

FRANK AND UNIVERSITY PRESS COLLEGE STATION

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## chapter 12

# The Final Air Force Days

WHEN I ROTATED BACK TO THE STATES in June, 1967, I wanted to go back to Maxwell Air Force Base. We had bought a house in Montgomery and I had left Eva and the kids there. I had friends in the right places, so I was able to kill assignments to Special Air Warfare Branch of the Tactical Air Command, which would have been more of what I was doing in Vietnam, and would have required extended visits to Vietnam. I also had assignments killed to the Pentagon and to the headquarters of the Continental Air Command. Career-wise, this was a terrible mistake. Had I taken any of these assignments, I feel I could have advanced my career.

I took an assignment to the air force headquarters of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP-USAF) as the inspector general at Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama, because it was the only opening available at Maxwell Air Force Base.

The CAP is a civilian auxiliary of the air force with the primary responsibility of search and rescue within the United States and endeavors to instill in young people the desire to fly. At the time I was involved, the air force loaned small surplus aircraft that were no longer in the inventory to the CAP for searching for missing aircraft and lost persons in remote areas. Private members also used their personal planes for searches. The air force paid for the fuel used during search missions.

Each state has a Wing headquarters and squadrons at various civilian airports within each state. As an air force auxiliary they have access to all military surplus material except weapons. CAP members wear air force uniforms and rank except for hat and lapel ornaments.

I was in charge of a team of inspectors who traveled around the country inspecting state Wings for search capability and compliance with air force directives. My inspection team consisted of one lieutenant colonel as director of inspection and three master sergeants who were specialists in supply, maintenance, and operations.

It was my duty as inspector general to determine the effectiveness of each unit and make recommendations to the air force and to the CAP

commanders of the units. There are some very fine people involved in the CAP. They are very dedicated and give of their time and talents in working with young boys and girls to instill in them a desire to fly. One of the best units I inspected was the one in Oklahoma City. A squadron commander was a policeman who did an outstanding job working with young people. The California Wing was outstanding in complying with the CAP directives. However there were also some Wings whose people used the CAP to further their own agendas.

Prior to an inspection, I would send a letter to the Wing commander advising him of the date of the inspection. I wanted to determine the effectiveness of the organization and our inspection team could not be as effective in a social environment. They are supposed to instill a desire for flying in young people, which hopefully they do. However, at that time they took advantage of their situation to raise money that was spent on lavish parties for a small group of top commanders and their wives.

I discovered some of the civilians in charge of the CAP were very powerful politically. Although it was an air force auxiliary, CAP-USAF headquarters had very little control over the CAP. For example, a former CAP supporter, who was a millionaire friend and financial supporter of President Johnson, got CAP-USAF headquarters moved from Ellington Air Force Base near Houston into a new building that had been designated for the ROTC headquarters at Maxwell Air Force Base. When the air force commander of CAP-USAF tried to gain control of the CAP, the previously mentioned CAP commander called President Johnson and told him there was a "dead general" there, and asked him to please remove the "body."

Another CAP commander, who was a multi-millionaire from Delaware, wanted the CAP rank of the commander to be increased to brigadier general. Fortunately the air force held the line and refused his request. Some, but not all, CAP officers liked to try to pass themselves off as real air force officers.

Two regional commanders had a regulation passed that all CAP members must have insurance for injuries suffered while on CAP duty, which is fine. However, one of the regional commanders owned the insurance company and another one owned the bank where the money was deposited that was collected from the members at an interest rate well below the going interest rate at the time. They were collecting ten dollars a year from each cadet in the United States. What a money-making deal and of course, the air force had no control over it.

During an inspection of one of the Wings, the supply inspector uncovered a discrepancy in supply records. There were records of thousands of high-value items, such as Jeeps, trucks, generators, radio equipment and radio stations, and various pieces of field equipment that could be used for camping, that could not be accounted for. There were no records as to where the items were located. When I confronted the Wing commander, a CAP colonel, he was very evasive. I told him I would stay indefinitely until I found all the government material. At that point he told me he knew where it was and we could take a flatbed truck and pick up the equipment, but in so doing, we would black out a lot of ranches in the area because they all had air force generators. We would also break up the communication systems because the ranches all had air force communication equipment. The trucks and Jeeps were also at these ranches. He told me he intended to contact the state senator, who at that time was very powerful in the U.S. Senate. He also stated he did not think the senator would be very happy with the air force in general and me in particular.

It finally came to me why the Wing commander, a CAP colonel who was an obscure air force reserve captain, had a mobilization assignment in Washington D.C. He was the senator's "number one boy" who was buying votes for the senator with misappropriated air force property. I contacted my commander and explained the situation to him. He asked me what my recommendations were. I recommended that the Wing be prevented from getting further access to surplus equipment, but the senator had too much power and I thought that I should probably take my inspection team on to the next inspection. The general agreed so I left with political thieves openly stealing from the air force.

The CAP-USAF director of materials came to my office with a list of identification numbers of the light aircraft on loan from the air force to the CAP Wings. He also had the FAA's list of aircraft owners and their aircraft listed by aircraft identification numbers. We crossed checked the two lists with a CAP member's roster. I was not surprised to find that more than half of the aircraft on loan were listed as being owned by CAP members—in other words stolen from the air force. The aircraft were no longer in the air force inventory and it had no use for them, but to me, it was the principal of stealing from our government. Had we taken appropriate action to recover them, it would probably destroy the CAP. Again CAP-USAF had no control.

One day I received a visit from an FBI agent. He told me that an army supply depot at Allentown, Pennsylvania, had donated about 100,000 pairs

of army boots that did not meet army specifications to various government-sponsored organizations as well as the CAP. They were to be used only for the members of those organizations; however, the boots were beginning to show up in civilian shoe stores all along the east coast. The FBI agent wanted to be sure we did not interfere with their investigation. I do not know what the final results were.

Some of the people in these state units completely lose perspective. One day the commanding general of CAP-USAF called me into his office and told me to go out to one of the units and see the Wing commander. "Go out and find some reason to fire that son-of-a-bitch. He thinks he's General LeMay." I went into his office and found him sitting behind a great big desk in full uniform with flag stands behind him, smoking a big cigar. On the wall were pictures of the president, the governor, and General LeMay. I think he expected me to salute him when I walked in. Finding a reason to fire him was not hard to do. I encountered one unit whose members were in a pitched battle over canteens, mess kits, a broken film projector . . . just a bunch of junk.

When we went out to inspect the Hawaiian unit, the air force liaison officer told me that the CAP people had gotten their hands on a surplus provost marshal's staff car. It had the CAP shield on the side doors making it appear like an official vehicle. It had flashing red lights and a siren, and at night it appeared to be an emergency vehicle. The CAP people would gain access to the base by turning on the lights and siren as they approached the main gate at Hickam Air Force Base, and the air policeman on the gate would salute and wave the vehicle through thinking it was an air force officer.

I could not get binoculars for my crews in Vietnam, yet one of the Wings gave a very expensive pair of binoculars to anyone who would join the CAP. This was mostly an air force accounting problem but it shows how the CAP members were using their influence in high places to get their hands on government property. I was completely disgusted by the way some of these civilians cheated and stole from the air force. When I tried to enlist the aid of the FBI, I was told they had no jurisdiction because it was an air force auxiliary. When I tried to get help from the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI), they said the CAP was a civilian organization and they had no jurisdiction. I was frustrated in every effort I made to gain some control.

A national convention was scheduled to be held in Los Angeles. The air force flew C-47s all over the country picking up CAP members to take

them to the conventions at government expense. I flew down to Florida to pick up a group and as we were heading to Los Angeles, they asked me to land at Las Vegas. They had no intention of going to the convention. They were only taking advantage of the government's free transportation. I told them my orders were to take them to Los Angeles and that is where I was going to take them. They became angry with me because they were going to have to pay for their own transportation from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. They asked me if I would pick them up at Las Vegas for the return trip. I told them what time I was leaving Los Angeles and if they were not there, I would leave without them. They went to Las Vegas at their own expense and were back in Los Angeles for the return trip to their respective homes.

A few of the air force's senior officers who were involved and about to retire saw the CAP as a possible way of feathering their nests after retirement. They put themselves at the service of the more wealthy and influential members of the CAP. For example, after one of their lavish parties at Maxwell Air Force Base, two staff members from the Ohio Wing asked to be flown back home by air force transport. One of them wanted to get back in time to attend church services. The other one wanted to sleep late. The air force commander of CAP-USAF provided two aircraft for their convenience. I flew the second one and passed the first one on his way back. The temptation to play along with these millionaires and politically influential people is more than some people can handle.

In the September, 1999, issue of *Air Force* magazine, the following article appeared:

Federal agents with search warrants seized Civil Air Patrol records, data, and computer files in five states on July 21. The FBI and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations confiscated records at the CAP national headquarters at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, and at wings in Kentucky, Texas, Florida, and West Virginia in conjunction with "the alleged misuse of appropriated funds by CAP personnel," said AFOSI spokesman Major Steve Murray.

The seizures were the latest development in a controversy that has gotten progressively worse since an Air Force audit in 1996 found significant problems in CAP financial management and accountability, flying safety, professionalism, and standards of conduct.

The CAP is a civilian auxiliary of the Air Force and receives about \$28.3 million in federal funds each year through the Air Force budget.

In May, the Senate Armed Services Committee sought a reorganization of the CAP, with a new board of directors to be appointed by the Secretary of the Air Force. An amendment to that bill postponed action until a year-long review of the matter was concluded.

According to Donna Leinwand of Gannett News Service, "The Air Force accused the 60,000 member group, known for its search and rescue operations, of mismanaging federal money, traveling first class on the taxpayer tab, retaliating against members who pointed out abuses, and losing track of its equipment. Auditors said they could not account for 70 percent of the federally purchased communications equipment in one branch of the group." Civil Air Patrol officials have denied the allegations.

The inspection and seizure of these records is long overdue. While there have undoubtedly been some changes in the operations and control of the CAP, the principle is still the same. Get all you can from the government.

Any time citizens write to their congressman or senator or to the executive branch, the letters are passed on to the Legislative Liaison Branch in the Pentagon and then to the *inspector general of the unit involved*. The unit then has seventy-two hours to answer. As the inspector general of the CAP-USAF it was my duty to reply to the letters. Most of the letters were petty complaints not worthy of investigation; however, they must have a reply. As an example I received a picture of a naked women laying on a round bed. The note with the picture said, "See how the men in the Air Force are ruining the morals of our people." My answer was, "I see no connection between the lady lying on the bed and the United States Air Force."

I received one letter stating that the writer had seen a woman in civilian clothes in an air force staff car. The note said, "Is this the way our tax money is being spent?" There was no time nor location given, which made it impossible to investigate. I replied that there are women in the United States Air Force and that with the little information given, I could offer no further comment.

After a couple of years of the inspector general fiasco, I had just about all I could take. I did not think they would ever consider me for the position of chief-of-staff, so when they started talking about another year in Vietnam, I felt my family needed me more than the air force needed me in Vietnam, so I retired. This was probably another career mistake, but I was ready to move on. So on August 1, 1969, I retired.

In general I loved the air force life; however, there were times when I wondered, "What in hell am I doing here?" But that is all part of air force life. I feel sorry for people whose occupations require them to do the same thing day in and day out. The requirements of the air force are strenuous, but I prefer that to a dull daily routine.

I love to fly but I was only able to accumulate more than eight thousand hours. The more rank you had, the less time you could spend in the cockpit. Because of my young age, I could have stayed in for another six years and I have always been sorry I did not take one of the assignments offered on my return from Vietnam, especially the one with Tactical Air Command.

I will always miss flying and even more the camaraderie of the troops. They are memories that will always be dear to me. One other thing that I have noticed since I retired is that I cannot always depend on what someone says. In the air force when an officer tells you something, you can always rely on his word being truthful.

After I retired, periodically, I received letters from the air force reminding me that I am still in the air force, only on the retired roll, and could be recalled at any time at the pleasure of the president, and that he did not need the approval of Congress. My reaction? "Don't throw me in that briar patch, Brer Fox."

At the 308th Bomb Wing reunion in August, 1996, in Omaha, Nebraska, we were given a tour of Offutt Air Force Base, which was where SAC headquarters was located. We conducted a memorial service at the base chapel for all of the men from the 308th Bomb Wing who are no longer living. As we entered the chapel, there was a listing of all of the people who were killed flying missions for SAC. I knew many of the names. On one wall of the chapel there are three stained-glass windows: one for the 2nd Air Force, the 8th Air Force, and the 15th Air Force. On the other wall there are stained-glass windows with the insignia for each of the Bomb Wings. It makes an old pilot feel good to know that someone remembers and cares about the sacrifices they made. There is a SAC museum near Offutt where examples of all the aircraft assigned to SAC are on display. They brought back many memories because I had flown many of them. For a while I felt I was back home as I do any time I am on an air force base. I guess I will always feel the air force is my home.

I look back on my life in the air force with pride, a feeling of accomplishment, and thankfulness that I was given the opportunity to serve, doing something I loved. As I look into the future and think of my great-

grandchildren and their great-grandchildren, I hope they will read this and learn more about me as a real person and not just a name and date on a tombstone. I hope they will attempt to live their lives based on the code of a military officer: DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY, AND FAITH IN GOD, because without His guidance, I would never have survived. He was with me all the way.