless, something about the DWM struck a sensitive nerve within American society. The argument over the medal's ranking may have been a red herring – a distraction that sought to shift the focus away from the real issue – the moral implications of drone and cyber warfare.

According to Brooks, societies develop customs, rituals, and artifacts to reinforce the categorizations that give moral meaning to killing. If one person kills another, society dictates how to regard the killing. If the killing occurs during war, it is not only justified but also heroic. If the killing does not occur during war, the act will be condemned. She writes, "we plant morals flags... we tell people how we want them to behave, and where we want our society to go."[1] Military medals are cultural artifacts and definitely serve as a type of "moral flag" for service members.

Throughout air power's history, technology has increasingly made drawing a clear line between war and peace more difficult. The controversy surrounding the DWM highlighted this problem. Consider the following hypothetical scenario: A crew flies a stealth aircraft into hostile territory and bombs a nuclear reactor that is suspected of producing weapon-grade uranium. The bombs destroy the reactor but unfortunately kill a dozen scientists in the process. If the crew is awarded a prestigious medal, it implicitly validates the killing as an act of war. Now consider a computer programmer that is able to insert a virus into the reactor's control system that causes it to speed up and ultimately explode, killing the same 12 scientists. It is less likely that the programmer will be awarded a prestigious medal, and this denial implicitly condemns the killing because inserting the virus did not constitute "real war."

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[1] Brooks, *How Everything Became War*, 347.

The only difference between these two scenarios are the means used and the degree of risk. The question then becomes, should a combat medal focus solely on the risk associated with the means used or focus on the ends achieved, regardless of the degree of risk? Is being physically present on the battlefield more important than the impact a person has on the battlefield? This is the type of philosophical question Dave Blair examined in his 2012 article, "Ten Thousand Feet and Ten Thousand Miles."[2] In it, he argued that throughout history, technology has continuously redefined the boundaries of the battlefield. Blair presented a prudent distinction between combat risk and combat responsibility, combat responsibility being when an individual's "choices may directly result in the saving of friendly lives or the taking of enemy lives."[3] Historically, combat responsibility assumed a degree of combat risk - in order to have an impact on the battlefield, one had to be present and thus at risk. Blair noted that archers, submariners, and aircrew have all been subjected to claims that they were too far removed from the battlefield to warrant recognition despite having a profound impact on the battlefield. The creation of devices for military medals tries to square the differences over the means used compared to the degree of risk.

The delineations between war and peace, and between combat and non-combat, are even more important when service members are asked to kill on behalf of society, but are otherwise told that their killing does not constitute "real war." Brooks argued that societies always try to define what war is and what war is not. She gives an example of Navajo warriors, who drew a line in the sand on the way home from battle in order to provide a spatial boundary between war and peace.[4] This

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[2] Dave Blair, "Ten Thousand Feet and Ten Thousand Miles: Reconciling Our Air Force Culture to Remotely Piloted Aircraft and the New Nature of Aerial Combat," *Air & Space Power Journal, (*May-June 2012).
[3] Blair, "Ten Thousand Feet and Ten Thousand Miles," 64.
[4] Brooks, *How Everything Became War*, 9.

boundary was important for differentiating killing as a legitimate act in a time of war from what would otherwise constitute murder. As the line between war and peace blurs, the use of violence becomes morally hazardous. Kaldor writes, "there is a thin dividing line between socially acceptable killing and what is ostracized by society."[5] Today, the awarding of combat medals represents a way of drawing these boundaries between what is and what is not considered war.

Within the US, there is very little agreement on where the line between war and not war should be drawn. While a frank and honest discussion over *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* is desperately needed, it is difficult to have because policy makers and senior leaders have hidden many of the details behind walls of secrecy. Rather than discuss the moral hazards of using force to carry out questionable acts, such as extrajudicial killings, the debate has been muffled by a lack of transparency. The absence of this discourse has left society ill prepared to confront what uses of force it does and does not consider as legitimate and justified. On the one hand, society determines the legitimacy of killing as a justifiable act of war. On the other hand, society has a responsibility, regardless of how morally uncomfortable it may be, to clearly define what constitutes an act of war because it is this boundary that separates the justified act of killing in war from what is otherwise murder.

In 2013, American society was clearly uncomfortable with the idea of honoring drone and cyber operators. The DWM may have shined a light in a corner of American strategic culture that many would otherwise like to keep in the dark. The reaction to the DWM was eerily similar to the British reaction to honoring the men of Bomber Command after World War II. Walzer ends his book on the morality of warfare by examining the shaming of Bomber Harris and his men. His words of

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[5] Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 19.

caution could have been written in the spring of 2013 during the height of the DWM controversy:

> They did what they were told to do and what their leaders thought was necessary and right, but they were dishonored for doing it, and it is suddenly suggested (what else can the dishonor mean?) that what was necessary and right was also wrong...
>
> It amounts to this: that a nation fighting a just war, when it is desperate and survival itself is at risk, must use unscrupulous or morally ignorant soldiers; and as soon as their usefulness is past, it must disown them.
>
> I would rather say something else: that decent men and women, hard-pressed in war, must sometimes do terrible things, and then they themselves have to look for some way to reaffirm the values they have overthrown.
>
> But the first statement is probably the more realistic one...[6]

On February 26, 2013, nearly seventy years to the date after the raid on Dresden, the Ministry of Defense in Great Britain quietly unveiled a new device – not a medal – to recognize the men of Bomber Command. The few surviving veterans that were eligible for the award saw it for what it was: society trying to reconcile the immorality of what it had asked these men to do during the war. One of the remaining survivors, George "Johny" Johnson, 91, said, "If they were going to recognize us properly, I think it should have been a medal, not a clasp [device]."[7]

Today, the honoring of drone and cyber operators is a moral imperative. While American strategic culture may wish to reject the difficult realities of modern warfare, it cannot afford to do so. These

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[6] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 325-326.

[7] Jasper Copping, "Bomber Command veterans boycotting 'insulting' award," *The Telegraph*, (7May 2013), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/britain-at-war/10064299/Bomber-Command-veterans-boycotting-insulting-award.html

operators are being asked to fight the nation's wars. How can society ask a service member to kill while simultaneously conveying that their act of killing does not constitute "real war?" Doing so places the full weight of the moral burden on the back of the service member, turning our surrogate soldiers into nothing more than moral scapegoats.

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