

Doing It By the Book

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The 24th of June 1994 was one of those pretty, early summer days in eastern Washington state. At Fairchild AFB, there was an Open House air show soon: Today was the perfect day to practice aerial maneuvers to demonstrate the flying capability of the B-52 Stratofortress, Fairchild's primary mission aircraft.

As a weapon of war, the B-52 is a fearsome tool. It is capable of flying thousands of miles unrefueled, and nonstop circumnavigation of the world with aerial refueling. It carries 30 tons of iron bombs, air-launched cruise missiles, and free-fall nuclear weapons. This aircraft has participated in several modern wars and conflicts. Most often the enemy doesn't even know it is there until their world falls apart under the rain of 2000 lb. bombs. It is capable of striking in any weather, at all hours. Truly, it is a war machine of the first order.

However, one ingredient makes, or breaks the effectiveness of the B-52: The crew. From the pilot to the gunner, every crew member (there are normally six) must perform their respective tasks exactly as taught and within the guidelines of the various regulations that govern Air Force heavy bomber operations.

At 1358 hrs. local time, a B-52 with the call-sign of *Czar-52* rolled down the runway and became airborne. By all accounts, what followed in the next 18 minutes, was indeed a wild ride for a B-52. At 1416 hrs. local time, *Czar-52* departed controlled flight and impacted the ground destroying the aircraft and killing the entire crew.

There are some interesting facts that surround this incident. For instance: The pilot was a Lieutenant Colonel with very high flight time. He had more than 5,200 hours in the pilot's seat of a B-52. This is equal to over 650 8 hr. days of flying. He was also the Chief of the Standards and Evaluation Branch (StanEval in USAF terminology) which is responsible for insuring that all aircrews in the Wing are properly trained and proficient at flying the Wing's B-52's and KC-135's. This pilot also had a perfect 31-0 record for his "checkrides," those proficiency evaluation flights that every Air Force pilot must undergo periodically (usually about twice a year, sometimes more). As one individual put it "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).*" ((Darker Shades of Blue: A Case Study of Failed Leadership, Major Tony Kern, United States Air Force, Copyright 1995))

So what went wrong?

What went wrong is an interesting parallel to the spiritual war that we fight for our witness and testimony. If we were to evaluate what the Lt Col. did in light of warfare, and subsequent impact upon the Air Force as a whole, and Fairchild AFB in particular with regard to their warfighting capabilities; we would have to say that the pilot, despite all of his talents for flying, did more for the enemy than he did for the Air Force. In the final analysis, an Air Force Lt. Col. assisted the enemy by the destruction of a strategic asset (the B-52), the killing of four highly skilled aircrew, the demoralizing of the entire command structure of an Air Force base, and the loss of confidence of the civilian community in those that are supposed to defend this nation.

In all, a guerrilla fighter opposed to the United States could not wish for better results.

The first of what went wrong was apparent years before the fatal incident. Repeatedly in the reports, it is mentioned that the pilot violated published regulations for the operation of the airframe he flew. He repeatedly violated Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR's) and Air Combat Command (ACC) regulations for the safe operation of aircraft. Granted, Air Force aircrews and especially pilots are given leeway for the conduct of their missions. However there is a point, even in combat, that you may not cross without being subject to considerable examination and discipline. This officer crossed that line many times before it caught up with him.

The second notable thing that went wrong was also apparent years prior to the incident. This pilot had not been properly disciplined by his superiors for his failure to comply with the regulations, even though they fully knew of his violation of those regulations. In one instance, his superiors observed him clearly violate regulations in front of thousands of subordinates and civilians at a previous Open House air show. Nothing was done to make this officer aware of his error.

Third: The officer had an open avowed goal that was clearly in violation of every regulation that existed for the operation of heavy aircraft. What was this goal? To roll a B-52 Stratofortress. His reason? It had never been done. His motivation was purely of pride. Indeed, he had a '*self before service*' attitude. He had his goals, and the Air Force was his vehicle to achieve those goals.

The parallels ought to be clear by this point. First, just as the pilot had published directives to follow, so do we. Only ours are much more significant than simply flying an airplane safely. We deal with the truth of God's kingdom and the souls of men. The pilot of a B-52 only deals with the portion of the mission to which he is assigned.

What effect does it have upon us when we fail to follow the rules God laid down in His word? Yes, we may think we 'get

away with it' when we play around with evil and wicked things with no immediately apparent consequence. However, sin is still sin, and no matter how small the wilful violation of God's commandment is, there will be repercussions. The LORD may allow it to take years for our sin to take its full toll; but when it does we will pay dearly for it. What was it Bro. Charlie Ashcraft said? "Sin will take you further than you want to go. Keep you longer than you want to stay. And make you pay more than you want to pay."

What effect does it have upon the congregation when one of the members is in gross sin and nothing is done? In church after church, discipline is being let go because 'We just don't want to be mean' or 'It's unkind to point out someone's sin' or 'That's just not love' despite the fact that the LORD has commanded that discipline be done to maintain purity and truth in His church. What effect does it have when the leadership fails to watch over the flock and remove someone for heresy, or apostasy? The effect of the failure of the leadership of Fairchild AFB to discipline the pilot in question led to the younger pilots trying to emulate the Lt. Col.'s flagrant flying practices, and almost caused the loss of a B-52 at a Canadian air show. Likewise in the congregation, people follow what they see in the leadership. In fact, it is that way in every organization; the leadership sets the tone for how things will be done, and how well the doctrines and practices will be followed.

What effect does it have upon those around us when we have decided we have a goal that is incompatible with God's will, and yet we set about to accomplish that goal regardless? When we have no regard for the LORD's will for our lives, the covenant to which we have entered, and the effect upon those around us; we have become enemies of the LORD, of the covenant, and of the congregation and have set ourselves as a god. This is what happened to the pilot in question. He became his own god. His goal was more important than fulfilling the

mission entrusted to him. His goal was more important than the taxpayer dollars he wasted, than the lives of the men he commanded in that airplane, than the families of those men, and more important than the wife he said he loved. He was blinded by his pride. As a result, he hurt everyone around him. So it is with us when we set forth to do that which God does not approve of, and are bound and determined to do it.

We, as members of the LORD's church are not free to do as we please. In certain things the LORD has allowed leeway, in most things he has not. It is not like we are "freelance" Christians outside the hedge of the LORD's protection. They can do pretty much what they want as long as it is not sin. They don't have a covenant with God to be the "pillar and ground of the truth." We do. As such, we cannot afford to give ground, be hypocritical, set our desires above the will of God, play fast and loose with truth, etc., etc. We are the focus of the spiritual war that rages in this world. We are members of the LORD's true church, empowered to carry forth the truth to the world around us, and to the generations that follow us. If we fail to do this, we will be the cause of the world becoming darker. The blame will be laid squarely at our feet when we stand before the LORD and are judged. For us, holding fast the truth is not optional – we are in a covenant. Moreover, it is a covenant sealed by the blood of our LORD. Can we disregard such a thing as this covenant? To do so places us squarely in the camp of the enemy. That makes us no different than the Lt. Col. that flew his aircraft into the ground at Fairchild AFB.

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