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Purple Virtues

A Leadership Cure for Unhealthy Rivalry

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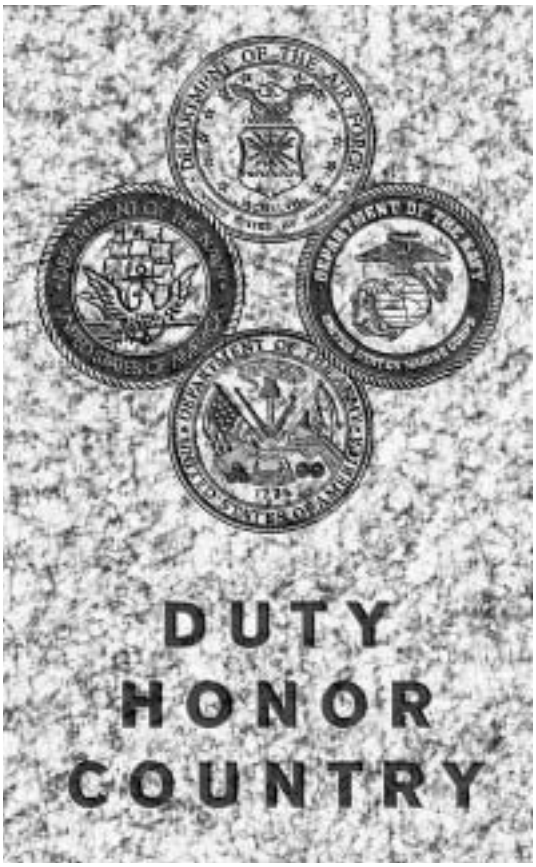
Editorial Abstract: Joint operations are the rule, not the exception, for the US military. Why then do interservice rivalries seem to work against becoming "more joint"? Colonel Ash proposes that the lack of a recognized set of common "core virtures" is the root of the problem. He suggests that the tenets of West Point's motto Duty, Honor, Country are these common, "purple" virtues.

Too often in this war did the leaders fight each other while the troops fought the foe.

—Capt Basil Liddell Hart

AS GREAT AS it is, the American military still lacks a common Weltanschauung. Its "jointness" comes not from the heart but traces its current popularity to the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. That act forces cooperation by law and personal careerist incentives; however, interservice friction produced by opposition to jointness still exists at many functional and operational levels. People—not systems—are fundamental to jointness. Yet, good teamwork may not be happening. Gen Anthony Zinni was right on target in a recent US Naval Institute *Proceedings* article in which he attacked service parochialism.[1] Interservice competition for roles, functions, and resources is not necessarily detrimental to the military and can be good, but interservice rivalry and friction based on lack of integrity or other unethical conduct are damaging to national defense efforts. In addition, breaches of integrity are not limited to the interservice domain, for at times the services work very well together from an ethical standpoint. But sometimes they collectively or singularly stoop to poor moral standards when dealing with other decision-making bodies and au-



thorities, such as the Department of Defense (DOD) or Congress.

What we have is a very important leadership challenge for the twenty-first century. Military leaders today might want to pay close attention to Liddell Hart's assessment of a First World War dilemma (above) because it may still apply. Technology changes; operations and tactics change; and we speak of revolutions in war as well as generational differences like baby boomers and Generation Xers. But truth and honesty are timeless, and they are also as fundamental to discipline and military effectiveness as anything else. Herein lies the leadership challenge. Ask any academy commandant if maintaining the honor code and getting cadets to live according to sound ethics are not among the greatest challenges in producing tomorrow's leaders. That challenge continues out in the services, particularly among the services. Ironically, the realm of leadership itself has undertones of interservice differences and potential rivalry. Behind closed doors, for example, some of the other services might suspect that the Army has the market on leadership. More geographical commanders in chief and chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) have come from the Army than from the other services. Does that cause resentment and rivalry—or respect?

War fighters need joint ethics, and that begins and ends with leadership, both as the example and as the enforcer. This article argues that our military leadership should live and promote joint cardinal virtues—"purple virtues." This is no diatribe for a "kinder and gentler" Air Force. It is as legitimate and important as air superiority and bombs on target.

Interservice rivalry may have begun thousands of years B.C., as offensive and defensive forces organized to perform different roles for tribes and nations. Contemporary interservice rivalry stems from differences in organization and function, as well as doctrine, culture, uniform, funding, and perspective. Another contributing factor is "divided allegiance," whereby members must remain loyal to different superiors and organizations.[2] Yet, differences and competition are not the problem. The difficulty arises when rivalry turns sour due to breaches in ethics.

Interservice competition for roles, functions, and resources is not necessarily detrimental to the military and can be good, but interservice rivalry and friction based on lack of integrity or other unethical conduct are damaging to national defense efforts.

On the one hand, competition among different soldiers over roles and functions was no more mission-detrimental or beneficial in the past than such rivalry is today. Honest differences of perspective are not unethical and can promote service morale, technological innovation, and adaptation of improved strategy or doctrine. Healthy competition spurs organizational improvement.

On the other hand, cooperation can be more important than competition.[3] Despite the mood of cooperation promoted by the Goldwater-Nichols Act, unhealthy interservice contention still exists and can become downright ugly over issues such as the fire-support control line, the debate over close air support, and the halt-phase squabble (conflicting visions of what airpower can and cannot do to halt enemy attacks quickly and decisively during the "halt phase"). At a "Clash of Visions" conference in Washington, D.C., in October 1997, the spirited debate over boots-on-the-ground versus airpower remained unresolved. The words of Maj Gen Charles Link, USAF, retired—a champion of airpower—reflect frustration over major differences of opinion on the effectiveness and functions of airpower in future joint warfare:

> When a soldier talks about using airpower to support troops on the ground, he's applauded for his 'Jointness.'. . . When a sailor talks about using Air Force tankers to extend the range of naval aircraft, he's lauded for his 'Jointness.'

> But when an airman talks about using airpower independently to kill the enemy instead of putting our troops in harm's way in the first place, he's being parochial and 'unjoint,' which is now viewed as a sin on the order of adultery.[4]

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Army and Air Force perspectives may both be legitimate, based on competing paradigms, but according to some people, "the reality is that we simply cannot afford both approaches by 2010."[5] If this is true, continued competition is on the horizon.

The primary underlying issue normally seems to be funding. Doctrinal, strategic, and tactical debates translate at some point into dollars and "haggling over hardware." Yet, one can feel the effect back on the battlefield with confusion over command and control, as well as operational excess and inefficiency.

Defense spending in the United States has dropped significantly during the post-cold-war years.[6] The result of infighting for funds could be a mutually agreeable solution among the services, based on truly objective analyses of the most cost-effective force-structure mix. Yet, the services have a propensity to force a "tricameral" military solution whereby the only mutually agreeable option is to split available funding three ways.[7] That may seem fair, but is it right when one service has a more lethal or more cost-effective way than the others to defend national interests? President Lincoln said that "honesty is the best policy," and S. L. A. Marshall calls honesty the "governing principle" of the military.[8] With declining defense budgets and commensurate competition over resources, we must have integrity in funding decisions.

In many respects, "military members reflect the values and mores of the society that produced them,"[9] but the military must be careful not to play the blame game, rationalizing that the system of civilian control and/or the decadence of American society cause(s) interservice friction.[10] The military must maintain ethical standards in interservice relations not only for the military's sake, but also because "high character in the military officer is a safeguard of the character of the nation."[11]

Substandard ethical conduct is often the product of an unhealthy "system" rather than of corrupt individuals. Defenders of this system will claim that it is simply Realpolitik that others do not understand or appreciate until they have been in that system.[12] That is a weak argument. The system must change if it is corrupted with substandard ethics. It was the message of Nuremberg, and it is the standard by which we must live today.

New interservice battlefronts over roles and functions are surfacing daily, including space, information technology and operations, functions versus geography, missile defense, deep battle, special operations, and various small-scale contingencies. In addition, the accelerating pace of the military, from adjusting to faster operations tempos to incorporating new technologies, has an effect on interservice rivalry. Even minor symptomatic squabbles may become exaggerated under such conditions. As an Army general recently stated, "Speed bumps are tough to deal with at 100 miles per hour."[13]

Media coverage adds to the recipe for disaster in any of these situations. As many a politician knows, after finding oneself in the limelight of dishonor, unburdening the yoke of negative media attention becomes exceedingly difficult. In a bizarre way, then, interservice rivalry has taken on a new twist entailing scandal avoidance or "hope that the other guy is getting all the attention." From Tailhook to Aberdeen to Lt Kelly Flinn, it is a sad commentary when service personnel privately snicker at each other rather than come to a mutual defense. There is no jointness here. Given the explosive growth of infomedia, services must be ever more diligent in collectively avoiding potential land mines that can set off scandal.[14] Overall, the envi-

ronment promotes continued interservice rivalry, but the delineator between productive competition and unhealthy contention is ethics.

Cardinal Virtues

The erosion of ethical standards may be due, in part, to people's lack of clear understanding of ethical concepts. Ethics is a vast subject, but with regard to jointness, it basically involves character, honesty, and integrity—commonly known as virtues. Yet, our military services have established not virtues but "core values." This is a problem. Integrity-based conduct must flow more from fundamental virtues than situational values.

The problem with values is that they can be situational—culturally driven and temporal. Values are dictated by profit and by circumstance, because they are based on "valuation" or worth. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a value as something "worthy of esteem for its own sake; that which has intrinsic worth." The worth, strength, or excellence of the military is important, but it should be moral and ethical for reasons that go beyond its worth. Business as a whole is concerned entirely with one issue—worth—yet the business world is not well known for ethical practices. As one author notes, the National Socialists of Germany in 1940 had integrity, were excellent in what they did, and practiced service before self.[15]

Core values do not promote the moral factor necessary in military ethics. Virtues do. Values simply do not go deep enough because they are focused on means rather than ends.[16]

Alexis de Tocqueville once said that "Napoleon Bonaparte was as great as a man can be without virtue."[17] Indeed, Napoléon had many leadership abilities as a commander, yet his lack of virtue also detracted from those abilities. Virtue is neither temporal nor value-dependent. It involves "doing one's duties whatever the cost to self [as well as] an *ethical* obligation to put military duties first" (emphasis added).[18] In other words, it is courage—something fundamental to the military. Students of war have learned that a soldier's courage on the battlefield stems from a desire not to let down fellow comrades. Yet, that bond of camaraderie is destroyed by unethical behavior and unhealthy rivalry. Hence, joint ethics provides a basis of courage for the joint team.

One requires not only right thinking, but also right action. Although a variety of virtuous traits exists, in general one can distill them into four cardinal virtues. *Justice* involves relationships, both individual and institutional. Jointness fails this cardinal virtue when, as Perry Smith notes, "some people will never lie for themselves, but they'll lie for the institution."[19] *Prudence* is wisdom—the foundational virtue for the other three—and is linked to what Clausewitz calls *coup d'oeil*. It is the ingenious ability to grasp the obvious, to see through the fog, and to anticipate the unexpected. But it is also such intelligence tempered by morality. *Courage* is simply bravery. Rather than reckless or immoral willingness to fall in battle, however, it is virtuous bravery. The final cardinal virtue, *temperance*, involves balance and moderation. It involves avoiding extremes that may be tangential to the main mission. Temperance focuses systemically on the whole rather than just the parts.[20] It promotes strategic thinking and cohesiveness—critical issues to effective jointness.

Ethics

Ethics is imbedded in the officer's commission and oath of office: "special trust and confidence" and "no mental reservation or purpose of evasion."[21] According to military ethicist James Toner, ethics is best determined by a blend of customs, rules, goals, expectations, and circumstances. It involves the "study of good and evil, of right and wrong, of duty and obligation in human conduct, and of reasoning and choice about them."[22] In order for an act to be ethical, its means, ends, and circumstances must all be acceptable, which undermines Machiavellian arguments that in jointness the ends justify the means.[23]

The military cannot afford to have situational ethics in which cultural standards slip into what Herodotus and Polybius called "the decay of political glory."[24] History is replete with examples of "bureaucratic barriers" perverting ethical standards, which were nevertheless allowed to continue in a state of "honor among thieves."[25] According to Perry Smith, "I remember so often the Air Force people would say in the Air Staff, 'We've got to fudge the figures because the Navy's doing it.' "[26]

One of the fundamental military concepts linking means and ends is the familiar West Point motto Duty, Honor, Country.[27] Toner transcribes this motto into another application for military conduct: Principle, Purpose, and People.[28] Here, one's honor involves living according to principles. Duty is linked to purpose, and, finally, people—the nation—should be the focus of all actions. By concentrating efforts and loyalty to principle, purpose, and people, military members will more effectively work through bureaucratic barriers and dueling duties to maintain good ethical standards.

The difficulty lies in having the "strength of will" under difficult circumstances to put ethics into practice. If practiced regularly, it becomes second nature to "ethically fit" military members.[29]

Perhaps the key to such ethical fitness is integrity or "response-ability"—the ability to respond in all situations according to the right ethical orientation.[30] Although the military pays much attention to integrity *of* command, just as critical is integrity *in* command.

Core Values

Thus, integrity is one of the core values the Air Force has established to promote ethical conduct. The Air Force's values were first formally introduced by Brig Gen Ruben A. Cubero, dean of the faculty at the Air Force Academy, and then adopted by the rest of the Air Force: "integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do." This sounds great, but why are the Army's values different (duty, loyalty, selfless service, honor, courage, respect, and integrity), as are those of the Navy and Marine Corps (honor, courage, and commitment) (table 1)?

Despite the similarities, shouldn't all members of a joint profession of arms have the same bedrock ethical foundation in the same core values? Are interservice differences again influencing procedure, even to the point of affecting published ethical standards?

Fortunately, one finds some commonality in published standards at the joint level, where moral courage and ethical conduct

Table 1€

Core Values of the Military Services€

Air Force	*Army*	*Marine Corps*	*Navy*
integrity first	integrity		
service before self	selfless service	commitment	commitment
excellence in all we do	duty		
	honor	honor	honor
	personal courage	courage	courage
	loyalty		
	respect		

are promoted. It would be helpful, however, if they also specifically addressed interservice relations. Joint Publication (Pub) 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, says that the team begins with integrity—the "cornerstone for building trust."[31] The document also states that military service is based on values—integrity, competence, physical courage, moral courage, and teamwork—common to all the services and the bedrock of combat success.[32] But the primary joint regulation on ethics, DOD Directive (DODD) 5500.7, *Standards of Conduct: Joint Ethics Regulation*, is principally concerned with financial matters,[33] and the section on ethical conduct occupies only the last four pages of a 160-page document. Also, this "single source of standards of ethical conduct and ethics guidance" contains different *values* than the ones embraced as "core" by each separate service.

The joint ethics regulation attempts to tie ethics and values together conceptually: "Ethics are standards by which one should act based on values. Values are core beliefs such as duty, honor, and integrity that motivate attitudes and actions. Ethical values relate to what is right and wrong."[34] The regulation's list of values contains important concepts for healthy interservice relations, and the regulation emphasizes ethical conduct, even to the point of stating that DOD personnel should "be prepared to fall somewhat short of some goals for the sake of ethics and other considerations."[35] Yet, evidence suggests that, within the services, nobody dares fall short, and fine-sounding ethical pronouncements are disregarded when it comes to protecting funding, roles, and functions.

Purple Virtues

The bottom line is that the joint team needs joint ethics. The challenge is how to make that happen, and leadership is the critical part of the answer. Good leaders must be moralists, and the military must have a union of leadership and virtue—what Toner calls the "ethics of leadership."[36] It is a huge leadership challenge because people cannot "touch, taste, or feel" ethics.[37] When subordinates abandon moral ethics, figuring that "what works is right,"[38] it is time for the leader to step in with moral authority.

Duty, Honor, Country provides linkage between the commission, the oath of office, and the professional military ethic. It is the motto of the "traditional idealistic code" unique to an American military founded on strength of character and universal equality rather than nobility.

In addition to leadership, the military also needs more education. William J. Bennett observes that people are not born with virtues; they must be learned.[39] Arguably, they can also be unlearned. Therefore, the educational process must never let up but continually reinforce ethical fitness.

But soldiers, sailors, and airmen do not have time to read Aristotle in the heat of battle.[40] They must have already probed the difficult and morally ambiguous issues, and they must have the benefit of a familiar code to carry them through challenging times. The best answer for this is the time-honored West Point motto.

According to military ethicist Anthony Hartle, Duty, Honor, Country provides linkage between the commission, the oath of office, and the professional military ethic. It is the motto of the "traditional idealistic code" unique to an American military founded on strength of character and universal equality rather than nobility.[41] As Perry Smith recently stated, "The military ethic of a strong institutional and personal commitment to duty, honor, and country has served this Nation well in war and peace for over 200 years."[42]

The West Point motto is a moral rallying point to remain committed to virtuous conduct. People tend to have a love-hate relationship with rules and checklists. Motorists may dislike speed limits, but they appreciate safer highways. Some drivers, however, will not follow speed limits unless patrols enforce them. To date, the military services and Congress have tried to develop various consensus-building mechanisms, such as the Program Objective Memorandum in the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System and the Goldwater-Nichols Act.[43] One can criticize these programs as artificial enforcers, but they serve their purposes. The ethical questions that arise are, Can we and do we wish to enforce ethics artificially?

The answer is *yes*. As a common motto for all the services, Duty, Honor, Country would not be a legal benchmark conflicting with the *Uniform Code of Military Justice*. Rather, it would be an educational one to help stand the test of time and serve as tangible evidence that the military is serious about embracing ethics.[44] It is better to have moral standards "spelled out and defended, rather than assumed or ignored."[45] Properly endorsed by leadership, publicized, and embraced by military members, our common motto could promote a joint ethical renaissance in the military of the new millennium.

The motto would not promote narrow-mindedness but would serve as a springboard to moral thinking that is essential to the profession of arms.[46] Just as the Code of Conduct serves to support and guide the conduct of soldiers from all the services, particularly in prisoner of war (POW) status, the motto would promote interservice relations by serving and guiding the conduct of other "POWs" (prisoners of Washington).

Finally, Duty, Honor, Country can promote second-nature ethical fitness by providing a crucial link to the four cardinal virtues. Clearly, this motto implies both prudent and courageous behavior motivated by the noble relationship of soldier and nation as defined by love of country over self. Such sacrificial loyalty might appear on the surface to demonstrate a lack of temperance—one of the cardinal virtues. But deeper reflection shows that focusing on the paramount issue of duty to country rather than having tunnel vision on certain elements of the country—such as duty to an individual service or to a function within a service—makes sense in terms of temperance as well.

Conclusion

The most capable military in human history cannot afford to suffer from an ethical breakdown. Interservice competition is good and is here to stay, but unhealthy interservice rivalry must end. Presently, the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps have different core values. This is dysfunctional. Core values are also limited in effecting joint ethical conduct because values don't go far enough. They are situationally tied to worth and lack a moral domain. Virtues are more appropriate as an ethical bedrock. West Point's respected motto Duty, Honor, Country is more closely linked to virtues than values because it has moral implications. What does this have to do with leadership? Everything. Ethics begins and ends with leadership—today's leaders living it and tomorrow's leaders believing it. The leaders we need for the twenty-first century are those with virtue and ethical superiority. Only then can our joint force be joint from the heart. □

Notes

1. Anthony C. Zinni, "A Commander Reflects," US Naval Institute *Proceedings* 126, no. 1 (July 2000): 35.

2. James Brown and Michael J. Collins, eds., *Military Ethics and Professionalism: A Collection of Essays* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1981), 10–11. According to Sam Sarkesian, "the demand for institutional obedience and professional loyalty can lead to professional mediocrity and institutional sterility and constrain critical and responsible inquiry" (10–11).

3. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 8–10. The author suggests that expertise, responsibility, and corporateness are fundamental to a profession. Corporateness holds that interservice rivalry can be counterproductive to the collective sense of "organic unity." Huntington does not include service in either the Army or Navy as a profession but lists service in the collective military as the profession.

4. Quoted in James Kitfield, "To Halt an Enemy," *Air Force Magazine* 81, no. 1 (January 1988): 62.

5. Dan Coats, "Joint Experimentation—Unlocking the Promise of the Future," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 17 (Winter 1997): 17.

6. Sharon K. Weiner, "The Politics of Resource Allocation in the Post–Cold War Pentagon," *Security Studies* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 125. Under President George Bush, spending declined 25 percent, and the Bottom Up Review under President Bill Clinton cut spending another 5 percent.

7. Maj Gen Hugh A. Parker, transcript of oral history interview, June 1972, Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, Ala., K239.0512-601. Splitting funding is the "easy compromise solution" to jointness. For example, as a member of the Emergency War Plans Group on the JCS staff, Parker witnessed the splitting of every plan three ways because each service had its own perspective and was fighting for its own existence: "Now how honest some of it was remains in doubt."

8. S. L. A. Marshall, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, D.C.: Armed Forces Information Service, Department of Defense, 1975), 79.

9. Keith Hutcheson, "The Discipline Crisis," *Armed Forces Journal*, March 1996, 40.

10. T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (London: Brassey's, 1963), 295.

11. Marshall, 2.

12. Richard A. Gabriel, *Military Incompetence: Why the American Military Doesn't Win* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 4–6. Gabriel identifies systemic incompetence and "institutional practices" as the real problems behind military incompetence.

13. General officer, address to Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Ala. (nonattribution policy).

14. The service academies are notorious for pointing fingers at each other when scandal hits. For an example of Naval Academy problems, see Mark Fiore's "Top Brass at Naval Academy Are Subjects of Pentagon Probe into Recent Scandals," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 23 June 1997.

15. Col Charles R. Myers, "The Core Values: Framing and Resolving Ethical Issues for the Air Force," *Airpower Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 40.

16. Dr. James H. Toner, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., interviewed by author, 3 September 1998.

17. Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times, From the Enlightenment to the Present*, 4th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 82.

18. Myers, 47.

19. Perry Smith, "Leadership and Ethics: A Practitioner's View," in *Moral Obligation and the Military: Collected Essays* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1988), 138–39.

20. Josef Pieper, trans. Richard and Clara Winston et al., *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), 146–47.

21. Thomas Begines, "Special Trust and Confidence," in *Ethics and National Defense: The Timeless Issues*, ed. James C. Gaston and Janis Bren Hietala (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1993), 6.

22. James H. Toner, *True Faith and Allegiance: The Burden of Military Ethics* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 9–17.

23. William Ebstein, ed., *Great Political Thinkers, Plato to the Present*, 4th ed. (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1969), 284.

24. Polybius, "The Histories," in ibid., 122.

25. Myers, 50.

26. Smith, 136–38.

27. Arthur J. Dyck, "Ethical Bases of the Military Profession," *Parameters*, 10 March 1980, 43.

28. Toner, *True Faith and Allegiance*, 100.

29. Rushworth M. Kidder, *How Good People Make Tough Choices* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1995), 57.

30. Toner, *True Faith and Allegiance*, 101.

31. Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, 10 January 1995, vi–vii.

32. Ibid., ii, 1.

33. DODD 5500.7, *Standards of Conduct: Joint Ethics Regulation*, August 1993.

34. Ibid., 155.

35. Ibid., 157.

36. James H. Toner, "Leadership, Community, and Virtue," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 11 (Spring 1996): 101.

37. Douglas A. Martz, "Professional Military Ethics," *Marine Corps Gazette*, August 1990, 58.

38. Kermit D. Johnson, "Ethical Issues of Military Leadership," *Parameters* 4, no. 2 (1974): 36.

39. William J. Bennett, ed., *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 12.

40. Gaston and Hietala, 140.

41. Anthony E. Hartle, *Moral Issues in Military Decision Making* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 44–47.

42. Perry M. Smith, "Military Ethics in the Pentagon," *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 11 (November 1999): 66–68.

43. Weiner, 130–32.

44. William F. Diehl, "Ethics and Leadership: The Pursuit Continues," *Military Review*, April 1985, 36–42.

45. Richard T. DeGeorge, "The Need for a Military Code of Ethics," *Army*, December 1984, 30.

46. Toner, *True Faith and Allegiance*, 91. Gen Malham Wakin warns that there is a danger in codes becoming narrow. They cannot become a substitute for sound education in wisdom.