

2014 National Character and Leadership Symposium – USAF Academy
"Character Overcoming Conflict: Individual Stories, Global Impact"
**Lt Col Michael Kathriner, CAP, NCSA Director – NCLS
Activity Director Final Report**

It was again my honor and pleasure to act as the NCSA Director of 2014 National Character and Leadership Symposium held at the USAF Academy. My associate at the symposium was Major Beth Dumont, CAP (Spaatz #1684).

Six cadets were selected (4 Primary attendees & 2 Alternate attendees) from an applicant pool of 14. In addition, with a kind donation by the Spaatz Association, CAP was able to increase the total to 9 cadets that participated. The CAP portion of NCLS has grown from 4 CAP cadet participants in 2012, to 6 cadets in 2013 and 9 cadets in 2014.

Also the funding allowed for a group of 11 cadets and senior members from a local Colorado Wing squadron to spend the final day of the symposium participating in the speaker presentations.

The program: The annual National Character and Leadership Symposium, one of the nation's premier symposia in the field of character and leadership development, brings together distinguished scholars, military leaders, corporate executives, world-class athletes, and others to explore a character-related theme based on the United States Air Force Academy's institutional outcomes. The great speakers tell great stories - to energize, enlighten and equip others for action. NCLS orients *future* leaders to see themselves and their world differently, to see opportunities for character and leadership development, to emerge from being great people to being great leaders. Leaders whose decisions and actions will shape a better future for the world.

Since 1993, USAFA has hosted students and faculty from over 500 different schools, to include civilian colleges and universities, ROTC detachments, Civil Air Patrol cadets, service academies, as well as international delegations. Student/Cadet participants are individually hosted by a USAFA cadet. They eat meals together and attend the NCLS sessions together and sleep in the dormitories with the USAFA cadets. This offers the visiting students/cadets insight into the actual workings of the Air Force Academy and the daily lives of the cadets that attend USAFA.

Previous Speakers have included:

Tony Mendez - *The "face behind Argo", CIA Agent in the Iran Hostage Rescue*

MSgt William "Spanky" Gibson - *First Above-the-Knee Amputee to Return to Operation Iraqi Freedom*

SSgt Salvatore Giunta, United States Army - *Medal of Honor Recipient*

Chad Hennings - *Former Air Force Officer, Dallas Cowboys*

Tom Enders - *CEO, Airbus*

Derrick Hall - *President & CEO, Arizona Diamondbacks*

Greg Hall - *CEO, Chilean Miner rescue designer*

Ross Perot - *Businessman, Public Servant*

Sherron Watkins - *Former Vice President, Enron Corporation*

Lopez Lomong - *United States Olympian*

Maximilian Lerner – *WW II United States Army Intelligence Officer, Survivor of the Nazi Occupation*

Dennis Muilenburg - *President and CEO, Boeing Defense, Space and Security*

Colonel Leo Thorsness, USAF (Retired) - Medal of Honor Recipient, Prisoner of War

CMDR (ret) Scott Waddle - Former Commander, USS Greenville

On the fateful day of February 9, 2001, Commander Waddle's life was forever changed when he gave the order to perform an emergency surface maneuver that inadvertently caused the nine-thousand ton submarine to collide with the Ehime Maru, a 500 ton Japanese fishing vessel, killing nine people on board. Against the advice of his attorney and the Navy's direction, he took responsibility for the accident. In October of 2001 he was honorably discharged from the Navy and retired from active duty as a commander. Commander Waddle is an author and inspirational speaker.

Dick Hoyt - President, Team Hoyt

Retired Lt. Col. Dick Hoyt and his son Rick, a spastic quadriplegic with cerebral palsy, have traveled the world competing in more than 1,000 triathlons and marathons in the past 30 years.

Aron Ralston - Speaker/Presenter

In 2003, Aron Ralston's extraordinary human drama grabbed headlines around the world. An experienced climber and avid outdoorsman, Ralston was descending a remote Utah canyon alone when an 800-pound boulder broke loose, crushing his right hand and pinning him against the canyon wall. After nearly five days -- without water and with no hope of escape -- Ralston made a life-or-death decision. He chose life by severing his arm below the elbow, rappelling a 65-foot cliff out of the canyon, and trekking seven miles to find his would-be rescuers.

As you can see, all amazing people....all with incredible stories of life, courage and character.

The 9 CAP cadets this year were some of the best I have ever met. They arrived prepared, took copious notes, and completed the attached assignment. We met each morning, prior to the day's activities, and reviewed each of their plans for the day. They then went with their USAFA cadet escorts and absorbed. Each evening we once again met and each of them shared their day's activities. Each of them told of the insights that each of the speakers had imparted to them. At the conclusion of the event, I provided each of them with a copy of the book, "**Lorenz on Leadership**". The book was ordered from the Air university library (free) and shipped to me by Marie Vogt, CAP, NHq. Gen Lorenz, USAF Ret. served as the Commander, Air Education and Training prior to his retirement. I arranged for the CAP cadets to meet the general. He spoke briefly about CAP and the cadets' role in shaping the nation and then he autographed each book.

I would like to thank Lt Col Tom Scheffel (Valkryie Cadet Squadron) for his assistance in supporting the continuing growth of the CAP presence at NCLS. He arranged for 7 additional cadets from the local Colorado wing to attend during the final day of NCLS. At the conclusion of the NCLS, I provided each of Valkryie cadets with a copy of the book, "**Heirpower!: Eight Basic Habits of Exceptionally Powerful Lieutenants**" by Bob Vázquez, Chief Master Sergeant, USAF, Ret. The Chief works at the academy and is one of the USAFA cadets' favorite mentors. I arranged for the CAP cadets to meet the Chief. He spoke briefly about leadership and then he autographed each book.

In closing, I would like to recommend that Civil Air Patrol continue to grow the National Character and Leadership Symposium NCSA. Now please read the cadets responses to the question "So What". These are the golden nuggets that they mined at NCLS 2014.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael J Kathriner, Lt Col, CAP

2014 National Character and Leadership Symposium – USAF Academy
"Character Overcoming Conflict: Individual Stories, Global Impact"
C/Major Ariana Ahadi, CAP – My NCLS Takeaways

The National Character and Leadership Symposium at the Air Force Academy was one of the most incredible experiences in my life. I got to listen to, learn from, and meet some extremely inspirational individuals, as well as make some friendships that will last me a lifetime. Thanks to Civil Air Patrol, the Spaatz Association, and the Air Force Academy, I had this opportunity to grow not only as a leader, but as an individual.

The first person I heard from in the Opening Ceremony was Razia Jan. She was an inspirational woman who currently runs a non-profit organization that helps teach over four hundred young Afghanistan girls how to read and write every year. Following 9/11 Razia set up her charity called "Razia's Ray of Hope" to help soldiers and refugees affected by the terrorists that led to war and suffering for so many. In hopes of "changing the image set by few, accepted by thousands [referring to the negative opinions many Americans had of Muslims and people of Middle Eastern decent]" Razia just wanted to be a "ray" of light through all the darkness. This quote alone, although a small part of her speech, left a strong impact on me because I'm half Iranian and have heard negative comments and jokes about "being a terrorist" my whole life. Instead of letting those jokes make me angry, I always tried to change their opinion instead of getting mad and inevitably proving them right. Following the opening ceremony I was able to meet up with her and thank her for everything she does to make the world a better place for everyone.

The second person I got to see, and one of my favorites from the whole weekend was Brigadier General Dan Cherry. However, my story with General Cherry does not start in Mitchell Hall, it starts in Dallas Airport on the plane to Colorado Springs. I sat down in my seat on the plane and he looks over and gives me a big grin and a welcoming "Hello!" We began talking about how excited I was about going to the Academy for 'this leadership seminar' and before he could reveal his identity his lovely southern wife told me he would be speaking at that seminar and handed me a paper with his picture and biography. I was so thrilled, but when I asked him what his class was about he told me "you'll have to come to my seminar and figure it out." So I did. General Cherry is a retired Air Force pilot with a pretty remarkable story. While he was serving in Vietnam he shot down a mig during an intense dogfight and saw the mangled pilot eject. Years later the question still bore in his head about whether or not the pilot had survived, so he went on a mission looking for him. He found the pilot, and was able to travel to Vietnam to meet his family and even become friends with him. It was a heart wrenching story about the human behind the motive, the similarities behind "enemies," and the unlikely outcome of two war heroes from different sides of the battle field coming together and being friends.

The next seminar I attended was given by power couple; Lisa Leslie and Michael Lockwood. Both with their own inspirational stories, Lisa Leslie was a four time Olympic basketball champion and Michael Lockwood was an academy graduate who later

became a pilot for the United States Air Force. Their class was about determining your destination and one thing they had at the bottom of every slide show was “excellence is not an accident,” and later on in their presentation they showed how excellence really was a CHOICE: **C**ompetence **H**ard work **O**ptimism **I**ntegrity **C**hoice **E**xecution. This was the main message of their whole presentation and it really resonated with me. They both grew up in poor homes with not many options and they worked hard both got straight A’s and went to college. Another thing they talked about was having strong goals, both short term and long term, and used those goals to keep them focused on what they wanted to accomplish.

Next was a class about Why Good Leaders Fail by Rev. Msgr. Stephen Roosetti. One thing he told us about that I really liked and even told to my squadron was the story about “the forth cookie.” In an experiment people were put into groups of three, assigned a random leader, and were told to work on a project. Midway through the project they were brought a plate of cookies; specifically four cookies for every group of three. Surprisingly they all ate one cookie and then the randomly assigned leader ate the last cookie every time because in his mind he was the leader and he deserved that last cookie. This experiment showed a very important, negative thing about the mindset of leaders: their divine sense of entitlement. As an individual’s power and success increased, their stress and exhaustion also increased, as well as their isolation from anyone who would dare to oppose them, which led to their accountability decreasing, also known as the Bathsheba Syndrome.

One seminar that I attended on Sunday that I thoroughly enjoyed was by Brigadier General Yitshak Kreiss, the Surgeon General of the Israel Defense Forces. I was also lucky enough to meet General Kreiss in the terminal at Dallas Airport, and became friends with him and his son, Guy. His class was about effective leadership in times of Emergency and described the 9 factor model for effective leadership in stressful situations. The first was devotion to the mission, always being prepared and alert. The second was the ability to analyze a complex environment even if it doesn’t run in a direct line with your field or job. The third was the ability to be adaptable and initially have strategic and tactical planning for any situation that could occur. The fourth was professionalism, and he said that in a time of emergency leaders should always demand the highest level of efficiency, sophistication, and professionalism. The fifth was the capability of a leader to make ethical decisions even in unusual dilemmas. The sixth was collaboration as a strategy, sharing information, technology and personnel. The seventh was vision and values, and being able to see past the politics and remember that with medicine the only goal is “to save as many people as possible.” The eighth was managing people in crisis, during a crisis people tend to lose their heads, and they need someone who has a clear head to lead them. Which leads us to the last factor: the ‘X’ factor. General Kreiss described the ‘X’ factor as you, and ended his presentation with the question: What kind of leader will you be?

In addition to all those wonderful classes mentioned above I got to see Dennis Muilenberg, the COO of Boeing, who spoke with us a little bit about his experience and what he did at Boeing, and then opened up the floor to questions. I got to see General Norty Schwartz, former USAF Chief of Staff, and his wife speak a little bit about themselves and then open up the floor to some questions. As well as spend some time with the other NCLS students that came with me, and learn a great deal from my mentor as well as some of the other students that went to the academy. One thing that one of the other mentors, Lt Col Cole, said that really resonated with me was his five year rule: if he wasn't going to remember something in five years and it wasn't going to affect him in five years, then he didn't let him bother him now. I thought that was a pretty good way to think about things, and not "sweat the small stuff" which we commonly let ourselves get wrapped up in.

In conclusion my time at the academy for the National Character and Leadership Symposium was one of the most inspirational experiences in my life. I learned so much from some of the most incredible leaders around the world, and from some future leaders that I have no doubt will aspire to do great things. I was truly blessed to be a part of the Civil Air Patrol group that was sent, and will not soon forget all the lessons I learned.

The National Character and Leadership Symposium was an event that I had wanted to attend for years. Ever since I first heard of it when I was a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, overly excited Cadet Airman Basic, I have been incredibly interested in attending this incredibly exclusive event. However, when I realized that I was of the proper age, grade, and academic standing, I realized that my chances I had of attending this most exclusive of exclusive activities was incredibly small. But, I applied anyway with the hopes of being one in 7,500 who would be invited to learn from the most experienced and knowledgeable individuals at one of the most incredible centers of academia in the entire world. When I was accepted, I was elated. But, when I got to the United States Air Force Academy, I realized that my expectations of this glorious event were really dim in comparison to the fantastic reality I was faced with. The National Character and Leadership Symposium really exceeded all of my expectations and introduced me to a new way of looking at a lot of principles that I felt I already understood.

The first thing that took me by surprise was the value of an education. These cadets at the United States Air Force Academy were getting a “free” education. Or, so I thought. But, then I came to understand that they are giving up years of their lives in defense of my freedoms, which is infinitely more valuable than any thousands of dollars that anyone else may or may not be spending in the pursuit of an education here in America. This all came about through contemplation of the message shared by Ms. Razia Jan. She spoke so powerfully about her belief, which I certainly share, of education being the doorway to a better world. She spoke of class differences and gender discrimination in her home country and how all of that could be fixed if education were made possible. She gave us advice to “Be determined. Have a vision. Only then can you have success.” She, who had lived under such horrible oppression for most of her life, told us that education was “a taste of freedom”. Education for the sake of education is invaluable and *liberating* if we accept it for what it is and seek after it with pure and vigorous intent, rather than chasing after a degree.

General Dan Cherry also really impressed me. One message that really stood out to me was when he said, “Be where you need to be when you need to be there.” This really stood out to me and I knew that I was where I was supposed to be right then. He spoke of dependability, loyalty, confidence, and determination. He recounted a story of his encounter with a Vietnamese pilot and then his reencounter with him decades later. He spoke of the detriments of holding a grudge and showed us so clearly through pictures and narrative the advantages to being open-minded and sympathetic, as well as the advantages to letting go of grudges. He spoke of the importance of looking at the “big picture” and not just at your present circumstances. For example, at the end of his narrative, he referred to the name of his book, “My Enemy, My Friend”, and his new Vietnamese friend’s negative reaction to the title. When he inquired, his friend responded, “We were never enemies- only soldiers.” He explained that they were

fighting for the same things, with the same motivations. He explained that they were more alike than they could ever be different on that fateful day in the skies above Vietnam. But, the only thing that brought them to that awful dogfight on that day was the fact that their leaders- not even their own values or intents- clashed. He explained to us that if we keep an open mind and truly examine the big picture, we will find the confidence and determination to maintain our integrity during the conflicts we will undoubtedly encounter.

Lastly, in regard to General Cherry's narrative, I learned something he did not actually directly reference. He forgave the Vietnamese pilot for his actions that were executed on behalf of his government. And the Vietnamese pilot forgave General Cherry. The forgiveness was so complete that they felt comfortable inviting each other to meet each other's children and grandchildren. They forgave each other and they forgave *the situation* that led them to be on conflicting sides of a war. I know that we as human being can lead happy and fulfilling lives if we will simply remember that forgiveness must be complete, lacking grudges, remembrances, and reminders, for it to mean anything to anyone.

Another one of my favorite speakers was the husband and wife duo of Lisa Leslie and Captain Michael Lockwood. They stressed that excellence is not an accident and that anything can be done by anyone who has the right motivation and is willing to give the right effort. They also stressed that we can be prepared for any test or trial or conflict life throws at us if we will take the time to learn the lessons that others teach us.

They also put an emphasis on the importance of their family. I found his quite thought-provoking as I have recently been thinking about one of the conflicts they addressed. They spoke of how important it was to have a family and how important it is to have your career and success. And I could not help but wonder how and why they did both. Before, per my experience with other people, most of the time one must decide between a family and success. But, this was not the case for them and that really opened my eyes on the situation. But, it applies to many things. One does not actually have to choose between a family and success, happiness and a dream job, or determination and peace. Both can be attained, but not without sacrifice. That is where prioritizing comes in. I connected it to something my mother always says: "If it is that important, you will find a way to make it happen."

The core of Captain and Mrs. Lockwood's lecture was the importance of making choices and not just reacting to events. They made an acrostic for the word "choice" that they said would be our keys to success:

- Competence
- Hard work
- Optimism
- Integrity
- Courage
- Execution

General Lorenz said that the world is our oyster and though I did not know what he meant at the time, I think I understand now. I plan to fully take advantage of the opportunities that lie within this glorious “oyster” that has been set before me. “What now?” you may ask. Now I am going to take these treasures, “pearls” if you will, of knowledge and share them. Now I will keep an open mind, let go of my grudges, and be a more effective advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. Now I will take pride in the Warrior Spirit and use my talents until I am thoroughly spent. Now I will make a difference in the world by first making a difference within myself.

I could not reasonably cover all of the things I learned at NCLS in this paper. Nor could I summarize the deep truths and principles that were taught by every single speaker at the symposium. Before, I said that the National Character and Leadership Symposium exceeded all of my expectations and introduced me to a new way of looking at a lot of principles that I felt I already understood. But, I think that was the point. Flexibility may be the key to Airpower, but I learned at the National Character and Leadership Symposium that an open mind and the preservation of one’s integrity are the keys to success in the face of conflict and inner tumult. This lesson is one that I will hold dear and apply to every conflict I find myself in. If we remember our purpose, as General Rodriguez stated, we can hold fast to our integrity and stand strong and sure in any conflict.

Life is full of conflict. Granted, without an occasional disruption of harmony, life would be quite boring. However, conflict is only beneficial if we allow ourselves to learn from the experience. The manner in which individuals manage conflict in their lives – personally and professionally – defines a large portion of their character. The 21st Annual National Character and Leadership Symposium at the United States Air Force Academy expanded on this premise by choosing the theme: character overcoming conflict. Each speaker at NCLS presented a way he or she overcame conflict in his or her own life and provided the attendees with tips on dealing with similar problems in their own lives. Over the course of the NCLS weekend, three major points stood out to me: the power of perseverance, prioritizing conflicting ethics in leadership, and the importance of being true to one's self.

Perseverance despite adversity signifies strong character. Afghan woman Razia Jan, the opening speaker at NCLS, told the story of how she exemplified such a trait founding a school for girls in a small Afghanistan village. Gender persecution is common in Afghanistan even today, and not many girls have hope for a successful, career-oriented future because the idea that women should not be educated is still very much believed. Ms. Jan revolutionized this mentality by opening this school, but not without her share of conflict. Parents were initially reluctant to send their girls to school; some girls refused to go if they had to wear burkas; and terrorists even attempted to bomb the school at one point. However, Ms. Jan did not give in to adversity, and today, this small but ever-growing learning center continues to be a safe haven for girls of all ages, providing them with opportunities that they would probably otherwise never receive.

Olympic gold medalist Lisa Leslie Lockwood, another speaker at NCLS, reiterated that optimism is important because ninety percent of conflict is one's mindset about the situation. She believes that as long as one remains focused on his or her goals, he or she could achieve virtually anything. To maintain that focus in the short term, Mrs. Lockwood suggested writing down every goal you want to accomplish in one year and then keeping the list of goals visible – somewhere you can see the goals regularly, if not daily – so they are always forefront in your mind. For the long term, she suggested writing down long-term goals as well -- these being accomplishments you wish to make in a five-year span of time -- and then revisiting these every few months, ensuring that your short-term goals remain consistent with what you want to accomplish in the long term. With regard to determining what kinds of goals we should set, Mrs. Lockwood challenged us to ask of ourselves: "what would I do for free?" Mrs. Lockwood's husband, USAFA graduate Michael Lockwood, accompanied her on stage, offering valuable insight of his own. One particular quote of his that really stood out to me was that "excellence is not an accident," meaning that the only way to achieve

success is to actively pursue success through hard work and dedication; one cannot expect to succeed by taking shortcuts.

Other important lessons I took away from NCLS center on the conflicting ethics of leadership, in particular, integrity versus loyalty. Heather Wilson, a New Mexico congresswoman, touched on both of these topics in an engaging discussion that included anecdotes from her own career. Making the transition from military officer, a profession in which integrity was highly valued, to politician, where corruption was the norm, was not easy for Mrs. Wilson. At times, she put her own career on the line for the sake of integrity. For example, after she was declared the winner of a 2006 New Mexico congressional election, an anonymous caller informed her party that the election had been fixed in her favor. Rather than attempting to conceal this information under the risk of being later discovered, Mrs. Wilson came forward with the allegation, insisting that the matter be investigated. In so doing, she was risking losing her seat in the House. Prior to her congressional service, Mrs. Wilson served as the Cabinet Secretary for New Mexico's Children Youth and Families Department. In one particular case, she had to make the choice between keeping a foster child's record confidential and revealing a doctored medical report. Either way, the safety and wellbeing of a child was on the line. Through this story, Mrs. Wilson proved her claim that the most difficult decisions we make in life are not those between "right" and "wrong," but those between "right" and "right," also known as situational ethics.

Mrs. Wilson made an intriguing point regarding situational ethics; she suggested that sometimes, lying by honorable men and women is both necessary and appropriate. Circumstances in which lying is justified include those involving protecting the innocent, preserving national security, or avoiding unnecessary offense. The first two go hand in hand; for example, men and women in the United States military endure intense training to prepare them for wartime situations in which they may be interrogated by the enemy. These soldiers must ensure they do not release sensitive information because the lives of millions of Americans could be at stake if this information falls into the wrong hands. In addition, lying to prevent offense— otherwise known as telling "white lies" —is acceptable in many situations, but Mrs. Wilson emphasized that one must only resort to lying for the benefit of the greater good, not to fulfill any selfish agenda.

Ultimately, every speaker whose seminar I attended agreed that remaining true to one's self is important regardless of the situation. Throughout his time in the US Air Force, including four years as a USAFA cadet, current California Mayor Scott Hines, another speaker, was forced to conceal his homosexual identity due to social attitudes and UCMJ restrictions in place at the time. As a result, he was miserable and became depressed to the point of wanting to end his own life. Years later, when he finally went public with his true identity, he lost everything in the process: his career, his family, and his direction in life. However, he gained something that he never had previously: a clear

conscious and the freedom to be himself. After rebuilding his life according to his own terms, Mr. Hines now owns a successful business, holds political office, and enjoys a harmonious family life.

Being true to one's self sometimes means having to go against the decisions of your superiors, as Mrs. Wilson pointed out. While unquestioned loyalty seems favorable, a good leader appreciates a follower who is not afraid to stand up for what he or she believes in, especially in matters pertaining to morality or safety. After all, at the end of the day, the only person you really have to answer to is yourself.

Overall, every speaker at NCLS was an inspiration to me in some way, not only because they achieved success, but also because each garnered valuable wisdom as a result of their conflicts and failures. Hearing their stories allowed me to realize the true value of character, and this realization will undoubtedly resonate with me as I continue to pursue my own ambitions. Conflict is an inevitable part of life, as is failure; but my attitude toward adversity will play a large role in how well I am able to overcome. A quote by Eleanor Roosevelt best sums up my NCLS takeaway: "People grow through experience if they meet life honestly and courageously. This is how character is built."

The opportunity to hear from some of the world's greatest leaders back to back and the stories they told allowed me to take a deeper look at my character and the different leadership qualities I hold. It opened up the question of what I really look for in a leader and how I can integrate those expectations into my own life. If I plan to be an Air Force officer, I will be a leader, and I will have many responsibilities to hold. The success of the people I work with as well as the people I would look over would ultimately ride in the hands of how well I influence them and the qualities that rub off of me.

The 2014 NCLS offered speakers with stories that I greatly enjoyed listening to as well as stories from which I received a lot of valuable information. Being able to hear some of the successes and failures of these speakers made me realize that we are all human, and we all make mistakes. However, taking those mistakes and turning them into lessons to learn from and make you stronger is what we should strive for.

Brigadier General Dan Cherry spoke on a series of unusual events that led to him meeting a fighter pilot that he had shot down during the Vietnam War. Though I really enjoyed the whole story he had to tell, I can say that I was able to take a lot from his experiences and character. The fact that I would like to some day be a fighter pilot in the Air Force someday as well really made me intrigued and closely taken in by his story. It is fairly well known that war is never a glorious act. Hearing even more so about the challenges and dark sides of his story brought even more realization of the dirty atmosphere that war will put you in.

After he shot down the other pilot, Cherry really struggled with knowing that he shot someone down. Cherry was able to celebrate about his victory, but it was in vain knowing that his opponent was not able to share an equal celebration, and he struggled with not knowing if he survived and if he had a family to take care. It put it all into perspective when Cherry said that it could have been him in that situation.

Many years later, Cherry had the opportunity to meet with the MiG-21 pilot and hear his side of the story. To this day, both pilots share a friendship that started from a dogfight many years before. One thing that struck me was a quote that Nguyen Hong My, the MiG pilot, had said about how they were never actually enemies but rather warriors each doing their job and fighting for their country. Seeing how this friendship arose also showed the futility of holding grudges and how forgiveness can make all the difference.

Lisa Leslie and Michael Lockwood, husband and wife, shared their stories of how the choices they made in life ultimately determined the success they both hold to this day. Everyone must answer the question of do you want to be good

or do you want to be great. Do you set yourself apart from the rest? If you fail, you must make a choice. Do you sulk about it, or do you take it as a lesson and make yourself stronger.

Lisa and Michael introduced an important concept that has worked for them in the past. Take a look at successful people and analyze what sets them apart from the rest of society – educate yourself by finding success in others. Whatever you do, if you strive for a goal, there is going to be pain because hard work is never easy. It is important to understand that the so-called pain is only temporary and the result is much more rewarding. Optimism in whatever you do not only affects you, but it rubs off onto those around you. Having that positive attitude sets you up for success by giving you the attitude of “I can accomplish this” rather than “I might be able to accomplish this.” Another important aspect of success is personal integrity. If you are not trustworthy, then you will be given neither the responsibility you deserve nor the freedom that is rewarded when you accomplish what you want. One way to look at it is being a man of your word. The final point in their six-step concept is execution. Having a great plan is a good start, but it is only as good as the person who carries it out. An outstanding plan means nothing if it is not carried out.

They gave a suggestion about accomplishing goals that sounds simple enough, but it really made me think about how well I am taking steps to accomplish my future goals. Take your long-term goals, about five years, and analyze all the time in the middle to determine what steps you should take to ensure it happens. One of my goals is to be heading off to Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) five years from now. With that in mind, I really put a lot of thought into what I am doing right and wrong at this moment and the steps that I need to take to ensure that changes are made to reach that goal.

Commander (Ret) Driscoll has logged thousands of hours as a fighter pilot and has gone on to teach at Top Gun, a prestigious fighter pilot school for the best of the best to become even greater pilots and leaders. Driscoll’s main presentation had to do with reacting under pressure and ensuring that you make the right decisions without having enough time to put in a lot of thought.

Everyone has to learn their own job, whether a mechanic, nurse, or fighter pilot. No matter what, you will, at some point, face problems and challenges that cross your path. According to Driscoll, the best way to deal with a situation is to “know your job and react calmly and by what you’ve learned.” This means you cannot expect to make the right decision if you have not prepared for it. As a pilot, Driscoll stated that you have to know your airplane and be ahead of it at all times to avoid it taking over and making you lose control. Though he talks about an airplane, this concept can be applied to all situations. Educate yourself to a point that you don’t have to think twice about what needs to be done, and you

can react from your instincts. Take this one step farther and “when it seems impossible, keep flying the airplane. If you give up or let up, you will always fail.”

Flying in the military almost always means you’ll be paired with a wingman. This means they have to be someone you can trust, and you can put your life in their hands. However, this is a two-way street. You cannot always worry about how much you trust your wingman because you too are also a wingman. As a wingman, what type of leader and friend do you make yourself? Driscoll says this is where you need to look in a mirror and determine the type of person you see. Can I trust him with my life? Does he have high standards? How is his reputation and character? Answering these questions honestly will make you think about how others view you. This simple act will make a big difference in the type of leader you make yourself. Another test is the Magic wand drill. As a leader you have one wish. What would it be – commitment, decisiveness, attitude?

The few days I spent at the Air Force Academy for NCLS changed my view and definition of being a leader. Two of the main underlying points I took from all of the speakers I heard were to educate myself and always have a positive attitude. Take my mistakes and the mistakes of others to ensure that they don’t happen twice. This part of educating yourself defines what type of leader you are – how you react to failure. Stay positive and have an optimistic attitude toward everything you do. The more doubt you have, the more likely you are to set yourself up for failure. How you carry yourself and you deal with adversity defines your leadership and character.

When I picture the Air Force, and the Air Force Academy especially, I see professionalism, intelligence, and excellence. While those characteristics are certainly predominant there, the National Character and Leadership Symposium added depth and perspective to my perception of the academy. Ms. Razia Jan, a middle-aged Muslim woman, who spoke through tears, opened the ceremony. I received a book there personally signed by a graduate of the academy and a four star general, and read in it that he failed a few classes as a cadet. My host cadet's roommate went to the same high school my younger siblings now go to. In thinking back about my four days there, the title of symposium really held true: "Character Overcoming Conflict: Individual Stories, Global Impact". Having previously attended other leadership seminars, I was expecting pre-packaged A+B=C character prescription lectures. NCLS pleasantly surprised me with arranging an incredibly diverse line up of, for the most part, highly personable and relatable stories of individual lives.

To highlight a few of my favorites- Brig. Gen. Dan Cherry's engaging narrative about his time as a fighter pilot, and later the reconciliation of his "enemy" was so moving it was hard to believe it was a true story. I remember having to remind myself to breathe because I was holding my breath in anticipation during his dogfight description. In personal application, the main point Cherry emphasized was the futility of grudges and the benefits of moving on from the past. With such a vivid story attached to that life lesson, I know I will always keep that in mind throughout my life.

Another upbeat session was the Lisa Leslie and Michael Lockwood session. Lisa gave the advice to write down goals, short, intermediate, and long term, and to then go after them! When I was fifteen I wrote down everything I wanted to do in my life. Now, at nineteen I've practically exhausted the list. Not that it was a slight list; it included flying a plane, living in Italy for longer than a month, being interviewed and having it published, becoming Miss America (I've since changed my views on the organization so that ones out), and visiting the Air Force Academy. After attending this session, I was inspired to write another with even more daring dreams along with plans to accomplish them.

Perhaps the most personally touching session was Dori Bonner. She gave her life testimony of growing up in Afghan during war times, then escaping with her family to India only to live in deplorable conditions. As a child, she had a postcard of a beach in America that gave her hope that someday she could be there too. When she was thirteen her parents arranged for her and her brother to travel to America, where her parents eventually caught up with them. Even after they had arrived they still had to continue to fight to become American citizens. Her story showed me how fortunate I am to be born an American citizen in a peaceful and wealthy state. It also taught me the power of believing in and wanting something so hard, that anything is possible.

Another dimension to the NCLS experience was all of the excellent people I met and reunited with. As a nearly twenty year old cadet Captain, there are few cadets I still interact with that are my age and rank. Meeting other Civil Air Patrol cadets that were at my level was motivating and fun! Getting to interact with cadets who attend the academy and learning how they got to where they are and where they plan to go after they graduate was always interesting. Finally, I was able to meet a few friends I had met before, both expected and unexpected. All of these interactions and the discussions that were had rounded out the experience.

Coming back home, I realize that none of what I mentioned above would make any difference unless I apply it to my life. A few years ago I came across this quote by Steve Jobs, and I think it explains what I felt after my visit to the Academy, “When you grow up you tend to get told the world is the way it is and your life is just to live your life inside the world. Try not to bash into the walls too much. Try to have a nice family life, have fun, save a little money. That’s a very limited life. Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact, and that is – everything around you that you call life, was made up by people that were no smarter than you. And you can change it, you can influence it, you can build your own things that other people can use.” All of the amazing things the Air Force, the Military, and this country, has accomplished, has all been because of individuals life stories. Stories that have been impacted by global issues, family issues, even physical issues. Everyone had a point in their life where they failed, but also were given a chance to rise to the occasion, made the hard decision, and strengthened their character as a result of it. Every person’s life can make an impact if they choose to lead a life of character and become a leader because of it. After hearing these testimonies, I believe I am better prepared to maintain my character no matter what conflict comes my way.

Attending the National Character and Leadership Symposium was an eye opening experience. I learned and heard from wonderful speakers that have worked to make a difference in their communities, state, and nation. I was also given the opportunity to stay and see the Air Force Academy in ways many others are not able to. Looking forward to applying the plethora of wisdom I received is going to be an adventure and is hard to contain in several pages.

As it has been aptly put, "Smart is knowing a tomato is a fruit, wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad." I believe the same is true for me as I have taken in so many people's learning and experiences, true wisdom will be knowing where to apply the imparted knowledge. Out of everything I was able to listen to, there were obviously some points that stood out or made more of an impact than others.

General Norton Schwartz spoke on the chemistry of leadership. He used five compounds to mix up the proverbial element of leadership: Character, situational awareness, credibility, interpersonal skills, and values and ethics. Touching on each of the points and developing the importance of each one to leadership truly impacted my perspective on what good leadership requires. General Schwartz asked us if "our good intentions [in leadership] are good enough." The way he asked the question caused me to stop and reflect on my own life and leadership. Am I willing to give whatever it takes to see a mission become successful? Next, he told us that there is no such thing as "no fault" in leadership. When put into a position of authority and influence, someone has to take the fall and fault for any mistakes that are made. The General truly challenged me to reflect on my personal views of leadership and the character it takes to embody leadership.

Another of the sessions I was able to take in was entitled "Effective Leadership in Times of Emergency." Brigadier General Yitshak Kreiss spoke on the importance of saving as many people as possible. It was just a time of his story that really exemplified the importance of devoting your life to what you believe in. For him, it was a focus on training and helping as many people as possible to effectively treat as many hurt people as possible and hand out aid. There were several things that specifically stood out to me in his talk. He said that quick decision-making and the correct placement of people was key to keeping order and maintaining order in high stress and crisis situations. The ability to analyze complex issues and use long term vision is also important to have. As someone who is interested in the medical field and emergency medicine, I was impacted most specifically by his statement that "if you do not want to cope with ethical dilemmas, do not go to disaster areas."

Brigadier General Kreiss made leadership in medicine look like shared work. Often, we are given the impression that leadership is a lonely responsibility and that there can only be one person responsible for poor decisions that can be made. While that is often times the case, in disaster and emergency situations, teams for support can come in many different forms than we may be used to. “Do not hesitate to use shared leadership in in many situations,” General Kreiss said. When asked if he thought that helping your enemies even if you endanger your staff is alright, he replied that though it can be a difficult situation, he thinks that medical personal should shoulder the responsibility for care of those around you, whether or not you fight for the same side of a war. He finished with a quotation, “In total darkness, even a small candle can shed a great light.” The largest take away for me was the fact that no matter the size of help offered, you can make a difference in a disaster when you use leadership and the resources around you.

The final, and most impactful speaker I listened to during my time at NCLS was General Wolfenbarger, the Four Star General in charge of Material Command for the United States Air Force. She was a part of the first class at the Air Force Academy that allowed women in 1976. She spoke on her struggles and victories in that area, and how it shaped her life. The main focus of the General’s speech was a focus on leadership. She labeled the different areas of leadership as Leadership 101 and Leadership 201.

In Leadership 101, General Wolfenbarger used four different points to illustrate her talk. First, “do your job, and do your best.” While it seems simple and self-explanatory, everything else you do as a leader builds off of this concept. Once you do your job, “it’s all about teamwork.” Knowing and relying on your team and the members that make up that team can make or break an operation. Thirdly, she told us to “take care of the mission.” Distractions and ideas abound in groups of people, and the military is no different. Taking care and staying focused on what is at hand to complete is imperative to being successful in leadership. Finally, you must “take care of your people.” Also seemingly simple, this concept has the ability to destroy trust and all you as a leader have worked to achieve. Making sure to follow up, check in, and share openly with those we work with is imperative.

Moving into Leadership 201, General Wolfenbarger told us that embracing opportunity, as a leader is what propels us to the next level of leadership. Surrounding myself with different perspectives as a leader is another way to encourage success. She stressed that if everyone I work with agrees with me 100% of the time, I am missing something that could be improved. Leadership is also steeped in change. Something has to change or be improved for us to be considered leaders. But, “big changes demand big buy in.” As a leader, we must be convinced and be willing to follow through on all of our plans and actions. It

spoke volumes to me about the depth that leadership requires of a person in power.

Looking back over the experiences and the conferences attended while at the Air force Academy, NCLS impacted the way I view leaders. I know that everyone, everywhere is, or will be, a leader someday; but this activity truly made the concept real for me. The National Character and Leadership Symposium was a great experience and learning opportunity. Summarizing the take away from the conference, I would say that leadership is about expecting to do well at whatever it is you are a part of. If that is the Air Force, Civil Air Patrol, or the job I have, I should expect to lead in a way that promotes excellence in all that I do. In the rest of my life, I can take the principles and wisdom shared at the National Character and Leadership Symposium and find applications and usages for the knowledge. As someone who relates closely with short quotations and catch phrases I was most influenced by Something General Schwartz said about fixing problems in leadership and in life, “not every nail needs a hammer.” By this, he was saying that as a leader, if I were to take the same approach to every situation and treat them all the same, I will be hampering the progress leadership strives to provide.

C/Maj Alex Price, CAP – My NCLS Takeaways

Optimistic anticipation defined my mood as I entered the baggage claim at the Colorado Springs airport. I have always been interested in arming myself with information to apply in the future. With that interest in mind, I knew the National Character and Leadership symposium would be gold mine – but I could not foresee just how much value I was getting. This value lay in the inspiration, learning, and new ideas.

Each speaker proved to be inspiring in some way. Whether it was Brigadier General Cherry's forgiveness or Commander Driscoll's discussion of self-improvement, motivating stories were bountiful. New ideas were brought to light. Concepts such as the idea of a "good vs others" comparison are among the ideas to use in future situations.

The night I arrived, I noticed a book on my host's desk: *Heirpower!* by Chief Master Sergeant Bob Vasquez. I gained many takeaways from this book. One in particular really stands out to me: the idea that attitude is a choice. According to Vasquez, you can either be a thermometer, only talking about external factors, or you can be a thermostat, which controls external factors. In addition to Vasquez's book, the view that attitude is a choice was also one of several common threads I found echoed in NCLS speakers.

The first session I attended was a speech given by Mr. Mike Farrell. He went into some detail about a perceived hypocrisy of the United States. "No one must believe a certain way". This idea is one I have long held. Farrell reminded us to apply it. This is important – having an idea can be great, but putting it into use is how the difference is made.

Farrell also holds that, "everyone wants love, attention, & respect – three things." This is a crucial takeaway for Civil Air Patrol members in particular. In a volunteer organization, attention and respect can be readily furnished in Civil Air Patrol. Recognition through awards and respect in its many forms go into recruiting and retaining members. Attention and respect are what makes a squadron – without these, members will feel little reason to attend meetings or events. People rarely stay in CAP if they are deprived of respect or attention.

The next point Farrell made was summed up in a quote he attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt: "When will we act to prevent human misery instead of avenge it?". From this I take away two ideas. 1) On the whole, making someone suffer is hardly a good idea, regardless of the suffering they have inflicted. Even after a culprit suffers, the victim is still wronged. 2) It is only by helping the victim that actual solving of the original problem transpires.

"Education is needed where incarceration is [often] prescribed", stated Farrell. Incarceration is barely plausible for most of CAP, yet Farrell's basic idea is very relevant to us. Consider the classic story of the cadet staff member at an encampment

who pushes his or her basic cadets way too hard. Does punishing the staff member help? Hardly. Teaching the staff member the correct way and mentoring them through it is a more helpful solution. *Problem solving, not punishment*, will make for a more valuable experience – more people will become stronger. This is the main take away from Mike Farrell's speech.

Commander Bill Driscoll provided an explanation as to how subordinates are motivated to action. He stipulated that a ship's captain must be able to answer three questions from the ship's crew: 1) Do you know me? There is more to this than knowing a subordinate's name. One must know the key strengths and weaknesses of a team member and where they can create the most value. 2) Do you care about me? Again, this is not as simple as a “yes”. A superior must maintain morale and see to it that the team member feels that they are contributing positively to the mission. 3) Will you help me get better? A “true leader” is often held to be one that develops their followers. (S)He will share with subordinates ways to improve – not just discipline them for perceived wrongs. Just like Chief Vasquez, Commander Driscoll suggests that appreciating subordinates' value and helping them grow will go a long way to making a better leader out of each person involved.

As important as others are, much of Commander Driscoll's speech detailed becoming better as an individual. “The day you stop trying to get better, you're no longer good”, Driscoll states. Self-improvement must therefore be continual. Relentless preparation for each major activity is important. On the other hand, confidence without preparation is very risky.

Monsignor Rossetti's speech began with an experiment which speaks volumes of human nature. He told a story wherein several tables of three had an arbitrarily appointed leader. Each table was given four cookies. In all cases, “the leader scoffed down the 4th cookie with gusto”. Later on, I had the good fortune to discuss this with my host cadet, Cadet 1st Class Joe Cole. One of Cole's ideas was that the leader should retain the 4th cookie as an incentive for the higher performing team member. I take away from this the importance of thinking creatively with surplus resources.

Rossetti also explained something valuable: How a great leader can fall. According to Rossetti, as success & power rise, so too do stress, praise, and tiredness. Isolated and surrounded by protectors, (cut off from critics) a leader will lose accountability, but gain entitlement and narcissism. They will soon cease to make decisions aimed at making value for the team. Narcissists will see problems in others, refute any and all criticism, and lack empathy.

Several preventive measures are offered by Rossetti for this kind of falling down. Self care in the form of time off was the first. He also cautions against being indispensable; a team must be able to go on without its old leader at some point. Moreover, feeling as though one must do everything makes for a more tiring tenure. Gratitude is another way to remain a good leader. By remembering what one is grateful for, they can change themselves to become happier. Recognition of the good in one's life is crucial to retaining healthy leadership practices.

Mr. Dennis Muilenburg's speech offered two intriguing takeaways. Firstly,

making a difference is a responsibility that leaders have. It should be a matter of pride, but also a primary goal. Muilenburg holds that “long term relations matter more than short term wins”. A difference should be made towards preserving long term relations, even if it means giving up a short term win.

Second, relations should be preserved because people (not short term wins) will take care of the mission at hand. Muilenburg argues that doing what is best for the people involved will produce the most meaningful result. Although short-term loses may occur, the benefit of retaining relationships will always be a better choice, he holds.

Brigadier General Dan Cherry's session had an impact on me unlike any I have experienced before. I was inspired by how powerful forgiveness can be. Years after an intense dogfight, Cherry met the “enemy” pilot, Hong Mi. Although one would expect hostility, the result was quite the opposite. Not only were they on friendly terms, but Hong Mi allowed his grandson to be held by Cherry – a testament to how prevalent forgiveness can be. Later on, they visited the “Hanoi Hilton”, which had held American Prisoners of War, and was later made a museum. When Cherry saw a friend's picture in this prison-turned-museum, Hong Mi asked, “You had a friend here?” When Cherry said yes, Hong Mi respectfully gave Cherry some time at the exhibit. Again, although they once sought to destroy each other, Cherry and Hong Mi were now on positive terms.

I specifically take this from Cherry's story: No matter what situation you are in with someone else (combat, etc), ultimately, virtually nothing is unforgivable. To my perspective, however, Cherry's speech actually created more mysteries than it answered. For instance, if two fighter pilots who grew up under negative impressions about each other's cultures can become good friends, how can hatred of any sort be nearly as common as seems to be the case? Why is it that people hold grudges? As Cherry stated (and ostensibly proved), grudges are futile. Given the awe I experienced during Cherry's speech, I can scarcely understand why we take pleasure in anyone else having a negative experience, even if they are an enemy. Why do people let themselves feel badly about others?

On the topic of negative experiences, General Norton Schwartz raised an intriguing point: Should people be allowed to enjoy themselves or should we tell them when something is going wrong? He also cautions against putting anyone in a position where they feel rejected, uninvolved, and/or cynical. Especially in a volunteer organization, any feelings of rejection, disengagement, or cynicism may cause a member to leave. With certainty, said feelings will undermine performance and create deep dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is almost invariably a root cause in any negative event.

General David Rodriguez also provided wisdom to apply in the future. “The only person who makes “can't or “can” come true is you”, he says. Once again, we find that attitude and mindset are critical. Gen Rodriguez also states that, “When resources are tight, we often pull in. We must learn to do the opposite.” This idea is often shared by Simon Sinek in many of his podcasts, videos, and articles.

General Rodriguez offers four “sliders” that apply to any leadership problem:

- 1) Truth versus Loyalty
- 2) Justice versus Mercy
- 3) Collective versus Individual
- 4) Long-term versus short-term

He stipulates that truth, justice, collective, and long-term become more important as time goes on.

Rodriguez adds that we must always continue to grow and learn. According to him, there is something to gain in any situation, even if it is just a small bit of experience. More learning will typically improve decision making in the future.

Several overarching themes appeared across many if not all of the NCLS sessions. Attitude is a choice – how we feel about something is a choice we make, not a course we are forced to take. Grudges are futile – to hate someone brings pain only to the one doing the hating. Gratitude is powerful – being grateful is an excellent attitude booster, and a way to maintain mental health.. Taking care of people and building trust are of the utmost importance – people (not results or profits) will make a difference when it counts. These four ideas were core components in many of the sessions I attended.

At NCLS, chief Vasquez's book was the first mention I found of attitude being a choice. Mike Farrell's idea about problem solving over punishment was the first speech to support this point. We can choose to be negative and add more suffering to the world or we can be positive and help people, he holds. Brigadier General Cherry's whole speech centered around choosing to be friends with a former enemy. In one way or another, just about every speaker mentioned this concept. Even the flight to NCLS was a chance to apply this wisdom. On the first leg of my flight home, I was crowded in a small seat. Immediately behind me was a baby which cried often. This could have been a negative experience, but I made it positive in part by reflecting on what I had just learned and admiring the outside scenery. Cherry in particular led me to wonder why people can choose to be negative.

With attitude being a choice, why would anyone hold a grudge? This mystery comes from another common thread among NCLS speeches. The whole idea of a grudge comes from a negative attitude. Ultimately, those who hold a grudge only hurt themselves. This wisdom is enormously beneficial. Rossetti and Cherry both reflected a view that grudges can only cause harm.

Gratitude is powerful. By remembering what you are grateful for, life will become easier. It will be easier to find motivation and take necessary action. Gratitude can also make you happier and improve relations with others. Both Chief Vasquez and Monsignor Rossetti mentioned this. General Schwartz and his wife discussed gratitude as well.

At the 2014 National Character & Leadership Symposium, I discovered an array of ideas and obtained powerful wisdom. I was blessed with some powerful inspiration. Ideas to apply in the future were bountiful. I also met some of the heroes who provided this wisdom.

While knowledge can be collected from anywhere, it is the sharing and evaluation of ideas with others that made NCLS a particularly enriching experience. For instance, getting to discuss Monsignor Rossetti's "4th cookie problem" with my host USAFA cadet was eye-opening. The cookie could be used a reward for the most promising team member, Cole suggested. Or, it could be used as the extra resource necessary for a team member to go even further. These are just two of the many ideas for a surplus-resource problem.

NCLS proved to be very enriching and I am grateful to have attended. I met heroes, gained wisdom to apply in the future, and exchanged ideas with leaders. The knowledge from NCLS is a gift beyond description – and one that I will always have. Yet, sharing ideas with others (and getting their ideas) amplifies this gift greatly.