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GENERAL MERRILL A. MCPEAK: AN EFFECTIVE  
CHANGE AGENT?

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Curriculum Requirements

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## *Preface*

This report originated from a paper I did about General McPeak for a “Leadership in the 21st Century” class. Whenever General McPeak’s name is mentioned to Air Force people an immediate response is given—be it good or bad. I wanted to take a closer look at what happened during General McPeak’s tenure. In studying his successes and near-successes, I realized organizational change was the foundational issue. This prompted a closer look at how a change agent should implement change and compare it to how General McPeak handled the task.

My academic advisor, Colonel Gail Arnott, was instrumental in guiding and prodding me through this study. He provided me valuable resources for background material and helped me focus my research as I was trying to go in different directions. I also would like to thank General McPeak for letting me interview him and being so candid. This first hand information helped me better understand why many things were done. I hope this report will help us understand why some changes were made. More importantly though, my wish is for us to be better leaders and change agents in our future jobs.

### *Abstract*

This report explored the concept of organizational change during General Merrill A. McPeak's tenure as Chief of Staff of the Air Force. General McPeak's term has been characterized as the most turbulent and challenging period in the history of the U.S. Air Force. This effort examined General McPeak's agenda and the methods he used in achieving his agenda. It also looks at the role he played as a change agent. Current models of how organizational change should be implemented are compared to how General McPeak implemented his organizational change.

The research on change was gathered through numerous books on organizational change theory. General McPeak's tenure was evaluated through his book, *Selected Works 1990-1994*, his end-of-tour interview, and a personnel interview with General McPeak.

General McPeak articulated a vision and agenda early in his tenure to keep the Air Force a premiere organization. The agenda involved massive change including reorganizing the Air Force at all levels from headquarters thru major commands to squadrons. He tried to make operations the focal point of the Air Force, and he instituted quality into the Air Force's framework. His most notorious changes included a new uniform and a heritage program that involved renumbering many organizations.

General McPeak's change produced scar tissue for both himself and the Air Force. His leadership and communications style were abrupt and forceful and based on a

demanding timeline. Overall his tenure and ability to implement large organizational change should be rated a success.



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

General Merrill A. “Tony” McPeak became Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force on 27 October 1990. His time as Chief was best illustrated during the reading of his citation for the Distinguished Service Medal at his retirement ceremony. The narrator announced the medal was being given to General McPeak for his leadership during “the most turbulent and challenging period in the history of the U.S. Air Force.”<sup>1</sup> This turbulence was caused by change. General McPeak, in an Airpower Dining-In at Maxwell Air Force Base in 1992, described his early tenure by saying, “It can be argued with much justification that the team of Rice and McPeak has further confused the matter. Our tenure has been characterized by change—I hope constructive change. (Others might call it turmoil, even confusion!)”<sup>2</sup>

Many scholars have written about organizational change and it is a subject of numerous college courses. There are universities that have degree programs dedicated to organizational change. Implementing change effectively in a large organization is a difficult process and one that General McPeak took on during his tenure as chief of staff of the Air Force. This paper will examine the agenda General McPeak chose and the methods he used in achieving his agenda. It will also examine the role of a change agent and how General McPeak fulfilled that role. Could General McPeak’s tenure been

different with the medal presentation describing the most dynamic and “harmonious” time in Air Force history?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Compart, “McPeak steps down after serving 37 years,” *Air Force Times*, Nov 7 ‘94, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Merrill A. McPeak, *Selected Works 1990-1994*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, August 1995), 153-154.

## Chapter 2

### Background

General McPeak entered the Air Force in November 1957 after earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree in economics from San Diego State College. After pilot training he was selected to fly fighter aircraft. One of the highlights of General McPeak's career was his tour with the Air Force's Thunderbirds, flying the solo position. General McPeak flew fighter aircraft throughout his career. He was selected to command at several different levels from squadron, group, wing, numbered air force, to command of Pacific Air Force (PACAF). He was one of three finalists for the Air Force Chief of Staff position in 1990, when General Mike Dugan was selected.<sup>1</sup> General McPeak was picked to become the Commander of Tactical Air Command (TAC). In September 1990, one week after his selection as TAC commander, the President nominated him to replace General Dugan as the Air Force Chief of Staff. General Dugan was fired by Secretary Cheney for remarks he made to magazine editors about the buildup for the Gulf War.<sup>2</sup>

Examining General McPeak's years as PACAF Commander provides insight into his leadership style as he became the Air Force Chief of Staff. One staff member described him as "...a reserved man, less open in his dealings with the media than Dugan was."<sup>3</sup> A reporter described him as "low key," and Harold Morse, military editor at the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* who has covered the services for 26 years said, "I can't remember any high

ranking General or flag officer who was as unobtrusive as McPeak.” Morse also said, “He was always in the background very soft spoken. He is no grandstander.”<sup>4</sup> A former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, James C. Binnicker (USAF Ret.) said of General McPeak, “He’s not a flashy type of person, not one for grandstanding, but he’ll be an excellent chief.”<sup>5</sup> From his previous command, it looked like the Air Force was getting a reserved individual who led from the rear. What actually evolved was a very aggressive leader who led from the front.

### **Setting The Direction**

As Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, General McPeak was charged with running an extremely large organization of approximately 740,000 active duty military and civilian employees.<sup>6</sup> The Air Force’s annual budget while he was chief was approximately \$85 billion. As the Chief of Staff he was comparable to a chief executive officer (CEO) in civilian industry. The job brings many responsibilities. Noted authors Elliott Jaques and Stephen D. Clement describe some of the basic responsibilities in their book *Executive Leadership*, this way, “A critical challenge facing all senior executives is how to exercise effective managerial leadership over their whole organization.”<sup>7</sup> They go on to say, “Thus, organizational leadership accountability is the exercise of leadership accountability from one to many. It includes accountability for setting direction and winning collaborative support of all employees collectively, at all levels in the organization, to work effectively and to move in the direction set. In order to describe this process, we shall need definitions of two basic concepts: corporate vision and corporate culture.

Corporate vision is the longest forward direction for the corporation's business and development, which is set by a CEO in consultation with the board. It is the vision and direction that establishes the time-span and priorities of the CEO role. Indeed, it is the ability to set a practical operational vision and to work towards it that expresses the time-horizon and therefore the level of capability of the CEO.

Corporate culture comprises the established ways of thinking and doing things in the institution and includes the company's policies, rules, and procedures; its customs and practices; its shared values and belief systems; its traditions and assumptions; and the nature of the language used to communicate throughout the company.<sup>8</sup>

One of General McPeak's first speeches after being nominated to be the Air Force Chief of Staff, and a day before he was confirmed by the Senate, was given to the Air Force Association National Symposium on 26 October 1990 in Los Angeles, California. He appraised the state of the Air Force in saying, "We have a lot going for us in the Air Force. We've got smart people—dedicated people—good people. We have great people in the Air Force. Our readiness is sky-high. Our equipment is the world's best. Our sustainability is good. Our operating tempo is right. Our training is realistic. We understand our tactics and doctrine. We have great leadership in the sharp end. We work well with sister services and allies."<sup>9</sup> General McPeak then laid out the themes for his tenure as Chief of Staff saying, "I'd like to lay out for you my thoughts on three themes that I feel will help characterize the years ahead of us: integrity, openness, restructuring."<sup>10</sup>

General McPeak had a vision for where he wanted to take the Air Force. He had his agenda and vision planned out and approved by Secretary Rice by January 15, 1991.<sup>11</sup> This was just two and a half months after taking command. General McPeak's vision was set and now he needed to articulate and sell it to the Air Force rank and file. Selling a vision that included massive change was going to be difficult and General McPeak

knew that. To better understand the change process we will examine the implications and strategies of implementing change.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Steve Weber, "PacAF's McPeak next in line for chief of staff," *Air Force Times*, Oct 1 '90, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Julie Bird, "Dugan's Downfall," *Air Force Times*, Oct 1 '90, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Weber, "McPeak's nomination as chief wins praise," *Air Force Times*, Oct 8 '90, 7.

<sup>6</sup> "How the Air Force Changed Under McPeak," *Air Force Times*, Nov 21 '94, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Elliott Jaques and Stephen D. Clement, *Executive Leadership*, (Arlington, VA, Carson Hall & Co., 1994), 264.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 264-265.

<sup>9</sup> McPeak, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with General McPeak on 21 March 1997.

## Chapter 3

### Change

There has not been a chief of staff in Air Force history that has not brought on a certain amount of change during his tenure. Constructive change is difficult to manage if not done correctly, a truism that has remained constant since the sixteenth century, when Machiavelli wrote:

It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who have the law in their favour; and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it. Thus, it arises that on every opportunity for attacking the reformer, his opponents do so with the zeal of partisans, the others only defend him half-heatedly, so that between them he runs great danger.<sup>1</sup>

General McPeak knew from the beginning of his term that he wanted to make changes. Natalie Crawford from the RAND Corporation reported, “He said the most important thing he had to do was seize the initiative...even though it might cause great pain.”<sup>2</sup> Julie Bird of the *Air Force Times* described the magnitude and effects of these changes when she reported, “Since becoming Air Force chief of staff in October 1990, General Merrill A. ‘Tony’ McPeak has directed some of the most sweeping changes in the young service’s history. The changes are not universally popular; neither is he.”<sup>3</sup> It was apparent from the beginning of his term as chief of staff, that General McPeak had an

agenda to take the Air Force into the future. History proved that this agenda provided some of the most sweeping changes in Air Force history

In examining the need for change, John Morgan wrote in his book *Managing Change*, there are four good reasons for an organization to change: 1) to operate more effectively, 2) to achieve balanced growth, 3) to keep up with the times, and 4) to be more flexible.<sup>4</sup> General McPeak described his reasons for pressing for change in a speech to the Air Force Association's national convention in September 1991. He stated, "The bottom line is that change is unavoidable, in any case. No human activity is static. In addition, there is a forcing function: declining support for defense spending. If nothing else makes us change the resource slide will." He continued, "Secretary Rice and I have absolutely no intention of presiding over the decline of the Air Force. Therefore, we will instead press for a top-to-bottom restructure as the best way to sustain our combat capability as we get smaller."<sup>5</sup> In General McPeak's end-of-tour interview he described his reasons a little differently, "The end of the Cold War had nothing to do with the reorganization of the Air Force, absolutely zero. The Air Force needed to be reorganized, whether the Cold War continued or stopped, whether the budget went up or down, whether our end-strength grew or shrunk, or whether we opened bases or closed them. It had nothing to do with resource dynamics; it had nothing to do with national strategy. It had zero to do with threat. It had to do with internal questions about how we were organized. What we were trying to do was organize the Air Force in the best way to meet any kind of threat or any budgetary circumstance."<sup>6</sup>

It seemed that General McPeak was well within Morgan's four reasons for change. But, it is difficult for some to agree change was needed since the Air Force was just



coming off a great victory in the Gulf War and the service was gleaming as the hero, since airpower proved decisive. Many questioned the wisdom and timing of General McPeak's agenda. General McPeak gave his reasoning in his end of tour interview:

The Air Force, through the entire 37 years that I participated, was always a magnificent organization. It was never true that there was something wrong that needed to be fixed. I mean, General Motors has proven what happens if you wait until it's too late to reorganize. What I wanted to do was to take a very good, world-class organization, the best Air Force in the world, and not chit up, keep it climbing. You can't level off in this world. There is no possible way you can ever say, "This thing is good enough. Let's just try to hold it here," because none of the forces around you are static, other organizations around you either improve or decline, and therefore your relative position changes, even if you try to hold steady. You have no alternative in this world between climbing and diving. So when I came in the door, I just lit the afterburner and climbed some. It doesn't mean it was all screwed up and needed to be fixed. What it means was, it can always be better. It can be better, still, but I ran out of time.<sup>7</sup>

Morgan's prerequisites of operating more effectively, achieving growth, keeping up and getting ahead of the times, and being flexible seem to be paramount in General McPeak's vision of the Air Force. It is significant that General McPeak, having been in the Air Force for 33 years and making it to the chief position, made revolutionary change while the organization was seemingly on top. Some people thought and some still think he was crazy. Others recognize the risk he was taking and applaud him for taking the Air Force on this visionary road—keeping the Air Force as a premier service. A look at General McPeak's agenda will help give a better perspective of the range and scope of change the Air Force was taking on.

## Chapter 4

### Agenda

General McPeak laid out his back-to-basics approach for his tenure in his September 1991 speech to the Air Force Association. The Air Force's five themes will be built around; 1) decentralization, 2) strengthen commander's authority, 3) streamline and flatten the organizational structure, 4) consolidate, where it is practical to do so, and 5) clarify functional responsibilities.<sup>8</sup>

General McPeak stated in 1991 he would work on how the Air Force should be organized. He said, "But my style is to work through a problem in an orderly way, so I suspect that next year's effort may focus on how the Air Force 'trains.' Accordingly, the 'equip' part may have to wait until '93.'"<sup>9</sup>

General McPeak's September 1991 speech to the Air Force Association National Convention included a synopsis of the changes he was planning for the reorganization of the Air Force—including changes at the squadron, group, wing, air division, numbered air force, and headquarters level.<sup>10</sup> General McPeak then produced a video briefing titled, *Tomorrow's Air Force*. This production was to be shown to everyone in the Air Force starting in November 1991, to explain the restructuring proposals he was implementing.<sup>11</sup>

During General McPeak's end of tour interview he explained the top priorities he had for his tenure:

First was organization, but it was intimately linked to concepts of what was important and what our mission was. Once you decide what it is you want to do, then how you organize is the most important management decision you make, and that is why I put it first. Next was training. That's the next most important thing because in the end, war is a human activity, and it's human training that wins wars. I think organization wins wars also, but that is an artifact of human activity. So these two things are the most important.

Next came equiptage, which is less important to me. That's why I put it third. (The order we worked the issues reflected what I considered important.) Equiptage is not about what kind of equipment we should have, it's about a long-range plan for modernization. It was about planning. It should have been called the year of planning for new equipment. (Laughter) I got stuck with this organize, train, and equip kind of paradigm, so it had to be "The Year of Equipping the Air Force."

Finally, readiness is the least concern because the Air Force is ready. Don't get me wrong, we all agree readiness is important, but I put it last because Air Force readiness is not a major issue for us, and it won't be for a while if we handle ourselves properly. Anything can be plumbered, don't get me wrong, but readiness is in pretty good shape. The exception is long-range modernization planning, and there we were not very good.<sup>12</sup>

General McPeak seemed to have a well thought out and planned agenda for the Air Force. He was basing his agenda on the general responsibilities of the services. General McPeak came to this agenda through a discussion with the Secretary of the Air Force. "As a new service chief, I guess one of the first questions Secretary Rice and I discussed was, what is it the services are suppose to be doing? The answer to that question is well known to many in this audience, but it is interesting enough—for me at least—to spend some time on. The answer is, the services are suppose to 'organize, train, and equip' forces and provide them for employment to a user—commonly a unified commander."<sup>13</sup> This was a well thought out and logical entering position.

By looking at the responsibilities of the chief of staff, General McPeak was trying to accomplish his responsibilities. The chief of staff is not the war-fighter, but the provider

of forces. It seems that the Air Force was well organized, trained, and equipped if evaluated by the results of the Gulf War. But General McPeak saw the budgetary cuts coming and was trying to prepare the Air Force for the next century.

The vision he articulated early in his tenure shows foresight. The Air Force did need to change to stay ahead of the times. As the leader of the organization, General McPeak smartly stepped out and exhibited his plan for the Air Force. To better understand how that vision was to be accomplished, an examination of the changes he made is important.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, approximately 1513, translation by Luigi Ricci, revised by E.R.P. Vincent, New York, New American Library, 1952, p.55.

<sup>2</sup> Julie Bird, "Seeking a simple structure," *Air Force Times*, Dec 20 '93, 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> John Smith Morgan, *Managing Change: the strategies of making change work for you* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 133-134.

<sup>5</sup> McPeak, 52-53.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. George M. Watson, Jr. and Major Robert White, *End of Tour Interview: General Merrill A. McPeak Air Force Chief of Staff*, The Pentagon, November 28, December 15, 19, 1994, 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> McPeak, 53.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-58.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Watson and White, 35-34.

<sup>13</sup> McPeak, 51.

## Chapter 5

### Changes Made

The changes made during General McPeak's four year tour are numerous. It is important to examine what General McPeak thought was important. General McPeak talks about his major accomplishments during his end of tour interview:

For number 1, I would have to list the reorganization of the Air Force. We rebuilt the Air Force top to bottom and changed it in fundamental ways, which I think were important. The basis for all that (I may have already said this in previous interviews) was a desire on my part to make operations the centerpiece of the organization and strengthen the role of operations. *Operations is our product*. Basically, I wanted to improve our product. We reorganized, restructured the Air Force top to bottom, and that is probably the most important thing.

The next thing we did, which I think was very important, was to pay attention to the heritage of the Air Force and to try to create a kind of systematic way of looking at the issue of what units we try to protect and keep on the books at this time of severe draw-down. We did a lot of good work on preserving the heritage of the Air Force. I believe 100 years from now people will credit us with that if they think about it.

Third is the reform of Air Force training and education. Again, this is more from the training standpoint. We really did some good work there, in my judgment. With NCO PME [Professional Military Education] (if you include that as education), we did pretty good work on the education side. The whole interlocking set of reforms included reducing the number of specialties so that people are more broadly trained and more flexibly used. The requirement that everybody go through tech training and the requirement that people return to the schoolhouse at some mid-career point for advanced technical training before they became seven levels [a technical-job proficiency rating] both paid big dividends. My statement at the time was that as we grow smaller, we should raise our training standards, and one day when we start growing again, we should raise our

training standards again. I hope that small irony isn't lost on the Air Force. Our training standards should never drop. They should be continually raised. That is what I tried to do.

Another accomplishment that I'm proud of is the emphasis on a quality Air Force, of the production of a vision statement, the definition of a mission, the establishment of the Quality Center, the change of the inspection system, the abolition of regulations—all of these quality-directed initiatives aimed at the grassroots participation in improving every process in the Air Force. I guess I would have put the reorganization, the rescue of our heritage, the reform of training and education, and the quality movement very high among the things that I was proud of.<sup>1</sup>

A synopsis from the *Air Force Times* of the changes made during General McPeak's tenure includes:

### **Personnel**

- After contentious debate, the Pentagon adopted the “don't ask, don't tell” policy allowing homosexuals to serve in the military.
- The Air Force unveiled a controversial new uniform in 1991; the uniform went on sale in January 1994.
- The active-duty Air Force fell from 506,000 members to 422,300; the number of civilian employees dropped from 232,700 to 196,400. The Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve increased from 291,600 members to 321,500.
- A new system for officer assignments was implemented involving a voluntary assignment process.

### **Organization**

- The major commands were restructured beginning in June 1992 and aircraft were reorganized—fighters and bombers in one command for “global power,” tankers and transports in another for “global reach.” Nuclear missiles were moved to Air Force Space Command. The Air Force now has eight major commands, down from 13 when General McPeak became chief.
- Various operations were restructured into field operating agencies reporting to Air Force headquarters.
- Wings were reorganized beginning in 1992 and now many are commanded by brigadier generals rather than colonels.
- The number of people in Air Force headquarters was trimmed by 21 percent.
- Arguing the Air Force should “train as it fights,” McPeak created composite types of wings with aircraft that fly together during war.

## **Equipment**

- The Air Force in July 1992 adopted a “cradle-to-grave” approach to buying and maintaining weapons and equipment. Called Integrated Weapon System Management, the approach makes one office responsible for an item’s design, development, production, maintenance and retirement.
- The first B-2 Spirit bomber arrived at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri in December 1993. The Air Force was asking for 75 B-2’s at the beginning of McPeak’s term, and only 20 at the end.
- The first C-17 Globemaster III transport arrived at Charleston Air Force Base, S.C., in June 1993. The Air Force was still hoping for 120 of the planes. Heavy flying schedules for the Persian Gulf War and numerous other operations forced extensive repairs to the C-141 Starlifter fleet.
- Congress ordered a six-month readiness test of the B-1B Lancer that began in June 1994; service officials said the test went well.
- The F-22 air superiority fighter appeared to survive numerous cuts to the Pentagon acquisition budget. The Air Force is asking for 442 of the planes, down from 648.

## **Training**

- The Air Training Command was expanded to include Air University in July 1993 and was renamed Air Education and Training Command.
- Undergraduate pilot training was divided into a fighter/bomber track and a tanker/transport track beginning in July 1992; follow-on training was placed under the education command’s control beginning in July 1993.
- The Air Force adopted civilian terms for technical skill levels—apprentice, journeyman, craftsman and superintendent.
- The Air Force will train all the services in areas such as law enforcement, cryptology and undergraduate space training.

## **Operations**

- About 1,400 Air Force aircraft and 86,000 Air Force people deployed for the Persian Gulf War beginning in August 1990. Thousands have remained in Saudi Arabia and Turkey.
- Airlift crews began daily humanitarian supply flights to Sarejevo in the former Yugoslavia in July 1992, and nightly airdrop missions to isolated Muslim towns in February 1993. NATO aircraft began patrolling the no-fly zone over Bosnia in April 1993.
- The Air Force began flying humanitarian aid to Somalia in August 1992. In December 1992, the mission expanded and was operated from Mogadishu, Somalia. It ended in March 1994.
- Air Force cargo planes took troops, food and water-purification equipment to central Africa in July 1994 to help Rwandan refugees.

- The Air Force set up operations at the Port-Au-Price airport in Haiti in September 1994 and flew in troops and supplies.<sup>2</sup>

This list of changes helps show the amazing amount of changes made over General McPeak's tenure. The quantity of changes were vast, but possibly of more importance is that the changes were so far-reaching. Every member of the Air Force was affected in many ways. Some of the changes were perceived as good and some as bad. To accomplish such an aggressive agenda is a difficult task. As Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General McPeak not only needed to come up with the vision, but he also needed to present and sell that vision to Air Force people. How you sell your agenda is an important element to the enduring success of change.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Watson and White, 73-74.

<sup>2</sup> "How the Air Force Changed Under McPeak," *Air Force Times*, Nov 21 '94, 18.



## Chapter 6

### Change Agent

There are legitimate reasons for change in the Air Force as General McPeak set his agenda and vision. The next step was selling the agenda to the Air Force. This critical step of getting change initiated into an organization was accomplished by a change agent. What makes a good change agent? Did General McPeak fulfill this responsibility? We will explore these issues next.

A large classified ad in the *New York Times* announced a search for “change agent.”

It read:

WHAT’S A CHANGE AGENT? A result oriented individual able to accurately and quickly resolve complex tangible and intangible problems. Energy and ambition necessary for success...<sup>1</sup>

General McPeak could definitely answer this ad and get hired. Warren Bennis believes there is more to it though. He believes change agents are not a very homogeneous group but that they have some broad similarities: 1) they are concerned with organizational effectiveness, 2) they play a variety of roles including researchers, trainers, consultants, counselors, teachers, and in some cases line managers, 3) they intervene at different points in the organization and at different times, and 4) their normative goals are aroused by dissatisfactions with the effectiveness of bureaucratic organizations.<sup>2</sup> General McPeak again fit this mold of a change agent and was well

qualified to fulfill the role with his vast experience in the Air Force including his many levels of command. Even more importantly though, he was the Air Force's leader; the keeper of its soul, and the visionary for its success.

In the book *Strategies for Planned Change*, Gerald Zaltman and Robert Duncan list the characteristics needed to foster change effectively: 1) they stimulate the user's problem-solving process, 2) they are sufficiently knowledgeable about the process that produces the solution, 3) they are able to foster communication and possibly collaboration, 4) they are willing to listen to new ideas with receptive but constructively critical ears, and 5) they are able to introduce flexibility into the relationship.<sup>3</sup> All of these characteristics are very important for change to succeed. Zaltman and Duncan give us hints for errors that change agents make: 1) premature commitment to change strategies and tactics, 2) failure to get client participation, 3) failure to consider the informal system, and 4) failure to identify individuals open to change.<sup>4</sup> There are elements from both lists that can be used to evaluate General McPeak's performance.

### **Able to Foster Communication and Possible Collaboration**

General McPeak talks about the need for open communications when he said, "By the way, a healthy dialogue includes listening to opposing views inside the organization...I want to be told when I'm wrong. I hope that won't happen too often. But, I've noticed that the only people who tell me I'm wrong are the ones who actually respect me. And I'm more interested in the substance than the appearance of respect."<sup>5</sup> He again alluded to the need for communication when in an *Airman* magazine interview he was asked if communication would be a two-way street? "Yes," he answered, "I

want everyone to be as open as possible with me. I need to get feedback—to have dialogue. I need people to tell me if we are on the wrong track.”<sup>6</sup> General McPeak felt he had a very good relationship and open communication with the other Air Force four star generals. He also set up an annual meeting with all of the numbered Air Force commanders to get their views and to allow him to talk directly to them<sup>7</sup>

### **Willing to Listen to New Ideas with Receptive but Constructively Critical Ears**

RAND Corporation’s Natalie Crawford characterized General McPeak’s communication style in this manner, “Some people would say he doesn’t listen. There was a time when I would have said that. But I have seen him change positions. When McPeak does change his mind, it is after consulting privately with a few people whose views he respects. That can make it difficult for others who would like to have influence with him but do not. He is not a consensus builder, preferring instead to provide direction. I think there’s a feeling of not being able to negotiate or debate (with McPeak) sometimes, that he has a position on something and can’t be swayed.”<sup>8</sup>

The reluctance to allow open communication and accept input from others is illustrated by the uniform issue. While the majority of Air Force people didn’t agree with putting rank on the sleeves and taking the “U.S.” off the uniform, General McPeak insisted on these changes. The results were documented by many including *Air Force Times* reporter, Julie Bird, stating, “General Merrill A. McPeak’s decision to change the Air Force uniform did more than enrage current and past service members and cause the biggest firestorm of his term as chief of staff. It may have helped kill his chances to become the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”<sup>9</sup>

Many people believe General McPeak was an intimidating person. When a person of lower rank is talking with a general they are respectful of the rank and position and are not used to open and frank debate. General McPeak, on the other hand, was a very confident person who seemed not to realize or forgot the significance of rank difference. While he wanted open discussion and opinions, the first time he rebuffed a person they tended to back off. General McPeak said he had a group of close advisors that were willing to be open with him and he used them a lot.<sup>10</sup>

### **Failure to Get Client Participation**

Jaques and Clement elaborate on this concept when they write, “Changing an organization’s culture is not a separate goal in itself. Cultural changes are designed to achieve future corporate objectives. In contemplating changes which are necessary to pursue the company goals, CEOs should make good use of their senior corporate staff by seeking their advice and counsel regarding the likely impact of any cultural change. In taking part in such interplay, the executives are actively participating in the cultural development process. This outcome is essential for guarding against the negative effects of unplanned or unwanted change and gaining commitment regarding the planned change.”<sup>11</sup>

From the beginning of General McPeak’s term he realized the importance of communications and “buy-in.” He highlighted this concept during an interview when he said, “General Dugan had made himself available to the media, had written as-I-see-it messages about important issues for weekly distribution throughout the Air Force, and had ‘sent an open letter to all Air Force generals describing his belief in openness and the

need for increased internal and external dialogue.” He continued, “His approach was correct, and we should continue what he began.”<sup>12</sup> With the uniform issue specifically, General McPeak tried to get the buy-in from the other Air Force four star generals by having them test the different uniform materials and configurations. These generals were seen by many Air Force people as they wore their uniforms at work. The generals gave their feedback to General McPeak. The feedback included comments the generals received from their subordinates and other observers of the new uniform.

Getting buy-in from even the four star commanders was sometimes difficult as General McPeak noted when he commented, “On the airlift side we had some skinning to do once we put the tankers and the airlift together, and it was hard to do. The airlift headquarters is as reactionary as any in the Air Force, and they fought the change tooth and nail. We had to work it in stages, and wait until we could change commanders.”<sup>13</sup> General McPeak said in an interview, as mentioned earlier, that overall he thought he had great communication with the other four star generals<sup>14</sup>.

General McPeak used many different mediums to brief, explain and discuss the change agenda. He seemed to use the Air Force Association speeches as a major forum for announcing changes. He produced two videos for Air Force viewing. The first was titled, “Tomorrow’s Air Force,” and was made after his first year as chief of staff. The main topic was the Air Force’s restructuring from the squadron to the headquarters level.<sup>15</sup> The second video was titled, “Two Kinds of Change.” It was distributed in July 1992 to the Air Force. Its main thrust was explaining the changes due to budget reductions and the changes due to restructure initiatives.<sup>16</sup>

There was only one article written and published by General McPeak while he was the Chief of Staff. The article was a response to an article written by A.G.B. Metcalf in *Strategic Review*, Fall 1991, titled, “A Backward Step?” General McPeak countered with a well-written response titled, “Air Force Reorganization: A Big Step Forward.”<sup>17</sup>

Communications is one of the most important elements to change and General McPeak was well aware of it. He tried hard to articulate his vision to the Air Force rank and file. He took personal responsibility for doing this and still does.<sup>18</sup> There is a responsibility in any organization for the subordinate commanders to also communicate the vision. In most cases this is done, but when change is as massive as it was during this time frame it was hard for everyone to understand all that was happening. It was also difficult to promote some of the unpopular changes.

The responsibilities of a change agent are difficult. To continue our examination of the change process, let us next examine the process for managing change.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Warren G. Bennis, *Changing Organizations; Essays on the Development and Evolution of Human Organization*, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1966), 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 114-116.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Zaltman and Robert Duncan, *Strategies for Planned Change*, (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1977), 188-189.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>5</sup> James W. Canan, “McPeak’s Plan,” *Air Force Magazine*, Feb ‘91.

<sup>6</sup> Lt Col Michael B. Perini, “Interview with General Merrill A. McPeak Chief of Staff,” *Airman*, Dec ‘90, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with General McPeak, 21 March 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Julie Bird, “The chief: what he has done right and wrong,” *Air Force Times*, Dec 20 ‘93, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with General McPeak, 21 March 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Jaques and Clement, 269.

<sup>12</sup> Canan, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Watson and White, 18.

## Notes

- <sup>14</sup> Interview with General McPeak, 21 March 1997.
- <sup>15</sup> McPeak, 67-113.
- <sup>16</sup> McPeak, 165-172
- <sup>17</sup> McPeak, 115-121.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with General McPeak, 21 March 1997.

## Chapter 7

### Managing Change

Wallace and Szilagyi in *Managing Behavior in Organizations*, identify three constraints for change that might help us further understand General McPeak's challenges in accomplishing his vision. The authors identify leadership climate, formal organizational design, and individual characteristics as possible constraints.<sup>1</sup>

#### Leadership Climate

Jaques and Clement believe a CEO needs to set a corporate culture and a vision. They state, "It is impossible for CEOs to get all their people moving along in a common direction if they do not have clearly articulated conceptions of where they are trying to take the company."<sup>2</sup> General McPeak believes he set the vision for the Air Force first with a good concise vision and mission statement:

We made a vision statement for the Air Force that was good and short. If you read most vision statements, they go on for paragraphs, and you can go to sleep reading somebody's vision statement. I thought we needed a short, snappy way of putting a target out there. I do believe in having a vision. I think it is a good idea. The hard part is, how do you construct a vision? How do you write one? That was a hard thing to do. I put the senior leadership of the organization around a table, and spent a lot of time on it, worked on it, and in the end, we got a vision statement. That has to be "top down," so that is the way we did it-top down.

I put together a mission statement, which I also think was an important focus—to try to tell people what job they are in, what it is we are trying to



get done. This is different from a vision statement. A vision statement is about the best possible future state of the organization. What you want the organization to be is a vision statement. A mission statement is what business we are in. What do we do here? Lots of people confuse these two things, but they are separate.<sup>3</sup>

Having the vision statement and mission statement stated is not enough though as John Morgan states in *Managing Change*. He argues you need to provide the leadership necessary to overcome obstacles to changing the existing structure—and that the CEO needs to provide the leadership at a time when the organization as a whole would probably oppose the change needed.<sup>4</sup>

### **Formal Organizational Design**

Lt Col Field, in his Air War College paper, describes the difficulties of managing change in the Air Force when he writes, “Inertia and resistance will vary depending on the type of organization. Larger and more hierarchical organizations generally resist change while smaller ones are more flexible.”<sup>5</sup>

Jaques and Clement add, “A company’s culture either facilitates the accomplishment of the organization’s goals and objectives or it interferes with the process; it is never neutral.”<sup>6</sup> General McPeak realized this and said, “Any time you attempt to reorganize, the affected area immediately develops antibodies,”<sup>7</sup> The General’s bottom line was, “I have been very proud of the Air Force as it has responded to the challenge of making change a friend and not an enemy...”<sup>8</sup>

### **Individual Characteristics as Possible Constraints**

In an *Airman Magazine* article on leadership General McPeak stated, “The key is trust. We all know that we will not follow someone unless we trust them. Leadership

style is an individual matter. There are a wide variety of styles from A to Z. Any style will work as long as you know your business and people trust you.” Trust, though, can be a difficult asset to acquire in a large organization that is under going massive changes in a short period of time. People can turn against a leader for numerous reasons, but one that came to light early in General McPeak’s term was described by *Air Force Times* reporter Steven Watkins. “Enlisted members and officers chided McPeak for glorifying pilots and leaving others to believe they were second-class citizens in the Air Force. ‘I think that was one of the few issues I had a little concern over myself was this favoritism-to-pilots issue,’ Rice said. ‘I think some of the things the chief was doing were unintentionally sending that message around the institution.’ Rice said after the two discussed it, McPeak consciously avoided making off-handed comments that would ‘send messages he didn’t want to send.’”<sup>9</sup>

General McPeak was a “hands-on” leader that led from the front. This style of leadership caused frustration from some subordinates. This style also created frustration in General McPeak himself because his staff was not always going in the same direction as the chief. His frustration over staffs was highlighted in a few remarks during his end-of-tour interview, “In order to get things changed, you have to know what it is you want done, and then you have to work those things, and the details of those things, and then you have to rework them, and then you have to circle back to rework them again, and then you have to follow up and make sure they heard you the first three times.”<sup>10</sup>

## Speed And Size Of Change Is Imperative

General McPeak's entering position as chief of staff was that he needed to make some sweeping changes and he needed to do them quickly. He stated in his end-of-tour interview, "I knew that the things I most wanted to do in 4 years would have to be done in the first 6 months of my tenure. My advice is, if you don't do it in the first 6 months, then you can forget it."<sup>11</sup> Richard Farson in, *Management of the Absurd*, also states a case against gradualism. He cites President Truman's bold, dramatic act of eliminating segregation in the service as compared to the long drawn out civil rights movement. He also makes a case of General Motors' sweeping change in laying off seventy-four thousand employees all at once as compared to a phased approach. Farson says, "people respect bold moves, and are more likely to buy into a change if it is big enough to withstand any attempt at countering it."<sup>12</sup> The reason a leader would worry about people countering change is given by Lt Col Field. "Substantial power does reside in lower level personnel. Therefore, resistance may be a result of lower level personnel not agreeing with established rules and regulations in a changed or changing environment. Their personal goals and common sense approaches may be in conflict with certain policies and edicts."<sup>13</sup>

This bold move strategy helps explain General McPeak's aggressive handling of his change agent duties. He did not have time to waste. As chief of staff he knew he had a time limit of four years to get his changes through—time was critical. The rapid time table and pace General McPeak set for the Air Force did not help make many of his changes popular. Some people thought change was being shoved down their throats—and resisted appropriately.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Marc J Wallace, Jr. and Andrew D. Szilagyi, Jr., *Managing Behavior in Organizations*, (Glenview, Illinois, Scott, Foresman and Company, 1982), 387.

<sup>2</sup> Jaques and Clement, 274.

<sup>3</sup> Watson and White, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, 151.

<sup>5</sup> Lt Col Edsel R. Fields, "Managing Change: Strategies for Air Force Organizations," (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, Air University Press, 1974), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Jaques and Clement, 269.

<sup>7</sup> Bird, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Lt Col Michael Perini, "Criteria for Today's Leaders," *Airman*, Nov '93, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Watkins, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Watson, 34.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Farson, *Management of the Absurd*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996), 110-112.

<sup>13</sup> Field, 9.

## Chapter 8

### Underlying Problems

There were a few themes that are not apparent from reading General McPeak's speeches and watching his videos. During the General's end-of-tour interview a theme came out loud and clear:

I set down, as one objective, to reinforce the position of operations. Our product is operations, and we needed to pay attention to our product and the central position occupied by operators. I felt we should simplify operations arrangements inside the Air Force so that it was clear not only what we were trying to do—that is operation—but also who was in charge. As a collateral objective, I wanted to enhance the warrior image within the Air Force.

Those two things were uppermost in my mind when I took over as Chief. I wanted operations to become more central in all of our thinking, and I wanted to enhance the warrior image of the entire Air Force. My idea was that to a considerable degree we were perceived as civilians in uniform collected around functions. We were seen as weathermen, historians, scientists, technical people, lawyers, doctors—who just happened to be wearing blue uniforms. I wanted to change that, to make sure it was understood that weather forecasting or brain surgery is not our product. Operations is our product, and all these functional activities exist to ensure that we operate properly. Operators should be placed in charge of all that activity, and the whole thing should be wired together or wrapped up in a way that makes clear the warrior ethos of the whole enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

I tried, in everything I did, to put operations right in the center. I have always thought over the years that we didn't do that enough, that we paid too much attention to non-operational stuff. I wanted to elevate operations, to make it the centerpiece of the Air Force and to strengthen operators at every level.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting that this theme did not come out “officially” until General McPeak’s retirement. It was apparent to the men and women of the Air Force as early quotes referred to the second-class citizen syndrome and Secretary Rice’s concern over favoritism to pilots. This feeling of discontent was described by *Air Force Times* reporter Julie Bird:

McPeak’s image suffered again when he banned crew-neck T-shirts in favor of V-neck T-shirts. Critics linked the move to the chief’s macho fighter pilot image because V-neck shirts show off the manly chest hair.

In August 1991, an unknown satirist published a paper that criticized the kind of Air Force that many people thought McPeak personified—one run by fighter pilots who cared little about others on the service team.

It introduced the term “manly men,” defined in the paper as “the single-seat combat warrior who must command the Air Force at all levels and within all functional areas.” A 53-page sequel in August 1992 was equally biting.<sup>3</sup>

Another minefield that General McPeak was having to navigate was the Air Force reorganization. This change was revolutionary and struck at the heart of many people. Lt Col Charles McGuirk analyzed the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and Tactical Air Command (TAC) reorganization into Air Combat Command (ACC) in his Army War College paper titled, “Two Air Force Subcultures Collide as General McPeak sets a New Course for the Air Force.” Col McGuirk wrote, “While General McPeak sold the consolidation of TAC and SAC as a merger, in reality it was a hostile takeover by TAC. The new consolidated command was given a new name, Air Combat Command (ACC), but beyond that SAC was given no quarter.”<sup>4</sup> Col McGuirk praises General McPeak’s handling of this monumental change as he concluded:

General McPeak skillfully orchestrated dramatic changes within the Air Force during his tenure as Chief of Staff. His vision for a relevant Air Force for the future was driven by external factors and was confronted by

two Air Force subcultures competing for domination. General McPeak clearly understood how culture controls an organization in all that it does and how to manage cultural change.<sup>5</sup>

General McPeak's skillful management of these two Air Force cultures allowed him to make sweeping changes and begin altering the basic assumption of the Air Force—strategic bombing. It opened the door to his vision “...*the world's most respected air and space force-global power and reach for America.*” His vision requires a culture that is innovative, flexible, able to operate in dynamic environments, and responsive to operators in the field, all elements of the TAC culture.<sup>6</sup>

There were two other issues that caused major consternation that should not have been big issues. The first was the new Air Force uniform. To set the stage Julie Bird reports, “General Merrill A. McPeak's decision to change the Air Force uniform did more than enrage current and past service members and cause the biggest firestorm of his term as chief of staff. It may have helped kill his chances to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”<sup>7</sup>

Ms Crawford, of the RAND Corporation, was even more scathing saying, “The new uniform was a stupid, minutia thing. With the big-time stuff such as cutting people and planes going on, to fool around with the uniform sort of trivializes his time.”<sup>8</sup>

From General McPeak's point of view he states, “The uniform is a lot simpler. We got a lot of doodads off of it and we got a lot of doodads out of our organizations. So you can see the uniform is a metaphor for what I have tried to do.”<sup>9</sup> General McPeak also stated, “In the end, I thought it was worth paying the price, and I didn't want to load anyone else with it.”<sup>10</sup> A very close friend of General McPeak, John DeBlanc, observed, “I think he got surprised by the reaction to it, surprised and perhaps a little hurt,” DeBlanc said. “I think he felt this was the kind of thing he could do, but it has become a focus of discontent.”<sup>11</sup>

A retired four star general said, “This became a rallying point against McPeak. He was stupid to take this issue on at his level. The uniform needed to be changed, and would have been more readily accepted had he let the established system work the uniform issue. He was very stubborn and sometimes would not listen to advice.”<sup>12</sup>

The other issue that was very emotional was the heritage program. While talking about his participation in the heritage program he said:

Well, let’s say I’m not pleased with the results because I have been in something like eight wings in my career, and only three are still operating.

What happened was, we went from 203 wings to something less than 90 on active service. You cannot do that without closing some wings that people like Charlie Gabriel had a close association with. And some units had great histories. I think people understood that we did the best that we could. We played the hand that was dealt us. We did try to retain our most distinguished formations. There are some high numbers around, but basically it was the two-digit wings that we have kept, and we will be proud of it.

Once again, I tried to make the right mistakes. We kept our best formations, and we brought back some that had already been folded.

That was hard to do. There is still some lingering resentment about it. To the people who think we have always given the Special Operations short shrift, this was just more evidence of the insensitivity here in Washington. But we no longer have two 1st Wings. We have one 1st Wing, and everyone knows what it is. We’ve got one of every other kind of wing with a number on it, so there is no confusion about where the 2d Wing is, where the 3d Wing is, where the 4th Wing is, and so forth. So I think it was worth it. In the long run it will be worth it because it frees us up to think about wings differently.

It’s a little thing, but what you call something is very important. I used to say that I was CINC/Names in the Air Force: Commander-in-Chief in charge of Names. It’s a very powerful position. People don’t think about it, but if you are in charge of saying what a thing will be called, it’s an awesome authority. People don’t care about it until you decide to exercise your authority, then everyone cares about it, which tells you how important it is. (laughter) So what we call things is important because it sets in concrete how we think about things, and I wanted to change how we thought about things.<sup>13</sup>



The heritage program is similar to the uniform issue in that it is one General McPeak took head on and caused a lot of discontent. In my interview with General McPeak he said a couple former chiefs of staffs told him they also wanted to change the uniform but were not willing to take on that issue because of the firestorm it would create. General McPeak said he took the uniform issue on making it a symbol and reflection of the new Air Force that was being created. The uniform would be, “stream-lined, faster, and smarter looking.”<sup>14</sup> General McPeak also concluded he should not have made the uniform a symbol of the change he was bringing to the Air Force.

The heritage program was very important to General McPeak and important to the Air Force in the long term. The Air Force was reducing in size dramatically, with appropriate cuts in squadrons and wings. Saving the history of some of the original Air Force units was important to General McPeak. Individuals in an organization are typically more proud of what their unit did and the history they are involved in building than the history of a unit they are not associated with. This causes a managerial dilemma because of the dissatisfaction caused by changing unit designations. General McPeak saw the long term benefit of saving the historically significant units and was willing to pay the price of short term discontent.

The long term results of both programs will probably turn out fine, but was it worth the amount of discontent it caused during a time of great change? Or as one four star general intimated, did General McPeak just use these programs as a distracter to keep the minds of Air Force people off of the other major changes?<sup>15</sup> In the long term the price was worth it and the Air Force is better off in the future because of these decisions.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Watson and White, 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 59.
- <sup>3</sup> Bird, 12.
- <sup>4</sup> Charles H. McGuirk (LTC), USAF, “Two Air Force Subcultures Collide as General McPeak Sets a New Course for the Air Force, Strategic Research Project, 15 April 1996, 15.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 20-21.
- <sup>7</sup> Bird, 14.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Watkins, 19.
- <sup>10</sup> Bird, 14.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with a retired four star General that preferred to remain anonymous.
- <sup>13</sup> Watson and White, 30-34.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with General McPeak, 21 March 1997.
- <sup>15</sup> Remarks made by a four star General who was speaking with academic freedom

## Chapter 9

### The Person

Richard Farson in *Management of the Absurd* states, “there are no leaders, there is only leadership.” He continues, “This paradox is another way of saying that leadership is less the propensity of a person than the property of a group.”<sup>1</sup> He goes on to explain, “In a well-functioning group, the behavior of the leader is not all that different from the behavior of other responsible group members. In fact, if it were not for the trappings of titles, private corner offices, desks with overhangs, a seat at the head of the table, and so on, it might be difficult to identify the leader in a group that is working well.”<sup>2</sup>

There are many different ideas on leadership and the different effects it has on the group. General McPeak does not fit Farson’s description though. General McPeak led from the front and was willing to take on issues as the chief of staff.

To take a closer look at the General as a person Julie Bird reported, “He has been called ‘Larry Welch without the charisma,’ an unflattering comparison with the stoical chief of staff who served from 1986 to 1990.”<sup>3</sup> The article continues, “He was also considered by many to be a bit eccentric.” McPeak answers, “he does not consider himself eccentric,” but “I wouldn’t object to being called different.” “‘Tony is a very complicated human being,’ said his longtime friend, John DeBlanc.” Bird continues, “Those not close to McPeak often see him as cold and aloof.”<sup>4</sup>

General McPeak was a person who said what he thought. Earlier in the paper, Secretary Rice was quoted about being concerned with the perceptions General McPeak was giving about a preference to fliers. General McPeak also was not above controversy with the other service chiefs. Steve Watkins reported, “Coupled with his blunt style, his controversial views on joint warfighting often landed him in hot water. ‘My personal standing with my brother service chiefs and so on is probably not at all that good,’ McPeak said in an Oct. 1 interview.”<sup>5</sup>

General McPeak also was not afraid to criticize other senior leaders. In his end-of-tour interview he commented, “That is the question: can you pick priorities? A lot of senior people I know cannot do that. They become a slave to the in-basket. They work the problems their staff considers important and they get nothing done. They are there for a few years and then they are gone, and nobody could tell the difference.”<sup>6</sup> He also describes a meeting with President Bush and the other service chiefs saying, “Without being critical here, I don’t think the other Chiefs had much to say. They were not very articulate in talking about what their service would do. They sort of circled the issues and said generally that. They didn’t shed much light; they had no specifics.”<sup>7</sup>

Following the 1992 election, each of the service chiefs was invited by the Clinton Defense Transition Team to submit a memorandum to the president-elect outlining their views on important issues. General McPeak’s memorandum was dated 21 December 1992 and started out, “This memo mostly discusses problems, so it may seem negative.” It goes on to discuss gays in the military, the use of military power, the problematic acquisition process, the problems with the DOD investment program, roles and missions, the problems with organizing jointness, national service, and a very upbeat, short

paragraph on the Air Force.<sup>8</sup> General McPeak was very willing to address problems openly. His style was to attack problems and not try to hide them.

General McPeak's controversial style lasted up to the very last day of his tenure. The day before his retirement the *Washington Post* ran a front-page article titled "Air Force Chief on Attack: McPeak Boldly Criticizes Other Services' Roles and Plans." the article began, "Army, Navy and Marine Corps leaders are fuming over a blunt and unusually public campaign by the Air Force's chief of staff to limit the functions performed by the other military services."<sup>9</sup> General McPeak made light of this article during his farewell address when he said, "Mr. Secretary, I'd like to say something about flying. I had no intention of making the Air Force a career. (And if I get much more publicity, I may not make it yet! Better get through this speech quickly!)"<sup>10</sup> He also makes fun of his relationships with the other service chiefs when he says, "Now, my brother service chiefs sometimes think I've flown too much, pulled too many Gs—the blood perhaps permanently drained away from my head."<sup>11</sup>

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Shalikashvili, joked during the retirement ceremony, "McPeak's proposals demonstrated how 'innovative' he can be. 'He sure added a lot of excitement to otherwise dull tank sessions.'" Secretary of the Air Force, Sheila Widnall, "defended McPeak at the retirement ceremony, saying 'he had the personal courage to risk his reputation and collegiality with the other services in his efforts to change and improve the system.'"<sup>12</sup>

Personal leadership style is obviously a very individual thing, with many ways to accomplish the same task. Certain personality traits are very hard to change so you need to make the best with what you have. Sometimes these traits are very good and serve you

well in situations. Sometimes these same traits are handicaps in other situations. General McPeak was not afraid to speak his mind. That got him in trouble in some cases and facilitated tough, rapid, and large scale change in others.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Farson, 144

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>3</sup> Julie Bird, "How McPeak rose to the top," *Air Force Times*, Dec 20 '93 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Watkins, "McPeak sought to change all the services," *Air Force Times*, Dec 20 '93,

<sup>6</sup> McPeak, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>8</sup> McPeak, 189-193.

<sup>9</sup> "Air Force Chief on Attack: McPeak Boldly Criticizes Other Services' Roles and Plans," *The Washington Post*, 24 October, 1994, 1.

<sup>10</sup> McPeak, 342.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Compart, "'Air Force way of life kept me': McPeak steps down after serving 37 years," *Air Force Times*, Nov 7 '94, 4.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Conclusion**

The years 1990 thru 1994 were a turbulent time for the Air Force. 1990 ended with the country preparing to go to war. 1991 started with the beginning of combat operations in the Gulf War, and the year ended with the country, and especially the Air Force, basking in victory. A new Air Force Chief of Staff named General Tony McPeak was just beginning to guide the Air Force into radical changes from reorganization to a new uniform. Lt Col Edsel R. Field stated in his Air War College research paper that, “many leaders lack the energy and the ability to implement change, and this is the major reason why change is not introduced at an appropriate rate in the organization.”<sup>1</sup> General McPeak did not lack the energy or the ability.

The Air Force had all the characteristics ripe for change, and the changes for the most part were to better the organization for the future. General Jay Kelley, former Commander of Air University, wrote in the forward of the book, *Selected Works 1990-1994*, “A significant downsizing of resources available to the Air Force had been under way for half a decade, and there was every reason to believe this trend would continue. In such circumstances, the Air Force could have adopted a ‘wait and see’ attitude, just doing the best job we could with the hand we were dealt. Instead, General McPeak launched the most far-reaching reorganization in our history, often getting ‘ahead of change’ at a

pace that confounded the Air Force rank and file.”<sup>2</sup> General McPeak was a visionary and a strong decision maker. He did as he put it, “seize the initiative,” to keep the Air Force relevant for the future.

General McPeak, as the change agent, had all of the qualifications to succeed. He wanted communications within the organization to be free and open. In his mind, he encouraged dissent, but to others he wanted things done his way. Without the buy-in from the other organizational leaders, change was difficult to manage. It did allow General McPeak to push through his changes in a very short time. This was an element of the change process that the General was well aware of. He only had four short years in his tenure and he needed to concentrate on the items to be changed and do them quickly or they would never get done. General McPeak admits that he and the Air Force has some “scar tissue” from his tenure as chief of staff. He believed the wounds were worth it and that the organization was better off in the end.

*Air Force Times* reporter, Steven Watkins, summarized the chief’s tenure saying, “Working with then Air Force Secretary Donald Rice, McPeak created a new mission statement for the Air Force and a guiding vision known as global reach and global power. They reorganized the Air Force command structure, streamlined the Air Force’s chain of command and carved out large chunks of bureaucracy, imposed modern management philosophies to ‘empower’ individuals, and raised training standards with the intent of ‘set[ing] the world standard of training.’”<sup>3</sup>

General McPeak accomplished a great deal in four years. He came into the job and quickly set a vision and an agenda to keep the Air Force as a premier organization. His changes were widespread and effected every Air Force member. General McPeak’s



confidence allowed him to take risks and make mistakes. This philosophy of making change within the first six months of his tenure was well suited for his change agenda. With a defined term of four years as chief of staff, an organization can stall and reject a change if it is not implemented early.

General McPeak was not a charismatic leader. His leadership style and blunt communications methods hurt him in getting lasting change implemented. It also caused scar tissue on General McPeak and the Air Force. Overall though, General McPeak did an outstanding job as chief of staff. He pushed through needed change to keep the Air Force moving in the right direction. There have been corrections and modifications to some of his changes but that can be expected.

General McPeak will be remembered for the Air Force's reorganization, new wing structure, introducing quality into the Air Force, and bringing operations back into focus. His ardent critics will bring up the uniform and heritage issues as distracters, but soon we will realize those were also needed changes and we will forget the short term animosity of how they were implemented.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Field, 14.

<sup>2</sup> McPeak, XVII.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Watkins, "The State of the Force: How the service evolved under McPeak," *Air Force Times*, Nov 21 '94, 16.

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