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Never Leave an Airman Behind: How the Air Force Faltered and Failed in the Wake of the Lackland Sex Scandal

Craig M. Perry

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“I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN. I AM A WARRIOR. I HAVE ANSWERED MY NATION’S CALL.” Thus begins the “Airman’s Creed,” recited by raw recruits and seasoned veterans throughout the United States Air Force. This mantra ends with an inspirational affirmation: “I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN: WINGMAN, LEADER, WARRIOR. I WILL NEVER LEAVE AN AIRMAN BEHIND, I WILL NEVER FALTER, AND I WILL NOT FAIL.” And yet, Air Force leaders have left far too many of these airmen behind in recent years. The USAF has been at war with our nation’s adversaries for decades, and its pace of operations shows no sign of letting up. Despite declining end strength and aging equipment, American airmen consistently manage to accomplish the mission – but doing more with less has come at a cost. Along the way, many airmen have lost faith in their senior leaders, who all too often seem to sacrifice integrity for expediency, substitute self-interest for service, and aim far lower than excellence. Our nation’s Air Force is now confronted by a crisis in confidence, which jeopardizes its effectiveness as an instrument of American power. A turning point in this precipitous decline came in 2012, after several instructors at Air Force Basic Military Training were implicated in crimes of a sexual nature. The witch-hunt that followed needlessly ruined the careers of countless airmen over increasingly frivolous allegations, all in the name of implementing transformation initiatives that have only made a bad situation worse. Such abuse of authority has since metastasized across the Air Force, with increasingly troubling implications. This is the story of some of those airmen the Air Force left behind: squadron commanders wrongfully relieved of command, instructors persecuted for victimless crimes, defendants railroaded over dubious allegations of sexual misconduct. The Air Force is facing a catastrophe of its own making, a predictable outcome of toxic leadership and a lack of accountability. As this book will attempt to demonstrate, there are no signs the Air Force intends to reform itself, or even acknowledge it has a problem. It’s time to call this sorry situation to the attention of Congress and the American people.

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