

## Gates: Fans and Fans Not So Much

Regarding Mr. Tirpak's article, "Gates Versus the Air Force," March [p. 54], I am quite certain I am not alone in wholeheartedly agreeing with General Moseley's assertion that the nation expects our Air Force to be prepared to fight/conduct more than just today's fight. As the general so aptly put it, "It's not either-or." Everything we were taught in War College tells us that (to think beyond "this-war-itis"). And Mr. Gates' weaker excuse for chopping the F-22, that we'll just build more F-35s, was completely off the mark. Anyone who knows anything about these two aircraft knows the F-35 is no substitute, with capabilities so dissimilar. We simply do not have enough Raptors today to meet the national strategy. Current events in the Crimea may be the beginnings of a re-emerging Soviet Union, which should make us think about what Gates did to the F-22.

Col. Frank Alfter,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Beavercreek, Ohio

Your article was not very convincing. The Air Force has been in need of a trip to the woodshed for many years and, in Gates, they found the man to do it. The Air Force got dragged into the 21st century. Fighter pilots are an endangered species, and they don't like it. Too bad! Fifty years from now, there may be no pilots. And what is all this about F-35 fighters? Air superiority against whom? The Chinese? The Russians? The Cubans? Some of those guys in South America? Put your money into developing "combat drones" and reduce the defense budget.

I notice also the article fails to mention the nuclear force major general who was fired recently for misconduct and those 90-some folks in Minot and Malmstrom who were, what, suspended? Fired? For cheating on their tests.

And you have problems with Gates? Get serious. You look foolish. We need a lot more like him.

John Thompson  
Centreville, Va.

How dare the Secretary of Defense try to lead the Defense Department in the midst of two troubling wars, and all the while rejecting the views of the fighter pilots in charge of the Air Force. And the affront of supporting a non-fighter pilot (and worse, a guy who flew transports) for Air Force Chief. At least that is how the unbalanced and unprofessional article by editor John Tirpak comes across. It appears that the Air Force Association is so taken with its self-appointed role as cheerleader for the Air Force that it can't produce a more nuanced review of how things soured between a former Air Force officer (alas, not a fighter pilot) who amassed a distinguished record of public service—including leading the US military as SecDef. Your March centerpiece is an embarrassment to the Air Force and the association.

Col. Michael R. Gallagher,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Hillsboro, Ore.

■ *The article illustrated Gates' determination to steer the Air Force in a very different direction—a direction subsequently rejected by both Secretary Hagel and President Obama. It was in no way a criticism of General Schwartz or of his selection to be Chief of Staff.*—THE EDITORS

I read your article on former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates with interest. From all that I have read and heard about Secretary Gates, I concluded some time ago that he is a very conflicted man. His own book gives testimony to that fact.

It is unfortunate how Gates appears to have had a vendetta against USAF. When the head of any organization,

government or private sector, allows matters or groups to become "personal," they have lost their effectiveness as a leader. That said, I do not see Gates as a leader.

M. Vincent Turner  
Silver Spring, Md.

## Keeper File

George Kennan was a true strategic thinker and a master of the English language, a species probably extinct in Washington today [*"Keeper File: The Long Telegram," March, p. 68*]. When General Marshal became Secretary of State he created a policy planning staff in 1947, with Kennan as director.

In 1953 Secretary of State John Foster Dulles decided there was no place in the State Department for George Kennan, which has astonished historians ever since. Given events in Russia and the Ukraine, who in the US government today is capable of writing a new containment letter?

Sherman N. Mullin,  
Retired President,  
Lockheed Skunk Works  
Oxnard, Calif.

## An Honor and a Privilege

Your fine article on the critical role played by the mortuary affairs operations at Dover Air Force Base brought back

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powerful memories [*“Coming Home,” March, p. 48*].

In 2009 I was part of an Air Mobility Command inspection team evaluating air traffic control and airfield operations at Dover. Part of my responsibility was visiting with various airfield operations customers of which AFMAO proved to be most unique.

I and a small cadre of inspectors toured the port mortuary facility, from the unloading dock where warrior remains entered, through the various staging areas, to the final waiting area where warriors were postured for pick-up for their trip to a final resting place. Once the director escorted us through the big double doors from the lobby area, the mood quickly got somber. During the tour some in my party were moved to tears by the sobering aspects of AFMAO's critical mission. The experience made a profound and lasting impact on us all. “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

Each time a designated aircraft arrives at Dover with remains onboard special procedures are initiated on the airfield. Once the dignified transfer begins all operations on the airfield cease for the duration with the freeze including aircraft, vehicle, and personnel movements. I'd previously witnessed such strict airfield controls only at Andrews Air Force Base, home of Air Force One.

From the Dover control tower cab I watched from above as everything below me came to a standstill. This included a large commercial cargo aircraft which sat idle on one of the taxiways. The aircraft held its position for 15 to 20 minutes until the transfer process was complete and the vehicle carrying the remains had departed the airfield. In this age where time is money it's heartening to see that human values can still prevail.

Likewise, the same freeze procedures go into effect when remains are departing by air. This is occasionally accomplished by a military aircraft sent specifically for the task, but most often contracted aircraft are used for delivery purposes. A small fleet of these aircraft sits on the airfield in a 24/7 alert status.

Mortuary related events could potentially cause disruptions to the day-to-day business at one of the Air Force's largest airlift hubs. That's not the primary concern. It speaks to the degree of respect earned by those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service to their nation.

Events depicted in the old Kevin Bacon movie, “Taking Chance,” where the actor plays a Marine lieutenant colonel tasked to escort the body of a fallen marine via commercial aircraft back to his hometown for burial, are a thing of the past. Transportation by air is now dedicated specifically to support this important mission. Corporate-size jets now carry the coffin, military escort, and

immediate family members. The smaller jets provide a degree of privacy while simplifying and expediting deliveries because they're capable of landing at smaller airports much closer to the final destination of the fallen warrior.

I was blessed and dodged the bullet. I was left with a high degree of confidence that if I hadn't, AFMAO would be there to do all the right things for my family and me.

Col. Bill Malec,  
USAF (Ret.)  
O'Fallon, Ill.

### Peashooter Classic

Your March 2014 Classic is really a CLASSIC! The Boeing P-26 Peashooter is/was really one of a kind! Even today it stands as the epitome of classic [*“Airpower Classics: The P-26 Peashooter,” p. 76*]!

And the notables of fliers reads like the history of flying!

The Thunderbird painted on the fuselage caught my eye. As an aviation cadet in pilot training, Class 43-K, I trained in the Stearman at Thunderbird Field II, east of Phoenix, Ariz. That inscription was our logo.

Many thanks for a really GREAT CLASSIC!

Karl Haeuser  
Cayucos, Calif.

### Whence Wheels?

[*In reference to “Lady Be Good,” February, p. 70*], I have a question concerning a paragraph stating: “The team then made random sweeps to the northwest and found the wheel tracks of five large, heavy vehicles, heading northwest.” Where would these “wheel tracks” come from if the airmen parachuted from the B-24 and would be walking to the northwest?

SMSgt. David Hegy,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Crystal Lake, Ill.

■ *Author note: The five large vehicle tracks were heading northwest and could have been made by British or German military trucks. By this time I'm sure the crew didn't care who made them as they desperately needed water. Since this is the second question about the wheel tracks, perhaps people don't realize that during the World War II period, and later, there were vehicles driving all over the hardpan of the Libyan Sahara. There was also an active postwar effort by the British to recover their disabled military vehicles from the desert. They were being made serviceable at a depot located on Tripoli's main airport. I once passed an Arab in flowing robes driving a Nazi ambulance that he'd recovered from the desert after the war. Hope this helps explain it.—John Lowery*

### Leave It to the Next Guy

As I read the article about rated management I quickly remembered the days when I was chief, operations and distribution management, at the Air Force Military Personnel Center from 1988 to 1991, fondly called rated management [*“How Many Aircrew?” January, p. 42*].

When I arrived in July 1988 we were beginning the initial implementation of the pilot bonus program. We were losing too many pilots and the program was designed to hand out bonuses to keep aviators in the Air Force until they had 13 years of service, designated as the retirement capture zone—thinking pilots would stay at least until 20 years of Active service before leaving the force. Just three short years later, I was one of two AF personnel reps who went out to the UPT bases to brief the “bank pilot” program. We had too many pilots in the pipeline, due to the strong reduction in force structure or as the programmers called it the “peace dividend” due to the collapse of the Soviet empire. Now, UPT graduates would not necessarily go to weapon system training; they would be assigned to a nonflying job for up to three years before getting a chance to fly. These assignments were made based on order of merit within each graduating class. Each class would have a few flying assignments, but a majority went to desk jobs and entered a holding pattern for weapon system training. That was my three years in rated management, beginning with not enough pilots to having too many.

In between these two major rated management programs were countless hours spent evaluating the right mix for unit experience levels, major weapon system absorption rates, interacting with Reserve/Guard forces to help mature our force experience levels. All along was the constant demand for experienced aviators to fill needed staff positions at all levels. We constantly scrubbed manpower billets and made staff organizations justify why each rated position required an aviator. If it was a fighter pilot-required billet, even more scrutiny was given to the review process.

I remember providing a rated management talking paper up my chain of command about the ramifications of reducing pilot training rates to match current force structure absorption constraints and how that would impact down the rated force in year group management by not having enough field grade officers to fill the squadron flying billets as well as the higher majcom staff requirements. The reply? That's the next Chief's problem. I hope these annual reviews can smooth out the pendulum swings within the rated force because

eventually there will be no can to kick down the road.

Col. Jeff Cain,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Fairfax Station, Va.

**It Ain't Them**

I've always been satisfied with AFA's coverage of nuclear weapons issues and with the ICBM community in general [*"Systemic Problems," March, p. 44*].

I was disappointed, however, with this article including a picture of technicians working on-site. The maintenance teams at Malmstrom and the ICBM force in general have not been implicated in any issues brought to light over the past year. To include these technicians under this headline is a disservice to them and all the men and women that keep the ICBM force on alert 24/7/365. Please be more careful how you choose to fill an issue's open space in the future.

Mike Todaro  
Redondo Beach, Calif.

**Speed It Up or Lose It**

Benjamin Lambeth does an excellent job of explaining the important reversal of roles that began to transform how we fought enemy land forces in recent high intensity wars [*"AirLand Reversal," February, p. 60*]. At the same time, he fails to call attention to the important reality that this reversal of roles is not only incomplete, but also is taking far too long, making it likely the US will experience unnecessary losses in lives and treasure in a future war because of inadequate doctrine and force structure. The failure to anticipate the transformation in how we fight and defeat opposing mechanized land forces is in stark contrast to the reversal of roles that has occurred between airpower and surface naval forces. Well before World War II many US naval officers, anticipating the reversal of roles between air and surface forces, began to explore this reversal through wargames and exercises.

The forward thinking of naval officers did much to accelerate critical changes in naval doctrine and force structure, greatly contributing to our success in the Pacific during World War II. In comparison, few airmen seem to have understood how developments in technology that made it possible to see and target enemy vehicles could transform the role of airpower in the defeat of opposing land forces. The lack of emphasis airmen put on military theory and history helps explain why they did not appreciate fully the central role that vehicles play in land combat by providing armies with mobility, firepower, armored protection, supplies, and engineering support. Their lack of attention to human

factors like fear may also explain why they did not recognize the immense effect the targeting of vehicles could have on the behavior of enemy soldiers. Targeting vehicles has proven to create such overwhelming fear that soldiers become unwilling to risk occupying their vehicles, quickly creating widespread paralysis with relatively few attacks.

As a result of these shortcomings airmen have not strongly supported the further procurement and enhancement of systems like JSTARS that are necessary for the reversal of roles. They have also been surprisingly slow to learn how to exploit its revolutionary capabilities, often having to relearn old lessons. Nor have airmen been energetically exploiting the use of wargames and exercises to explore the future developments in doctrine and force structure that will be necessary to complete the reversal of roles needed to transform US military capabilities. Until we see airmen finally taking the lead, it is unlikely that the changes in joint doctrine and education necessary to make role reversal a reality will occur, let alone the required changes in Army and Marine Corps force structure.

Lt. Col. Price T. Bingham,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Melbourne, Fla.

**Stop Outsourcing**

Your editorial, "Compensation Controversies" [*February, p. 4*] noted the cost of 329,000 Active Duty airmen and 800,000 DOD civilian employees. But you ignored a key part of the compensation equation: 650,000 private contractors on DOD's payroll. They do jobs that GIs or civilian employees can do cheaper, better, and with more accountability. The nut who shot up the Navy's D.C. shipyard was a Hewlett Packard contractor who passed a background check run by another private firm. Other large defense contractors devouring a huge chunk of the DOD's budget include Science Applications International Corp. (Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James' former employer) and Booz Allen Hamilton, which hired Air Force General and CIA Director Michael Hayden after he retired from military life. Booz Allen also paid high school dropout Edward Snowden \$122,000 a year to work for the NSA. Uncle Sam needed specialists with unique skills right after 9/11 to fight the war on terror. But we no longer have to outsource our country's defense. DOD has had 13 years to get its personnel up to speed. Save military and civilian jobs. Tell the hired guns to take a hike.

Richard Reif  
Flushing, N.Y.



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