

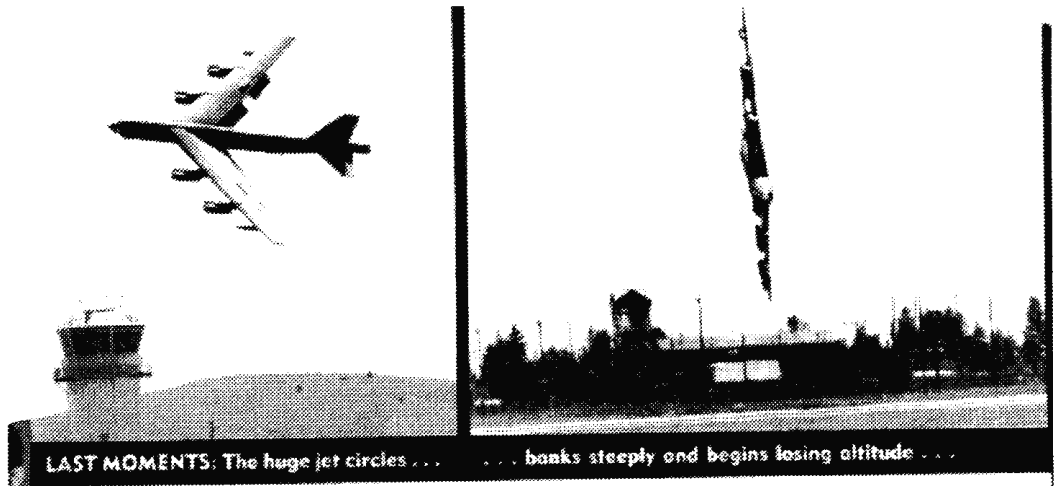
## **CZAR 52: A PRELUDE TO DISASTER**

**Tony Kern**



**Recommended Reading:**

**Darker Shades of Blue by Tony Kern**



LAST MOMENTS: The huge jet circles . . . . . banks steeply and begins losing altitude . . .



When leadership fails and a command climate breaks down, tragic things can happen. This is the story of failed leadership and a command climate which had degenerated into an unhealthy state of apathy and noncompliance - a state which contributed to the tragic crash of a B-52 at Fairchild Air Force Base, on the 24th of June 1994, killing all on board.

I have three purposes in presenting this case study. First, I hope to integrate the various elements of the story into a historically accurate and readable case study for all interested parties. In addition, to provide a clearer picture of what actually occurred at Fairchild Air Force Base in the years and months leading up to the tragedy. Secondly, I wish to analyze leadership and the command climate at the wing, operations group, and the squadron levels. This analysis will identify possible errors and provide lessons learned for use in academic environments. Finally, I wish to show the positive side of this episode, for there were many who did the *right thing*, and acted in a timely and proactive manner. Their actions might have averted the disaster in a more rational command climate. Their story should be told.

All testimony contained in this report is taken from the AFR 110-14, ***Aircraft Accident Investigation Board*** transcripts, obtained through the freedom of Information Act, or through personal interviews conducted by the author. I analyzed transcripts from 49 individual testimonies, and conducted 11 personal interviews. I wish to make it perfectly clear that no data was taken from the ***Air Force Safety Mishap Investigation***. So the issue of 'privilege was not a factor in preparing this report. In fact, I intentionally did not read or receive a briefing on the results of the safety board for the express purpose of 'avoiding even the appearance of a conflict.

***Placing blame on individuals was not my intention and is not the purpose of this report.*** However, my interpretation of events found potentially significant errors in leadership, disregard for regulations, and breaches of air discipline at multiple levels. As an officer and an aviator, I found many of these events personally and professionally appalling. Occasionally, my interpretation of events reflects this mood. Although I have attempted to avoid bias, I make no apologies for my discoveries. Any errors of omission or commission are strictly those of the author. I write this as my contribution to promoting the Air Force values of integrity, fairness, discipline, and teamwork — all found to be tragically lacking in this example.

## Prologue

"What's the deal with this guy?" Captain Bill Kramer asked, indicating a car conspicuously parked in the center of the red-curbed "No Parking" zone adjacent to the wing headquarters building. It was a short walk from the HQ building, commonly referred to as The White House, to the parking lot where they had left there own

vehicles while attending the briefing on the upcoming air show. As they passed the illegally parked car and then the various "reserved" spaces for the wing and operations group commanders, Lt Col Winslow turned to Captain Kramer, and replied, "That's Bud's car. He always parks there." The Lieutenant Colonel reflected for a moment and responded, "I don't know -- he just does."

### **Introduction**

*There are no bad regiments, only bad colonels.*

-- Napoleon

On the 24th of June 1994, Czar 52, a B-52H assigned to the 325th Bomb Squadron, 92d Bomb Wing, Fairchild Air Force Base, WA, launched at approximate 1358 hours Pacific Daylight Time (PDT), to practice maneuvers for an upcoming air show. The aircrew had planned and briefed a profile, through the Wing Commander level, that grossly exceeded aircraft and regulatory limitations. Upon preparing to land at the end of the practice air show profile, the crew was required to execute a "go-around" or missed approach because of another aircraft on the runway. At mid-field, Czar 52 began a tight 360-degree left turn around the control tower at only 250 feet altitude above ground level (AGL). Approximately three quarters of the way through the turn, the aircraft banked past 90 degrees, stalled, clipped a power line with the left wing and crashed. Impact occurred at approximately 1416 hours PDT. There were no survivors out of a crew of four field grade officers.

Killed in the crash was Lt Col Arthur "Bud" Holland, the Chief of the 92d Bomb Wing Standardization and Evaluation Branch. Lt Col Holland, an instructor pilot, was designated as the aircraft commander and was undoubtedly flying the aircraft at the time of the accident. The copilot was Lt Col Mark McGeehan, also an instructor pilot and the 325th Bomb Squadron (BMS) Commander. There is a great deal of evidence that suggests considerable animosity existed between the two pilots who were at the controls of Czar 52. This was a result of Lt Col McGeehan's unsuccessful efforts to have Bud Holland "grounded" for what he perceived as numerous and flagrant violations of air discipline while flying with 325th BMS aircrews. Colonel Robert Wolff was the Vice Wing Commander and was added to the flying schedule as a safety observer by Col Brooks, the Wing Commander, on the morning of the mishap. This was to be Col Wolff's "fini flight," an Air Force tradition where an aviator is hosed down following his last flight in an aircraft. Upon landing, Col Wolff was to be met on the flight line by his wife and friends for a champagne toast to a successful flying career. Lt Col Ken Huston, the 325th BMS Operations Officer, filled the radar navigator position.

## Significance of the Case Study

The Fairchild example is worth our further analysis and contemplation, not because it was a unique aberration from what occurs in other military organizations, but rather because it is a compilation of tendencies that are seen throughout the spectrum of aviation operations. Many aviators report that rules and regulations are "bent" on occasion, and some individuals seem to be "Teflon coated" because their mistakes are ignored or overlooked by their supervisors. Most honest flyers will readily admit to operating under different sets of rules depending on the nature of the mission they are about to fly. For example, standard training missions are treated differently than evaluations. Likewise, higher headquarters (management) directed missions are treated differently than inspections, or air show demonstrations. This often leads to a confusing mental state for young or inexperienced flyers, who see ever-increasing "shades of gray" creeping into their decision-making process. This case study illustrates examples of such missions, and of aviators who felt that the rules were different for them.

## Methodology

This monograph takes a case study approach to identify positive and negative aspects of leadership. This study uses no formal definition of leadership, although there are many to choose from. This is not an oversight; but rather by design, to allow each reader the opportunity to apply his or her own notions of leadership to the case study. Leadership assessment will use criterion taken from several sources, chosen for their relevance and practicality, including Major General Perry Smith's, *Taking Charge: A Practical Guide For Leaders*, *The Leadership Secrets of Atilla The Hun*, by William Roberts, *Follow Me II*, by Major General (Retired) Aubrey S. Newman, and J. K Van Fleet's, *The 22 Biggest Mistakes Managers Make*. In addition, the author selected several points from a lecture given by Lieutenant General (Retired) Calvin Waller on the subject of Ethical Leadership. From these sources, the author compiled a list of questions with which to assess the leadership behaviors. They follow.

- *Did the leader have all the facts necessary to make an informed decision? For example, did they know and understand the applicable guiding regulations and directives?*
- *Were the leader's actions and words congruent? Did he talk the talk and walk the walk?*
- *Did the leader act in an ethical manner? Would his actions pass the "newspaper test?"*
- *Did the leader consider the implications of his actions on subordinates?*

- *Did the leader's actions promote a sound command (organizational/management) climate? Did he permit and encourage the free flow of information? Did he require that deviations from standards be reported?*
- *Did the leader enforce established standards? Was the leader able to effectively discipline? Was he fair and decisive?*

At a gut level, most aviators can determine reasonable from unreasonable courses of action, regardless of the nature of the mission. This quality is referred to as *judgment or airmanship*. From the beginning of an aviator's training, he or she is taught that "*flexibility is the key to airpower*" and is given considerable latitude in employing methods for accomplishing mission objectives. This is one of the major strengths of airpower and should not be changed. But there are also those aviators, usually of high experience, skill, and confidence, who see this built in flexibility as a chaotic environment that may be manipulated for their own ends — often with tragic results. These *rogue* aviators are usually popular and respected, possess considerable social skills, and have learned what rules they can break, when, and with whom. They are usually perceived much differently by superiors than by peers or subordinates. This level of sophistication makes the direct oversight role of the supervisor more difficult, and the role of effective command climate more important. What the leader may not recognize *as an individual* must be identified for him *by the organization*. Further, upon this recognition, the leader must act. Failure to act after the organization has fulfilled its role in identifying a problem, leads to a deterioration of *faith in the system* by subordinates, who now feel that their input is of little value. A *culture of compliance* must be inculcated and constantly nurtured to prevent the downward spiral into disaster, such as occurred at Fairchild Air Force Base in June of 1994.

The culture of compliance was certainly not in place at Fairchild AFB in the three years preceding the crash of Czar 52. In this case study, the signs of trouble were present early and often. A pattern of negative activity could be found in complaints from other crewmembers, maintenance problems from over-stressing or exceeding aircraft limitations, and stories of Lt Col Holland's grand accomplishments and plans that circulated throughout the crew force. After reviewing the history contained in the testimonies, one suspects that an energetic historian could find earlier signs of Lt Col Bud Holland's departure from the aviator's "straight and narrow" path of regulatory compliance, but for our purposes we will limit the analysis to the period between 1991 and June of 1994.

By the summer of 1994, the entire Fairchild culture was caught up in the activities of a single B-52 pilot. Red flags of warning were abundant -- and yet those who could act did not do so, in spite of recommendations to ground Bud Holland. As one B-52

crewmember said about the accident, "You could see it, hear it, feel it, and smell it coming. We were all just trying to be somewhere else when it happened."

### **The Players**

There were many individuals involved with this story. This section introduces the reader to Lt Col Holland and the command staff at Fairchild AFB during the period of this analysis. The remainder of the personnel will be discussed as they fit into the narrative.

### **Lt Col Bud Holland**

Lt Col Arthur "Bud" Holland was the Chief of the 92d Bombardment Wing Standardization and Evaluation Section at Fairchild Air Force Base. This position made him responsible for the knowledge and enforcement of academic and in-flight standards for the wing's flying operations. By nearly any measuring stick, Bud Holland was a gifted stick and rudder pilot. With over 5,200 hours of flying time and a perfect 31-0 record on check rides, Lt Col Holland had flown the B-52G and H Models since the beginning of his flying career in March of 1971. He was regarded by many as an outstanding pilot, perhaps the best in the entire B-52 fleet. He was an experienced instructor pilot and had served with the Strategic Air Command's 1st Combat Evaluation Group (CEVG), considered by many aviators to be the "top of the pyramid." But between 1991 and June of 1994, a pattern of poor airmanship began to surface. Perhaps his reputation as a gifted pilot influenced the command staff, which allowed this pattern of behavior to continue. The following were typical comments from Lt Col Holland's superiors:

- "Bud is as good a B-52 aviator as I have seen."
- "Bud was . . . very at ease in the airplane . . . A situational awareness type of guy. . among the most knowledgeable guys I've flown with in the B-52."
- "Bud was probably the best B-52 pilot that I know in the wing and probably one of the best, if not the best, within the command. He also has a lot of experience in the CEVG which was the Command Stan Eval . . . *and he was very well aware of the regulations and the capabilities of the airplane* (emphasis added)."

A far different perspective on Lt Col Holland's flying is seen in statements by more junior crewmembers, who were required to fly with him on a regular basis.

- "There was already some talk of maybe trying some other ridiculous maneuvers . . . his lifetime goal was to roll the B-52."

- "I was thinking that he was going to try something again, ridiculous maybe, at this air show and possibly kill thousands of people."
- "I'm not going to fly with him, I think he's dangerous. He's going to kill somebody some day and it's not going to be me."
- "(Lt) Col Holland made a joke out of it when I said I would not fly with him. He came to me repeatedly after that and said "Hey, we're going flying Mikie, you want to come with us?" And every time I would just smile and say, "No. I'm not going to fly with you."
- "Lt Col Holland broke the regulations or exceeded the limits . . . virtually every time he flew."

The reasons for these conflicting views may never be entirely known, but hint at a sophisticated approach to breaking the rules that became a pattern in Lt Col Holland's flying activities. Additionally, some light can be shed on the issue by looking at the rapid and frequent turnover of the 92d Bomb Wing senior staff.

### **The Shifting Command Structure**

The 92d Bomb Wing experienced numerous changes to its wing and squadron leadership during the period from 1991 to 1994. The changes included four wing commanders, three vice wing commanders, three deputy commanders for operations/operations group commanders, three assistant deputy commanders for operations, and five squadron commanders at the 325th BMS. During this time period eight significant events that occurred will be analyzed.

### **The Events**

Each of the events leading up to the crash of Czar 52 on 24 June 1994 provides insights on leadership performance. We will analyze each event by providing a synopsis of what occurred, as determined from eyewitness testimony. Secondly, we will look at the action of the followers, which were typically (but not always) B-52 air crewmembers. Finally, we will conclude the analysis of the event with a look at the leader's actions. This framework, or model for analysis is suggested by leading researchers for use in the case study approach. It is important to understand that a historical case study cannot provide definitive guidance for other situations. All situations are unique and must be defined in terms of their own circumstances. It is hoped, however, that this discussion will provide some general lessons that may carry over into other environments.



## **Situation One: Fairchild AFB Airshow**

**19 May 1991**

Lt Col Holland was the pilot and aircraft commander for the B-52 exhibition in the 1991 Fairchild AFB airshow. During this exhibition, Lt Col Holland violated several regulations and Technical Order (T.O. IB-52G-1-11, a.k.a. Dash 11) limits of the B-52, by (1) exceeding bank and pitch limits, and (2) flying directly over the air show crowd in violation of Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) Part 91. In addition, a review of a videotape of the maneuvers leaves one with the distinct impression that the aircraft may have violated FAR altitude restrictions as well.

### **The Followers**

Many of the crewmembers that were at Fairchild for the 1991 air show were unavailable for interview, but it appears as if there was no large public or private outcry as a result of the 1991 B-52 exhibition. However, some aircrew members had already begun to lose faith in the system. One B-52 Pilot, when asked why more crewmembers didn't speak up about the violations, said, "The entire wing staff sat by and watched him do it (violate regulations) in the '91 air show. What was the sense in saying anything? *They had already given him a license to steal* (emphasis added)."

### **The Leaders**

There is no evidence to indicate that commanders at any level took any action as a result of Lt Col Holland's flight activities. There is no indication that either the wing commander (COL Weinman) or the deputy commander for operations (COL Julich) was aware that the profile flown was in violation of existing MAJCOM regulations or FARs. However, there can be little doubt that they were both aware that the profile violated the Dash 11 T.O. Both men were experienced pilots and were undoubtedly aware of the bank and pitch limitations of the B-52 in the traffic pattern environment, which were grossly exceeded as they personally observed the flyover.

Interestingly, the wing commander had a reputation for demanding strict adherence to air discipline. While acting as the commander of a provisional bomb wing at Andersen AFB, Guam, in GIANT WARRIOR 1990, Colonel Weinman had been very proactive to prevent low altitude violations during airfield attack portions of the exercise. After two days of observing aggressive simulated airfield attacks at Andersen he remarked, "If we keep trying to outdo each other every day, there is only one way this is going to end -- with somebody getting killed. The next guy that busts an altitude will talk to me personally and explain why I shouldn't ground him and send him home." The author could find no explanation for the apparent disconnect between what Col Weinman demanded in the provisional wing and what he allowed to occur at his own air show.

## **Situation Two: 325th BMS Change of Command Fly Over"**

**12 July 1991**

Lt Col Holland was the aircraft commander and pilot for a "fly over" for a 325th BMS Change of Command ceremony. During the "practice" and actual fly over, Lt Col Holland accomplished passes that were estimated to be "as low as 100 - 200 feet." Additionally, Lt Col Holland flew steep bank turns (greater than 45 degrees) and extremely high pitch angles, in violation of the Dash 11 Tech Order, as well as a "wingover" -- a maneuver where the pilot rolls the aircraft onto its side and allows the nose of the aircraft to fall through the horizon" to regain airspeed. The Dash 11 recommends against wingover type maneuvers because the sideslip may cause damage to the aircraft. As in the previous situation, the flyover plan was developed, briefed, and executed without intervention. The flyover for a change of command required approval by the USAF Vice Chief of Staff. No such approval was requested or granted.

### **The Followers**

Because most of the 325th BMS personnel were standing at attention in ranks for the Change of Command ceremony, they did not personally see the violations as they occurred. Most had to rely on descriptions from family and friends. The followers were acutely aware, however, that the senior staff had a ringside seat, and therefore may not have felt the need to report or complain about a situation that their leaders had witnessed directly.

### **The Leaders**

This time the leadership was forced to take action. The ADO (COL Capotosti) went to the DO (COL Julich) and remarked, "We can't have that, we can't tolerate things like that, we need to take action for two reasons -- it's unsafe and we have a perception problem with the young aircrews." Evidence indicates that Lt Col Holland may have been debriefed and possibly verbally reprimanded by either (or both) the DO or wing commander. However, Lt Col Harper, the outgoing Bomb Squadron commander stated, "No overt punishment that I know of, ever occurred from that (the Change of Command flyover)."

## **Situation Three: Fairchild Air Show**

**17 May 1992**

Lt Col Holland flew the B-52 exhibition at the Fairchild Air Show. The profile flown included several low altitude steep turns in excess of 45 degrees of bank, and a high-

speed pass down the runway. At the completion of the high speed pass, Lt Col Holland accomplished a high pitch angle climb, estimated at over 60 degrees nose high. At the top of the climb, the B-52 leveled off using a wingover maneuver.

### **The Followers**

Once again, perhaps because the senior staff was eyewitness to the violations, the junior crewmembers kept their opinions on the flyby to themselves. A B-52 pilot remarked, "I was amazed that they (the senior staff) let him keep doing that. Getting away with it *once* you could understand, you know -- forgiveness is easier to get than permission. But this was the third time in less than a year."

### **The Leaders**

The wing commander was Col Ruotsala and the Deputy Commander for Operations (DO) was Col Julich. The DO was TDY during the air show planning sessions from January to April 1992, and was to leave for another assignment within a month after the air show. The Assistant Deputy Commander for Operations (ADO), Col Capotosti, did not take part in any of the air show planning due to a family emergency. As a result, the normal command structure was not in place for the planning phase of the air show. The ADO, Col Capotosti, was to move up to DO a week after the air show. He was upset by the lack of Lt Col Holland's air discipline and told his wife, "This will never happen again. In seven days, I'll be the DO. Lt Col Holland will never fly another air show as long as I am the DO." After he took over as DO, Col Capotosti "took Holland in and told him to his face, behind closed doors, "If you go out and do a violation and I become aware of it, I will ground you permanently." Although Col Capotosti began to keep a folder on flyover and air show regulations, there was no documentation of the reprimand or counseling given to Lt Col Holland in any form.

Once again, the required waivers were not obtained for the B-52 demonstration. The wing commander stated, "I guess I assumed that it had been approved because there are a lot of other flyovers, or flying events . . . and it was all kind of bunched up into one approval for the event." This was an incorrect assumption. The outgoing DO took no disciplinary action, perhaps feeling that the new DO would handle the situation. The incoming DO's statement that "this will never happen again" was soon to be qualified with "as long as I'm the DO." Perhaps more significant was the fact that the counseling sessions which apparently occurred after the last incident (Change of Command flyover, 12 July 91), were apparently not passed on to the new DO. If there had been any implied or stated threats to Lt Col Holland after the last event, such as, "If you do this again, you are grounded." they were not passed along. This left the new DO at "step one" in the disciplinary process. By this time, the credibility of the senior staff had been severely damaged, and the DO's verbal reprimand most likely sounded hollow to Lt Col

Holland, who had been verbally reprimanded by the wing commander for similar violations the previous July.

#### **Situation Four: Global Power Mission**

**14 - 15 April 1993**

Lt Col Holland was the mission commander of a two-ship GLOBAL POWER mission to the bombing range in the Medina de Farallons, a small island chain off the coast of Guam in the Pacific Ocean. While in command of this mission, Lt Col Holland flew a close visual formation with another B-52 in order to take close up pictures. This type of maneuver was prohibited by Air Combat Command (ACC) regulations. Later in the mission, Lt Col Holland permitted a member of his crew to leave the main crew compartment and work his way back to the bomb bay to take a video of live munitions being released from the aircraft. This was also in violation of current regulations.

#### **The Followers**

The members of the crews on this GLOBAL POWER mission participated in the unauthorized activities that took place. When questioned as to why they did this, several crewmembers testified that Lt Col Holland told them that the wing commander, Brigadier General Richards, had instructed him to do, "Whatever you need to do, to get good pictures." The pictures and video that resulted were clear and unequivocal evidence that regulations had been broken.

#### **The Leaders**

After the mission, the 325th BMS commander, Lt Col Bullock, became aware of the video. One crewmember testified that the squadron commander attempted to coerce him into taking a job as the wing scheduler by using the videotape as "blackmail." The crewmember was so upset with this development that he went to the base Judge Advocate General (JAG) to file a complaint, but was told, "He could not win." Lt Col Bullock denies these events took place and states that, "No one told him specifically that illegal events had taken place on the flight." The same crewmember later showed the video to the Deputy Operations Group Commander (ADO), Lt Col Harper, who advised him, "I would not show any of this", relating to certain sequences of the video tape which he (Lt Col Harper) felt were in violation of regulations. When the DO was made aware of the presence of the potentially incriminating video he allegedly responded, "Okay, I don't want to know anything about that video -- I don't care." The entire episode began with Lt Col Holland's impression that he was given, "some orders

(presumably from the wing commander) to basically free-style to get good photographs and video . . . to make the presentation (of the wing's accomplishments) more spectacular.”

### **Situation Five: Fairchild Air Show**

**8 August 1993**

Lt Col Holland flew the B-52 exhibition for the 1993 Fairchild Air Show. The profile included steep turns of greater than 45 degrees of bank, low altitude passes, and a high pitch maneuver which one crewmember estimated to be 80 degrees nose high -- ten degrees shy of completely vertical. Each of these three maneuvers exceeded Technical Order guidance. As was the case in previous air shows, Air Combat Command approval was required, but was neither requested or granted.

### **The Followers**

By now, the crew members of the 325th BMS had grown accustomed to Lt Col Holland's air show routine. But a more insidious effect of his ability to consistently break the rules with apparent impunity was manifested in younger, less skilled crewmembers. In one example, Captain Nolan Elliot, a B-52 Aircraft Commander who had seen several of Lt Col Holland's performances attempted to copy the "pitch-up" maneuver at an airshow in Kamloops, Canada -- with near disastrous results. The navigator on this flight said, "We got down to seventy knots and . . . felt buffeting' during the recovery from the pitch up." At seventy knots, the B-52 is in an aerodynamically stalled condition and is no longer flying. Only good fortune or divine intervention prevented a catastrophic occurrence in front of the Canadian audience. A second example occurred at Roswell, New Mexico, when a new Aircraft Commander was administratively grounded for accomplishing a maneuver he had seen Bud Holland do at an air show. "It was a flaps down, turning maneuver in excess of 60 degrees of bank, close to the ground." His former instructor said of the event, "I was appalled to hear that somebody I otherwise respected would attempt that. The site commander was also appalled, and sat the man down and administered *corrective training*." The bad examples set by Col Holland had begun to be emulated by junior and impressionable officers, and had resulted in one near disaster and an administrative action against a junior officer. This was precisely what Col Capotosti had feared when he warned the DO about Holland's influence on younger crewmembers in July of 1991.

## **The Leaders**

There was no disciplinary action taken at any level of command as a result of the 1993 airshow.

### **Situation Six. Yakima Bombing Range**

**10 May 1994**

Lt Col Holland was the aircraft commander on a single ship mission to the Yakima Bombing Range to drop practice munitions and provide an authorized photographer an opportunity to shoot pictures of the B-52 from the ground as it conducted its bomb runs. Lt Col Holland flew the aircraft *well below* the established 500-foot minimum altitude for the low level training route. In fact, one crossover was photographed at less than *30 feet*, and another crewmember estimated that the final ridgeline crossover was "somewhere in the neighborhood of about *three feet*" (emphasis added) above the ground and that the aircraft would have impacted the ridge if he had not intervened and pulled back on the yoke to increase the aircraft's altitude. The photographers stopped filming because "they thought we were going to impact . . . and they were ducking out of the way." Lt Col Holland also joined an un-briefed formation of A-10 fighter aircraft to accomplish a flyby over the photographer. This mission violated ACC Regulations regarding minimum altitudes, FAR Part 91, and Air Force Regulation (AFR) 60-16, regarding overflight of people on the ground. There were several occasions during the flight where other crewmembers verbally voiced their opposition to the actions being taken by Lt Col Holland. Following the flight, these same crewmembers went up the squadron chain of command with their story and stated they would not fly with Lt Col Holland again.

## **The Followers**

During the flight, crewmembers strongly verbalized their concerns about the violations of air discipline and regulations. At one point, Lt Col Holland reportedly called the radar navigator a "pussy" when he would not violate regulations and open the bomb doors for a photograph with live weapons on board. On another occasion, following a low crossover, the navigator told Lt Col Holland that the altitudes he was flying were "senseless." But the real hero on this flight was Captain Eric Jones, a B-52 instructor pilot who found himself in the copilot seat with Lt Col Holland during the low level portion of the flight. On this day, it would take all of his considerable skills, wits, and guile, to bring the aircraft safely back to Fairchild. After realizing that merely telling Lt Col Holland that he was violating regulations and that he (Captain Jones) was uncomfortable with that, Captain Jones feigned illness to get a momentary climb to a higher altitude. Captain Jones also said he needed training and flew a few more passes.

But in the end it was once again Lt Col Holland at the controls. The following is Captain Jones recollection of the events that took place then:

“We came around and (Lt) Col Holland took us down to 50 feet. I told him that this was well below the clearance plane and that we needed to climb. He ignored me. I told him (again) as we approached the ridgeline. I told him in three quick bursts “*climb-climb-climb.*” . . . I didn't see any possibility that we were going to clear the top of that mountain . . . It appeared to me that he had target fixation. I said “*climb-climb-climb*” again, he did not do it. I grabbed hold of the yoke and I pulled it back pretty abruptly . . . I'd estimate we had a cross over around 15 feet . . . The radar navigator and the navigator were verbally yelling or screaming, reprimanding (Lt) Col Holland and saying that there was no need to fly that low . . . His reaction to that input was he was laughing -- I mean a good belly laugh.”

Following the low level portion of the mission at the Yakima Range, the crew was scheduled to fly another low level at a different route. Captain Jones convinced Lt Col Holland that the other copilot on the flight needed some training. When Lt Hollis climbed in the seat with Captain Jones (replacing Lt Col Holland at the other set of controls) Captain Jones told Lt Hollis that, “he was not to get out of the seat again, (even if) Col Holland ordered him to.”

Upon returning from the mission, the crewmembers discussed the events among themselves and came to the conclusion that they would not fly with Lt Col Holland again. Captain Jones reports, "I vowed to them that never again would they or myself be subjected to fly with him. That if it required it, I would be willing to “fall on my sword” to ensure that didn't happen." The next day, Captain Jones reported the events to Major Don Thompson, the squadron operations officer stating, "I did not ever want to fly with Lt Col Holland again, even if it meant that I couldn't fly anymore as an Air Force pilot." Major Thompson told Captain Jones that he didn't think it would come to that, because he "was joining a group of pilots in the squadron who had also made the same statement."

### **The leaders**

The staff at the squadron level began to take action when Captain Jones reported the events to Major Thompson, the squadron Operations Officer. Major Thompson had already seen a videotape taken from the ground during the photography session the previous day and was aware of the severity and degree of the infractions. Although he was admittedly a good friend of Bud Holland, Major Don Thompson had seen enough.

He immediately went to the Squadron Commander, Lt Col Mark McGeehan. Major Thompson recalls, "I had an intense gut feeling that things were getting desperate . . . I said, "I feel like I'm stabbing a friend in the back. I like (Lt) Col Holland, but we need to remove him from flying. That Yakima flight needs to be his "fini-flight." I guess I was just trying to protect Bud Holland from Bud Holland." The Squadron Commander concurred with his Operations Officer, but it was agreed that in order to restrict the Wing Chief of Standardization Evaluation from flying, the order would have to come from the DO. Lt Col Mark McGeehan went to see Col Pellerin. At the meeting, Lt Col McGeehan laid the facts on the table and made his recommendation to ground Bud Holland. The DO thanked him and said he would get back to him with a decision after he had heard the other side of the story. Colonel Pellerin consulted with Lt Col Holland and was told that he (Holland) was just trying to demonstrate aircraft capabilities to the more junior crewmembers. Lt Col Holland was verbally reprimanded by Col Pellerin (undocumented) and promised not to break any more regulations in the future. In making his decision, the DO did not view the videotape of the event and did not contact any previous senior wing leaders to ascertain if Lt Col Holland had a history of airmanship problems. The DO then called a meeting with Lt Col Holland and Lt Col McGeehan to announce his decision. He informed them both that he had reprimanded Lt Col Holland, but that he had decided against any restriction on his flying. At that point, Lt Col McGeehan made a decision to restrict he crews from flying with Lt Col Holland unless he was in the aircraft. According to his wife, "Mark said afterwards that he knew that he was not going to let Lt Col Holland fly with anybody else unless he was in the airplane . . . that he was going to be flying whenever Bud flew." He was true to his word.

Two men (Lt Cols McGeehan and Holland) who were professionally at odds, were to be paired in the cockpit for the next several months. Lt Col McGeehan had confided in his wife that he did not trust Bud Holland to fly with his aircrews. Captain Eric Jones related the following encounter with Lt Col Holland (after the DO's decision):

"I was sitting there and he came over and said, that little f---er," referring to Lt Col McGeehan, tried to get me grounded. But I solved that . . . And Lt Col Holland told me that he didn't respect him (Lt Col McGeehan) as a man, as a commander, or as a pilot. Apparently Lt Col McGeehan had said something about him being dangerous and Lt Col Holland indicated that he told him that he was just a "weak dick."

The squadron leadership at the 325th BMS performed admirably. After acquiring the facts and evidence, the squadron senior staff reached a logical conclusion and made an ethical and appropriate decision. They attempted to use the chain of command to enforce established standards and up-channeled the information to the appropriate level. After the decision of the DO was rendered, they saluted smartly and went about



taking actions that were within their purview in an attempt to do what they could to keep everyone safe.

## **The Command Climate**

### **Fairchild AFB in Early 1994**

The Yakima mission brought to a head many emotions that had been lying beneath the surface at Fairchild. In addition to the problems in the Operations Group, the antics of Bud Holland were being discussed by the officer's wives, civilians, and even on the high school playground.

The rift that existed between Lt Col McGeehan and Lt Col Holland extended beyond the men themselves. A B-52 aircraft commander stated, "Everybody was lining up on one side or the other, Bud had his groupies, and then there were the rest of us." The effects and strain were also felt by Lt Col McGeehan's wife Jodi, who related a conversation she had with Bud Holland's wife, Sarah Ann. "I was at Donna Pellerin's going away luncheon and I never really had a chance to meet Sarah in the whole year . . . somebody mentioned something about one of the airshows, and Sarah Ann just turned to me and she said, "You know, there is not anybody that could do anything to stop my husband from flying the way he wants to fly." The children were no more exempt from the controversy than were the wives. Patrick McGeehan, Mark and Jodi's oldest son came home from school one day extremely angry with Victoria Harper, the daughter of Lt Col Steve Harper, the Deputy Operations Group Commander. When his mother asked him why he was so upset he replied, "Well, all year long she just kept telling me that the best pilot in the squadron was Colonel Bud Holland . . . it annoyed me, but the thing that really annoys me the most is that she said that if anybody is going to roll the B-52, Bud Holland is going to be the one to do it, and I can just see him doing it some day."

There is also some evidence to suggest that the local civilian community was aware of the controversy swirling around Lt Col Holland's flying practices. One civilian complained to the local TV news that a B-52 was in 60 to 70 degrees of bank over the local supermarket in Airway Heights.

But it was the crew force morale that was most effected. Captain Shawn Fleming, a B-52 instructor pilot and a weapons school graduate, was an opinion leader within the squadron, and summed up the feelings many 325th BMS aviators had about Lt Col Holland's airmanship, and the wing leadership's actions related to it.

"Everybody had a Col Holland scare story. Col Holland was kind of like a crazy aunt . . . the parents say, "Ignore her" . . . and the hypocrisy was amazing. For him to be in the position of the Chief of Standardization . . . is unconscionable. When Col Holland did something . . . he's patted on the back by the leadership, "Good Show." What's the crew force

supposed to learn from that? You got comments like, "He's about to retire" (and) "That's Bud Holland, he has more hours in the B-52 than you do sleeping." Yeah, he might have that many hours, but he became complacent, reckless, and willfully violated regulations."

By June 1994, the command climate at Fairchild Air Force Base was one of distrust and hostility. "Everybody was just trying to get out of here." In spite of these facts, Lt Col Holland was selected by Col Pellerin to perform the 1994 airshow. "It was a non-issue," Pellerin said. "Bud was Mr. Airshow."

### **Situation Seven: Air Show Practice**

**17 June 1994**

Lt Col Holland and the accident crew flew the first of two scheduled practice missions for the 1994 airshow. The profile was exactly the same as the accident mission except that two profiles were flown. Once again they included large bank angles and high pitch climbs in violation of ACC regulations and Technical Order guidance. The wing commander, Col Brooks, had directed that the bank angles be limited to 45 degrees and the pitch to 25 degrees. These were still in excess of regulations and Technical Order guidance. Both profiles flown during this practice exceeded the wing commander's stated guidance. However, at the end of the practice session, Col Pellerin, the DO, told the wing commander that "the profile looks good to him; looks very safe, well within parameters."

### **The Followers**

Because the 325th BMS was scheduled to close, most of the bomb squadron crewmembers had already been transferred to new assignments. But those that remained were not comfortable with the situation. In fact, one of the squadron navigators refused to fly the airshow if Lt Col Holland was going to be flying. This required the ranking navigator in the 325th BMS, Lt Col Huston, to be the navigator for the airshow and practice missions. Major Thompson, the squadron Operations Officer was also uneasy. "I had this fear that he was again going to get into the airshow . . . that he was going to try something again, ridiculous maybe and kill thousands of people."

It wasn't just the flyers that were getting nervous. Lt Col (Dr.) Robert Grant, the 92d Air Refueling Squadron Flight Surgeon, was told by a crewmember during a routine appointment, that he refused to fly with Lt Col Holland. This, coupled with a concern that Lt Col Holland was scheduled to fly in the 1994 airshow, led Dr. Grant to take his concerns to both the 92d Bomb Wing Chief of Safety, Lt Col Mike McCullough, and to Dr. Issak, the Chief of Aeromedical Services at Fairchild. The Chief of Safety told Dr. Grant that, "Lt Col Holland was a good pilot and that the maneuvers had been done before."

Dr. Issak did not pursue the issue after he learned that Dr. Grant had spoken to the wing safety officer.

Major Theresa Cochran, the nurse manager in emergency services, attended an airshow planning session in which Lt Col Holland briefed that he planned to fly 65-degree bank turns. The wing commander quickly told him that he would be limited to 45 degrees maximum. Major Cochran recalls Lt Col Holland's response in a prophetic discussion between her and a co-worker who was also in attendance at the planning session.

“Colonel Holland's initial reaction was to brag that he could crank it pretty tight . . . he said he could crank it tight and pop up starting at 200 (knots). Bob and I looked at each other, and Bob is going, "He's f---ed.", and I said, "I just hope he crashes on Friday, not Sunday, so I will not have so many bodies to pick up." . . . those words did return to haunt me.”

### **The Leaders**

During the planning session briefing on June 15, Lt Col Holland briefed using overhead slides. As the briefing progressed, Col Brooks, the wing commander, made clear that (1) there would be no formation flight, (2) bank angles would be limited to 45 degrees, and (3) that pitch angles would be limited to 25 degrees. Although the slides and briefing clearly indicated that a part of the demonstration would include a "wingover," there was curiously no discussion on this point. Although Lt Col Holland was clearly not pleased with the wing commander's guidance, there is no doubt that he left the briefing with an understanding of what the commander's guidance was. During the practice mission, the commander's guidance was repeatedly violated, but was not reported as such by Col Pellerlin, the DO to the wing commander. The wing commander had only personally witnessed a small portion of the practice, because he was at a rehearsal for a retirement ceremony for the outgoing Base Commander. Lt Col Ballog, who was serving as the Commander of Troops on the parade field at this rehearsal, recalls Col Brooks making a negative comment about the portion of the airshow practice that he was able to see. "The comment was basically, that this was not supposed to be happening . . . not a part of the agenda . . . that he (Lt Col Holland) was too low and banking over too hard . . . which was contrary to guidance that had been put out." In spite of this personal observation, no action was taken following the report of, "well within parameters" by the DO upon landing from the practice mission.

On Monday, the 20th of June, disaster did strike Fairchild AFB, but it was not the one that is the focus of this analysis. A lone gunman entered the base hospital and killed several Air Force members before being shot and killed by a security police officer responding to the scene. Understandable, the airshow and all preparations for it were immediately put on hold. After some discussion, it was determined that going ahead

with the airshow would aid in the healing process of the personnel still at the base, and so another practice session was scheduled for the morning of 24 June.

### **A Final Perspective**

The crash of Czar 52, like most accidents, was part of a chain of events. These events were facilitated through the failed policies of several senior leaders at the 92d Bomb Wing. These failures included an inability to recognize and correct the actions of a single rogue aviator, which eventually led to an unhealthy command climate and the disintegration of trust between leaders and subordinates. However, in most aircraft mishaps, the crash is the final domino to drop in the cause and effect chain of events. In this case, however, scores of young and impressionable aviators "grew up" watching a rogue aviator as their role model for over three years. They remain on active flying status in various Air Force wings, passing along what they have learned. Because of this, the final domino in this chain of events may not yet have fallen.