

the flying squadrons with whom they worked, he listed three reasons. First, he recalled the Dear Boss letter and suggested that flying-squadron commanders needed to focus on flying in order to remain credible in the mission. Second, he reiterated his train-for-war philosophy and noted that during wartime, the aircraft-maintenance specialists would need leadership focused 100 percent on maintenance, not trying to balance combat flying and maintenance responsibilities. Third, he described how the maintenance career field needed clear tracks for progression and by putting flightline maintenance within the flying squadron, the maintenance-officer career field would have been “eviscerated.”⁴⁰ He recalled that when TAC absorbed the air defense mission, air defense units were organized with maintenance in the flying squadrons and, when compared to their TAC counterparts, “without exception, they struggled.”⁴¹

Creech undertook a number of other initiatives to engender the pride he believed to be related to productivity. Among the first was to establish a system of goals, which had been lacking: “I remember when I first came to TAC, I used to walk into an AMU on the flightline and I would say ‘What’s your sortie goal this month?’ I got all kinds of answers. No one knew!”⁴² While there was a system in place, it essentially meant nothing to the troops on the flight line and, furthermore, it was based on a daily rate in which there was no catch-up. If a unit failed to meet its goal one day, the goal for the next did not change.⁴³ Creech abolished that system and created monthly goals that were clear and unambiguous. In late 1979, Lt Gen Robert C. Mathis, Creech’s vice commander, described the system:

We also set sortie goals by individual squadrons, so the troops on the line could relate to them. If sortie goals or output information are aggregated on a wing-wide basis, they can’t relate to it. But when it’s identified as their airplane’s performance or that of their individual squadron, they can and do relate to it. For example, if they are supposed to fly 450 sorties per month, they fly them. If they meet their sortie goals, we give them some extra time off. If they are not meeting their sortie goals, they work longer. They understand that. It’s straightforward and it works.⁴⁴

General Creech gave the crew chiefs pride of ownership, expanding on the “dedicated crew chief program” that had begun the month before he arrived at TAC.⁴⁵ Creech described the

benefits of the program as follows: “[Under the old system,] any crew chief worked on any aircraft. What is the problem with that? Well, if you’re the dedicated crew chief, all the work that you put into that aircraft shows up in that aircraft. It’s definable. . . . One of our great [noncommissioned officers] in telling me why he supported the dedicated crew chief approach said, ‘it’s this simple—when’s the last time you washed a rental car?’”⁴⁶ Creech also allowed the crew chiefs to paint their names on their aircraft to engender further pride.⁴⁷ He also allowed the crew chiefs to repaint their aircraft more often than allowed by Department of Defense regulation. Creech recalled, “There was a DOD rule you could only paint airplanes, quote, ‘if they were 66% deteriorated.’ That is, they had to look two-thirds crappy before you could paint them.” Creech went on to say that expecting the maintenance troops to take pride in working on a shabby-looking airplane reflected a lack of understanding of basic human nature.⁴⁸ Clearly, Creech saw a close relationship between pride and appearance, and he carried it well beyond painting aircraft.

Gen Jack I. Gregory, a TAC wing commander when Creech took over, recalled that “in early 1978, the building colors on TAC bases looked like those on Easter eggs.”⁴⁹ Many of the maintenance troops responsible for a large part of the flying mission were working out of abhorrent facilities. At some bases, they lacked buildings and worked from tents with porta-johns substituting for indoor plumbing.⁵⁰ Creech set about providing permanent facilities for those that did not have them as well as a massive facelift for TAC facilities in general. He instituted a series of “Look” programs—“New Look” for maintenance, “Sharp Look” for security police, “Proud Look” for the motor pool, and “Smart Look” for munitions.⁵¹ These career fields were the ones with the lowest retention, and Creech actively sought to improve their lot in life. He took money from his headquarters budget for many of the projects and used self-help for many as well. Creech used some standard colors to paint the facilities on TAC bases, and one of them inevitably came to be known as “Creech brown.”⁵² When the Government Accounting Office (GAO) went to TAC and investigated the spending on facilities, Creech noted that he

could paint all of TAC for the price of one F-15.⁵³ The GAO found that most of the money was spent on materials, the labor was largely of the self-help variety, and the increased productivity more than offset the spending.⁵⁴ Creech later said, “You can’t treat them shabbily, and house them shabbily, and expect quality work in return.”⁵⁵ Putting it more succinctly in 1996, Creech said, “It’s a hell of a lot more than brown paint.”⁵⁶

One of the fundamental complaints contained in the Dear Boss letter by Keys was the lack of credibility of squadron- and wing-level leadership. Seeing this as a serious and fundamental problem, Creech adhered to one of his command dictums: for important issues, the commander should become the “action officer.”⁵⁷ Creech perceived two factors at work with the basic credibility complaint and actively worked on both issues. One part of the issue was the “rated distribution training management” (RDTM) issue. The basic problem was that because of a lack of young fighter pilots, many pilots from other types of aircraft were being assigned to TAC as senior captains and majors. Nearly three-fourths of the new pilots fell in this category, which created a large rank-experience mismatch throughout TAC. This led to squadron-level leadership that had no credibility with the more junior, yet more experienced, pilots.⁵⁸ General Welch recalled, “General Creech absolutely immersed himself in the rated course business when we were struggling with how we could produce the number of pilots we needed. General Creech was the action officer.”⁵⁹ The RDTM problem had been a focus of concern and work for a number of years but had remained unsolved. General Creech personally worked closely with the Military Personnel Center, the Air Staff personnel offices, and other MAJCOMs to set fighter-pilot personnel and training policies and to ensure that the TAF was receiving an appropriate number of “pipeline” pilots (i.e., those coming directly from pilot training). Gen Joseph W. Ashy stated categorically, “Creech fixed it.”⁶⁰

The second issue at stake with midlevel leadership credibility was that many wing commanders did not seem involved in the mission. At the wing level, General Creech instituted an “immersion program” in which officers were required to get out

of their offices and get involved in specific aspects of the unit mission for several weeks at a time. For example, approximately every four months, TAC wing deputy commanders for maintenance (DCM) were required to drop everything and spend two weeks at the working level of their organizations. Two of every three immersion periods for DCMs had to occur during the night shifts. At the end of their immersion periods, they were required to write Creech a personal letter containing their observations, insights, and any changes they would make as a result of what they learned. The DCMs also included recommendations for commandwide implementation.⁶¹ The program was in place for wing commanders and other key leaders too.⁶² Wing commanders were required to immerse in the unit flying for two-week periods, flying every position in every mission in which the unit trained.⁶³

The results of Creech's many initiatives were notable. Early on, Creech had identified the fundamental problem as "a steady decline in sortie productivity over the years resulting in a decrease in aerial combat proficiency and readiness" (see fig. 3).⁶⁴ By the time he left command, leadership and morale had changed significantly.

In March 1981, Creech stated, "In addition to sortie rates and accompanying flying hours being increased, TAC flew 101 percent of those increased programs in both fiscal years 79 and 80, which represented the first time in 10 years that all of TAC's allotted hours had been flown." He continued, "The most obvious advantage is the great increase in sortie productivity. . . . Higher sortie rates mean increased proficiency for our combat aircrews, and that, of course, is the name of the game since they must carry the fight to the enemy."⁶⁵ TAC overflowed its annual flying-hour allotment every year of Creech's command except fiscal year 1978, in which Creech was in command for less than one-half of the year. Creech used a chart to illustrate the improvement (fig. 4). Further improvements included a reduction in response times for supply items from one and one-half hours to nine minutes under the COSO program and a decrease in the TAC accident rate (despite an increase in "realistic training," which tended to involve riskier flying).⁶⁶