



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS AIR COMBAT COMMAND
JOINT BASE LANGLEY-EUSTIS VA



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MEMORANDUM FOR ACC Commanders

SUBJECT: Leadership, Initiative, and War

1. I've attached two directives behind this letter. Together, they describe the exercise of command, the correct use of initiative and the barriers to both. These directives were issued by Admiral Ernest King in 1941 and the language reflects the time. However, I could not issue better guidance for today. Here are two of the key paragraphs:

"We are preparing for –and are now close to – those active operations (commonly called war) which require the exercise and utilization of the full powers and capabilities of every officer in command status. There will be neither time nor opportunity to do more than prescribe the several tasks of the several subordinates (to say "what", perhaps "when" and "where" and usually for their intelligent cooperation, "why"); leaving to them – expecting and requiring of them – the capacity to perform the assigned tasks (to do the "how").

If subordinates are deprived – as they now are – of that training and experience which will enable them to act "on their own" – if they do not know, by constant practice, how to exercise "initiative of subordinates" – if they are reluctant (afraid) to act because they are accustomed to detailed orders and instructions – if they are not habituated to think, to judge, to decide and to act for themselves in their several echelons of command – we shall be in sorry case when the time of "active operations" arrives."

Take a minute now to read both directives. Share them and discuss them with your subordinate commanders and leaders.

2. As a step toward practicing the skills outlined in the directives, I'm directing ACC Wing Commanders to integrate a series of exercises into your training plans. My intent for these exercises is to practice the autonomy and initiative that combat operations will require at the squadron and flight level by deploying small teams of Airmen and aircraft, for short durations, to practice the skills we will need to execute Adaptive Basing concepts. The objective of these exercises is to increase tactical proficiency, hone the ability to rapidly deploy and employ combat airpower, and develop trust and initiative in and between ACC leaders. That means these exercises should be planned and conducted by junior leaders...not higher than the wing weapons officer level. In addition to tactical execution, I expect flight leads and mission commanders to lead the team of operations, maintenance, logistics, and any other mission assurance personnel required to assure mission exercise objectives. Successful execution will require coordination and familiarization across bases and wings to allow each agency to identify and resolve issues.

3. Squadron leadership will coordinate with regional CAF units to provide the "what", "when", "where", and "why" for the exercises. Junior leaders will formulate tactical scenarios and provide the "how." The exercise timeline will incorporate tasks essential to rapid execution of combat capabilities in Contested, Degraded, and Operationally limited environments while balancing impact on home-station operations.

Agile Combat Power

Wing and squadron leaders will have to balance total deployed force size with other readiness requirements. I suggest you limit total participation to no more than 12 aircraft to focus training on integration and unit desired learning objectives, not deconfliction. I suggest you expand the exercises in building blocks--start with 1 day out and back exercises and build to 2 to 3 day deployments. Commanders of wings with missions that do not deploy aircraft should develop training exercises related to and supportive of the adaptive basing concept and practice the autonomy and initiative required to win in a CDO environment.

4. I'd like ACC Wings to plan and execute one exercise per quarter. I realize each unit has constraints and may not be able to participate in the full spectrum of exercise events or in every event. Wing Commanders should receive an out-brief after each exercise that includes lessons learned and recommendations for improvement. I'd like Wing Commanders to summarize these out-briefs in their quarterly reports to me. Upon request, ACC/A3 will help ensure resources are available to accomplish these exercises.

5. I expect this to be a training exercise that develops our future leaders at the lowest levels. This is not a readiness inspection, but a means to prepare for rapid deployment for the next fight. We'll continue to discuss ways to develop leaders that can win joint warfights in the weeks to come. Thank you for your continued leadership, and I look forward to hearing your feedback.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Holmes", with a stylized, cursive script.

JAMES M. HOLMES
General, USAF
Commander