George Kenney and William Tunner: A brief analisys of two iconic air leaders

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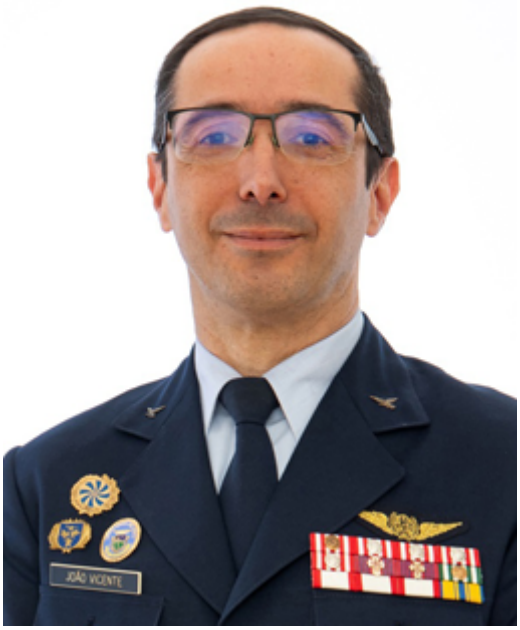

What judgments and decisions are made by air leaders when faced with challenges? Moreover, how to make airpower effective in solving strategic challenges? These questions epitomize the nature of this essay. Practicing leadership in warfare it's like teaching parenthood. Therefore, examining past experiences it's the only way to answer those questions and prepare for future wars. Following this approach, this paper will scrutinize the experiences of two "iconic air leaders". Generals George Kenney in the Pacific, and William Tunner in the "Hump." The analysis will be framed by a trinity of context, commander, and operational template. The context will reveal the strategic challenges. On the other hand, the commander dimension consists of his personality and the influence over the command system, including aspects as relationships (with superiors, subordinates or allies), formative experiences (both professional and technical), and trust.[1] Finally, operational templates are designed by the commander to solve strategic challenges, and involve troops, technology, and thinking. These concepts and interactions will be merged throughout the analysis unveiling several commonalities which are paramount to the success of an air leader. This paper will then argue for the importance of formative experiences; the ability to create and nurture relationships; and the vision to innovate by creating and adjusting operational templates.

War in South Pacific was mainly an air war, and the most instrumental person on that war was General George Kenney.[2] The Pacific, as an operating environment, didn't favor

the aircraft's limited endurance. However, this geography vastness meant that enemy forces were isolated and heavily dependent on resupply by air or sea. Additionally, in the puzzle of global war, it was a secondary theatre, competing for resources and lacking air power effectiveness.[3] Air operations were largely ineffective, mainly due to inappropriate tactics and technology, poor training, and lack of spare parts and aircraft, resulting in the loss of confidence of General MacArthur in Kenney's predecessor. Although the task was challenging, the situation was so bad, that even Kenney recognized that whatever he did it would be an improvement.[4]

Within this context, Kenney was confronted with several challenges. At the strategic level preventing Japan from isolating Australia. At the operational level the requirement to improve command relationships was his first priority. In order to be successful at the strategic level, Kenney had to gain MacArthur's trust and support by improving the effectiveness of airpower. Kenney's personality, positive outlook, and professional knowledge rapidly established chemistry with MacArthur. Kenney was able to overcome the skepticism of ground soldiers about air power and also circumvent MacArthur's tight staff in order to convey information directly to his theater commander.[5] However, keeping this bond meant achieving results.

When he assumed the command in the Pacific in 1942, Kenney had the advantage of experience and knowledge by his side. Kenney's formative experiences, such as the knowledge about combat operations, doctrine and tactics, aircraft development, and staff experience, were instrumental to the development of a successful operational template. He had experiences in engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; combat experience in World War I; a variety of staff tours; knowledge of aircraft development and modifications; and a wide variety of professional military education. For instance, combat operations in World War I instilled in Kenney the value of training, control of the air, leadership and morale.[6] Although Kenney had, during his career, limited experiences as a commander of an operational aircraft squadron, they provided valuable leadership experiences. He applied these valuable lessons throughout his command. For example, he accepted the risks of decreased measures of performance to increase the effectiveness of combat operations. Although there was fierce opposition about diverging resources from combat operations, he directed additional training for bombing units, and established training bases in Australia and New Guinea.[7] Training would preserve resources, improve moral, and lead to combat effectiveness. Additionally, his doctrinal approach to airpower resulted from reality instead of rhetoric, making him an advocate of achieving air superiority as a prerequisite for other operations. He saw that the predominant operational template, the strategic bombing, could not be effective in the Pacific's operating environment.[8] The high altitude bombing of naval targets lacked the technological advances of accuracy and endurance, rendering it ineffective. Finally, he realized the importance of connecting and motivating the troops, by spending time in the field and awarding decorations.

Kenney envisioned, implemented, and adjusted an operational template which would solve the strategic challenge. His blueprint for action, informed by his formative

experiences and theatre context, relied first on achieving control of the air, attacking Japanese aircraft in the air and on the ground.[9] Then, airpower would isolate the battle area by interdicting the supply routes, followed by bombing enemy positions, airlifting troops and providing supporting fires for the invasion.[10] Finally, building airstrips provided an "island-hopping" capability to advance operations. However, due to the theatre remote locations, the resources scarcity, and the technology limitations, several innovations and adjustments were required to improve the operational template combat effectiveness.

Kenney fostered a creative thinking atmosphere, allowing innovation to flourish, introducing tactical, technological, and organizational changes.[11] For example, due to the scattered location of resources and communication problems, Kenney established air task forces, bringing together several units to a single location, facilitating mission planning. By introducing drop tanks it made possible to increase the endurance and range of platforms. The adjustment in tactics to low altitude bombing with changes to aircraft's forward firing power and fuse settings proved to be determinant.[12] Besides tactical and technological adaptations, organizational changes were also introduced. Since Kenney wanted to stay close to MacArthur, he created a forward combat headquarter and delegated command authority to facilitate the control of combat operations and increase its flexibility.[13] Furthermore, he improved unity of command by reducing the power of the Allied Headquarters, also pleasing MacArthur by separating Australian and American units.[14] On the maintenance side, Kenney improved efficiency by moving the supply depots closer to the frontline, developed rear echelon maintenance, and recognizing the mechanics as part of the team.[15] Encouraging and rewarding innovative methods of combat and repair, which could increase the number of missions flown, proved to be a decisive leadership tool.[16]

Despite considering Kenney's relationships a hallmark to his success, there were some shortcomings. His relationship with Navy officers hindered joint planning. This animosity can be attributed to the inter-service rivalry and the lack of exposure to naval theory.[17] Furthermore, Kenney's loyalty to his subordinates and to the theatre commander was always greater than towards his Chief of Staff, General Arnold. His constant quest for better pilots, machines, and staff officers, although understandable, revealed a narrow vision about war.[18]

Finally, although Kenney's judgments and decisions were highly effective, they cannot be attributed exclusively to his genius as a commander. The fact that the enemy failed to adapt and the intelligence gathered by decoding of Japanese communications provided additional leverage to Kenney's operational template.[19] Nonetheless, the impact of George Kenney in making airpower effective in Southwest Pacific made him an iconic air leader.

Using the same analysis framework, similar characteristics can be attributed to the leadership of General William Tunner in "Hump" campaign. The "Hump" operating environment challenged aircraft and aircrews performance, due to weather and altitude

conditions. The phrase, “It was a place to which you exiled officers you wanted to get rid of,” captures its essence.[20] Additionally, it was a tertiary theatre, making it even more challenging to obtain resources. The strategic challenge at hand was keeping a pathway open to China, tying down the Japanese in this theatre in order to facilitate future plans for the invasion of Japan. A future attack to Japan would come from air bases in China. Moreover, about two million Japanese troops were on mainland China. That was 2 million less Japanese forces that didn’t fight US troops elsewhere in the Pacific.[21] This would require an increasing thru put, or the tonnage delivered. However, Tunner was also required to decrease the accident rate while increasing morale.

Tunner encountered several problems. First and foremost, the alarming accident rate was proving that a tactical mistake can have strategic effects. For every thousand hours flown there were two accidents. For every thousand tons flown into China, three Americans died. This tactical problem was also causing strategic effects which were exerting political pressure in Washington.[22] The shortage of aircrews, operational fatigue, austere living conditions, maintenance below standards, and long deployments were also contributing to a low morale and discipline. Moreover, the lack of unity of command and effort prevented an effective coordination throughout the commander’s area of responsibility.[23] Finally, technology, the airplane itself was not dependable.[24] Therefore, making the operation as effective as possible at the tactical level would solve the strategic challenge.

Tunner’s personality as a manager highlighted his leadership capabilities. He recognized that his success was due to the quality of his staff members, his “board of directors,” advocating for a great leeway in their selection.[25] He recruited, from inside and outside of the military, several experts and matched the right person to the right job, in areas of maintenance, flying, and supply. This was only possible with the “full backing and support” of his commander.[26] This shows, again, the importance of nurturing relationships and networking in order to get the mission done.

His operation template had to be centered on the “man-machine” interface. Tunner addressed both dimensions to solve the strategic challenge. While doing this he would establish the thinking portion, which would inform future airlift operations. Developing doctrine for airlift in the midst of the strategic bombing era was not considered a priority. Moreover, the perception was that this task was simple. That was not the case, and Tunner was one of the few officers that had developed an expertise in airlift operations.[27]

His scientific approach, grounded in statistic methods, was aimed to maximize the tonnage per sorties while achieving maximum sorties per aircraft. Standardization encapsulated his operational template. He developed standard procedures for flying operations, maintenance, communications, and supply. Several programs were implemented. Orientation and training programs for aircrews allowed them to gain experience while reducing the risk for operation. Very active flight safety programs were also in place. With them, additional flight rules and procedures were implemented (flight plans, communications, corridors etc). In order to improve the transport capacity, one of

the measurements of success, he implemented a production line maintenance concept where specialization improved effectiveness and efficiency of maintenance.[28] As a consequence, higher availability and quality of aircraft was originated, thus decreasing the mishap rate. The introduction of the C-54 in the theatre also contributed for a reduction of the mishap rate and the increase of the tonnage.[29]

On the other hand, his command style focused on improving the living conditions and the morale of his troops. Some of his measures included a fair and dependable personnel rotation system, the investment in morale and welfare facilities, or improving the sanitization facilities. These methods, along with the reinforcement of military discipline, set a new command attitude that showed Tunner's concern for the safety and well being of his troops. Hence, that they were all important to improve the mission effectiveness.

Tunner's desire to innovate and improve airlift proved that leadership and a sound operational template can maximize the effectiveness of airpower. The epitome of this concept was observed in 1 August 1945, the Army Air Forces Day, one year after Tunner assumed command. In that day, his Division flew 1,118 round trips over the "Hump" with a payload of 5,327 tons, averaging two trips per available plane, and delivering in China four tons of cargo every minute.[30] During that day, one aircraft crossed the "Hump" every 72 seconds, and one C-54 flew three round-trips totaling 22 hours and 15 minutes of flying time.[31] Mission accomplished…with zero accidents!

As a conclusion, both case studies validate the thesis, revealing the essential traits of iconic air leaders, which are crucial to the effectiveness of the airpower template in solving strategic challenges. By exposing the contexts, commander's personality, and operational templates, this analysis has shown the importance of formative experiences, relationships, and innovative operational templates. Both commanders, confronted with different contexts and challenges, made judgments and decisions which demonstrated the importance of taking care of people as the key to airpower!

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1 According with Van Creveld, a command system includes organizations, procedures, and technical means. Van Creveld, *Command in War*, 10.
2 Griffith, *MacArthur's Airman*, 247.
3 Ibid., 47.
4 Ibid., 61.
5 Ibid., 232.
6 Ibid., 16.
7 Ibid., 15.
8 The main operational template at the time was the strategic bombing theory which downplayed the requirement to achieve the control of the air. Several ideas drove this kind of thinking. The leading ones were the belief about the overwhelming power of the bombers and that modern societies, which were complex and interdependent, would be vulnerable to the air bombardment. Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 289. Ultimately, strategic bombardment would become the sole justification for service autonomy.
9 The option to attack Japanese factories was not available due to the limited range of the aircraft.
10 Close Air Support mission, although with reduced effectiveness, would improve the relationships with the ground troops.
11 Griffith, *MacArthur's Airman*, 100.
12 For example, installing .50 caliber guns to B-25 nose, or modifying armament fuses in order to better destroy aircraft shelters. Ibid., 99.
13 General Whitehead served as the commander in the forward area. Ibid., 63-64.
14 MacArthur was upset by American forces being under the command of another nation. Ibid., 237.
15 Ibid., 245.
16 Although the number of mission capable aircraft grew gradually, the number of missions flown jumped from 1.000 in September to 4.000 in December of 1942. Ibid., 98.
17 Ibid., 242-243.
18 Different agendas and objectives motivated fierce disagreements. Arnold's responsibility determined the allocation of resources to Kenney's theatre. The political priorities established the European theatre as the main recipient of resources. Ibid., 243-244.
19 Japanese failed to increase aircraft production, maintenance, and logistics. Also they didn't adapt to the low level attacks. The reduced ship self-defense and the relatively few antiaircraft defenses near airfields made the low level attacks very effective. Ibid., 246.
20 Ibid., 51.
21 A Tunner, *Over the Hump*, 8, 58.
22 Ibid., 55, 63.
23 Ibid., 321.

24 As a result of an inadequate testing program, the C-46 had several engine problems which would cause numerous accidents. Ibid., 62.
25 Ibid., 327.
26 Ibid., 62.
27 His experience in the Ferrying Division gave him the background to tackle with this problem.
28 Ibid., 94.
29 Ibid., 121.
30 Ibid., 133.
31 Ibid., 133.