General Myers: Thanks to Joe for the introduction and for our great Chairman of the Air Force Association.

I thought what I’d do is I’ll take a few minutes and talk about the book, and then we can open it up to questions and answers on any subject that you feel comfortable talking about. I’m happy to talk about anything, book related or whatever. Whatever’s on your mind.

First of all, when I contemplated writing this book, in fact I wasn’t contemplating that book. The historians around me were saying listen, you served in this very unique and challenging time in our history, you ought to record some of this. I said yeah, but how can you do that and do it in a way that is fair to the people you worked with, and yet still be illuminating and so forth? I had to convinced myself that we could put something together that would be interesting, but not sticking fingers in people’s eyes, in what seems to be the rage today. The publisher, I will tell you, I have a great publisher, but they really pushed to make it sort of a tell-all. Say something bad about these guys. Say something bad about the President. I said oh, yeah, that’s exactly what the military, that’s what we should be doing, right? Or the Secretary of Defense. Or anybody that you worked with. Because you make it a tell-all, then of course they get very interested and it becomes sort of the Jerry Springer of the book business. But that wasn’t me and I don’t think that’s what our profession, the military profession, is all about. So that was the first thing I had to convince myself of, is that you could write a book, a person could write a book and make it interesting and tell important stories but not make it a personal point where you trade some of the professional confidences that you’ve had over the years with people of all ranks and including our civilian bosses.

I got over that after a while and started thinking about how you lay out the book. The book is basically in several parts. The first part is little Dicky Myers grows up and becomes Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Why that might be interesting is that nobody would have picked me when I went through ROTC at Kansas State that I was going to be much of anything, actually. In fact I have in the book, if you’ve read any of it, I have that one statement in there from the training officer of ROTC summer camp that said, “Cadet Myers does not have much future in the United States Air Force.” [Laughter].
So in a way it’s supposed to give the rest of you all hope, that no matter who’s beating on you on a particular day, that you too - You just can’t let one person’s idea of you get you down. You’ve got to keep pressing on.

So I hope the more memoirish portion of the book does that for young people of probably any persuasion, but moving forward is a lot about perseverance and having confidence in yourself. Most of us as teenagers, young adults, don’t have an abundance of confidence, but we have enough that if we call upon it, it can get us through the rough spots.

The second part of the book then is heavily into my time as Vice Chairman and Chairman. Those were beginning some very interesting, and particularly after 9/11/2001, some unique and challenging times.

I thought it was useful to give another perspective. I do some work with the War Colleges and I was up at the Army War College and they were very proud to announce that oh yeah, we use Tom Ricks’ book, he’s got a couple of books, we use those as some of our mandatory reading assignments. I said do you use any other books to kind of give another perspective? They said no, we really like those books. I thought boy, if it’s Tom Ricks they’re relying on, and he’s a fine reporter and all that, it would be nice to have another perspective. So I hope what the book does is provide another perspective of those times, the decisions that were made, how the senior military people worked with each other, and importantly, how the senior military people worked with our civilian bosses, from the President on down. I thought that was something important to talk to the American public about because they probably don’t have a good understanding of it, and yet it’s so essential to who we are as a country, how our country works, how our military works, what our responsibilities under the Constitution are. I thought it was important to kind of tease that out in the book. So there’s a lot of time spent with the decisions and those relationships and how we interact.

Also relationships with Congress, relationships with the media. I thought people might be interested in those sorts of things.

And I finally come to the conclusion in that part of it, though, and throughout that part, talking about the importance of relationships. And you all know it because of everything you do, that it’s all about relationships is how you get things done in life. It’s no different when you’re a senior military leader and a new Secretary of Defense shows up and he chooses you to be his Chairman, and the President chooses you to be his Chairman, you’ve got to work on these relationships. And relationships of course are
built, like all relationships, on trust. So I talk about that in the book as well, about the importance of relationships, how you build those relationships, and the importance of trust and credibility, both ways, in that environment. I thought that was important for people to understand.

The last part of the book is not a memoir at all, it’s kind of a fresh look forward on how to deal with what I think is still the most important threat our country faces, and that’s the threat from violent extremism. So I devoted a chapter, it’s Chapter 12, to the whole issue of violent extremism. I have believed for a long time since I was in uniform and now out of uniform, that we still haven’t developed the appropriate strategy not only in this country but internationally to deal with this threat from violent extremism. I don’t call it terrorism, I call it violent extremism. Violent extremists use terror as a method, is kind of the way I look at the problem.

I think we’ve been way too focused on using the military instrument of power and not considered and not used the other instruments of power, the political, diplomatic, economic, and you could even weave in there educational and information technology and all of that. Those other instruments of power to bring to bear on the problem, for whatever reason.

As in any endeavor, and you’ve all been part of these endeavors. As in any endeavor the urgency of the moment takes away from the ability to stand back and do some real strategic planning. I think governments are affected by that just as you are in the offices and the places you work. It’s the immediate that always gets the attention, and if you ever want to get any real thinking done, you have to kind of step back. Sometimes you do it on a Saturday, sometimes you do it at off-sites and things like that, but you’ve got to step back for a moment.

For instance, we were probably in hundreds and hundreds of meetings about Iraq and Afghanistan in the situation room. Probably less than five meetings on the overall strategy, how to deal with violent extremism writ large. That’s just the wrong balance. So in Chapter 12 I talk about that, have some thoughts about that.

Then Chapter 13 just looks at some of the security issues that the country is faced with.

The book came out just after President Obama came into office and one of the things that the Air Force might be interested in there is I think one of the real dilemmas for our national security future is how we’re going to find the research and development and procurement dollars to do what
we need to do for our military, because they always seem to be the dollars that are in the end slice off and cut. And it’s happened throughout my tenure, my 40 years in the service, and it’s likely to happen in the future given our budget deficits and everything else that’s going on. So I do talk about that in hopes of spurring even more conversation. And I’m afraid, the best you can tell from what you read is that we are headed down another path where procurement dollars are becoming even more precious and so recapitalizing the capital intensive services, particularly the Navy and the Air Force, is going to be a real problem. Ships are going to get older, airplanes are going to continue. I don’t know how they can get much older, but get older. And we’re going to have to continue to make do with that and not recapitalize our fleet. So that’s an example of one of the issues that I have in Chapter 13.

Each one of those issues I treat in Chapter 13 could be a whole book on itself but the publisher wanted a minimum number of words but they didn’t want too many words either, so they turn you off at a certain point and that probably saved all of us from some very tedious reading, so we’re done with that.

So that’s about the book. It took about two years from the idea of doing this and being convinced it was the right thing to do, to putting a book out that was professionally, I hope, respectful of the positions that I’d had, didn’t bring discredit on the office of the Chairman or the Vice Chairman or the other commands that I’ve had or the Air Force uniform, but at the same time tell, I think, an important story about some unique and challenging times.

Who all in here has written a book? This was not a fun thing to do. And even though I had a collaborator who was supposed to be doing most of the writing, I’m not going to go into that relationship, but it was interesting, and not always easy. And, well, I’ll give you one little anecdote.

Malcolm McConnell was my collaborator. He’s a wonderful writer. He does have a view of life perhaps different than my own. So I’m trying to tell this story in the book, and this was not always typical but it gives you some idea of how you have to read very carefully what your collaborator writes.

I was trying to tell this story about media relations and about the time that I asked Dan Rather to withhold photos from Abu Ghraib. 60 Minutes II had the photos and said we’re going to release these photos, and General Abizaid, then CENTCOM Commander. I told John about that. He said listen, this will be a very bad time. We’re trying to work some political magic here with the Iraqis, and the security situation, we’re at a very dicey moment, could they
possibly hold them? So I called Dan Rather who I had established a relationship with, as I did all the network anchors, and I said Dan, could you hold these photos? He said sure, I can hold them for a week. I called him back in a week and said could you hold them for another week? He said sure, I can hold them for a week.

Finally he calls me and he says listen, ABC’s got these photos, we’ve got to put them on the air. I said that’s fine, we understand it’s a business deal at this point.

So that was the anecdote and that was the way I wanted it to come out in the book. My collaborator, God bless him, put in there, the last sentence was, “And everybody in the Pentagon thought Dan Rather was a communist.” I said, Malcolm, did I ever say that? Did I ever talk bad about Mr. Rather? Why would you put that in my book and make it sound like it’s coming from me. This is just not right.

It wasn’t always like that, but it’s not like the agent said. The agent said -- If you ever want to write a book don’t believe the agent, because the agent said yeah, you’re going to spend 30 to 50 hours. The collaborator will be taking sort of an oral history from you, and then from those notes and other things you provide him, magically will appear this manuscript of 80,000 to 100,000 words and that will be it. I said 30 to 50 hours? That’s not so bad, I can do this. I don’t know how many hundreds of hours we spent and how much research I did. And we had several research assistants helping to make sure we had the facts straight and so forth. And my agent’s a good person, I just don’t think he’s ever written a book actually. So maybe he needs to do that. [Laughter].

That’s the story on the book. I know several of you have purchased it. I thank you for that. I found out way late in this process you don’t really make money on books, and if I make any money I’m going to donate it to military charities, if we ever make any money. So it’s not about money, it’s about telling I think an important story or at least a different perspective of a time – not my personal story, but the perspective of the time that might be different from some of the other pundits that have talked about it.

So that’s the book. I’m happy to take questions on any issue you have. The book, things in the book you’ve read, things you don’t believe that are written in the book, or any subject about anything that you think I might know something about.

Moderator: General, the first one has to do, it says, “I read General Franks’ book, American Soldier. How
accurate was his frustration with the service chiefs and how did you try to work both sides of this issue?

**General Myers:** I think his frustration with the service chiefs was very real. He felt like he was getting, as he’s trying to do his war planning, if you recall, the President and the Secretary said do we have a war plan for Iraq? The answer was yes. The next question is, is it worth anything? The answer was no, it’s not very good. It hasn’t been updated for some time. So he had a year to do the planning, not ever knowing we’re going to execute, it but he had a year to do that. He felt that during that planning that the services were making inputs inappropriately into the planning process. I don’t know if he got personal pressure from the services. I think in the case of one service he probably did. But he was, I don’t think Tommy ever served in the Pentagon, and I don’t think he understood as well as he should have the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Chairman is the principal military advisor to the President and the National Security Council. But if you keep reading, I’ve got to represent the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. If we all agree, then you are the principal military advisor, you give them you advice, everybody agrees. If you don’t agree, the law says that you must also provide the advice of service chiefs who have a different point of view.

Let’s just take an issue of troop strength, a big issue in Iraq initially. I could tell the President with confidence because we worked this through the Joint Chiefs a lot, that General Franks thinks he has the troops he needs, we agree with that. And no service chief dissented on that particular point.

General Franks didn’t understand that process very well, so if the Chiefs are going to have, the Joint Chiefs are supposed to be providing this advice, they’ve got to be informed. Who’s supposed to inform them? Well, the combatant commanders, you’ve got to come and brief them from time to time. It was like pulling teeth to get General Franks to come talk to the service chiefs. But part of your job as the Chairman is to make that happen.

It’s a great question. It’s accurate, that part in the book about his frustration is accurate. He also mentioned in the book I think he was also frustrated by the Secretary of Defense’s reviews of his plan, of which I played a part as did the Vice Chairman and several folks on the Secretary’s staff. That started out very very rocky. I remember after one meeting, I think I put this in the book. After kind of the first meeting like that General Franks
comes down to my office and he throws something across the room, and I don’t remember what it was exactly he threw, but he was not happy after just coming from the Secretary’s office, threatened to quit and all this kind of stuff. I felt my job at the time was to be the facilitator to kind of get him back on track and maybe help with the Secretary’s attitudes, too.

Fortunately Secretary Wolfowitz walked in just as General Franks was going through his tirade, and between Secretary Wolfowitz and myself we convinced the Secretary that he’s going to have to have a different approach to working with General Franks on this. And we also convinced General Franks that it’s the legitimate right of the service chiefs and the Secretary to review his planning because in the end the President’s going to have to approve it. And the President’s not going to approve your plan, Tommy, unless we say it looks pretty good to us. So that was how that worked. I think the Chairman does play a very critical role in that process, trying to keep everybody on side.

And if you read later in General Franks’ book, he does comment that the process that he went through, particularly with the Secretary, resulted in a much better plan in the end. I can tell you that was for sure true, as a lot of folks in this room know.

Is that right, Gary? That’s pretty much – I wasn’t too mean to anybody there.

Moderator: This one may be in your book, but the person has not yet read it, I’m sure. “What was your most memorable thought on 9/11?”

General Myers: The first thought, the first most memorable thought, the thing I remember worrying about, and I was on Capitol Hill when the World Trade Centers were struck and then kind of went back to the Pentagon because the Chairman, then Chairman Shelton, is out of the country heading towards a NATO meeting. When I saw the Pentagon, the black smoke coming across the 14th Street Bridge, and seeing the Pentagon on fire, black smoke billowing out, the first thought was what a horror, actually, what a tragedy, and how many people died, because you have no idea but you see this thing engulfed in flames and smoke, at least one section of it. The second thought is what’s next? Where’s the next strike going to be? Is it going to be in this country, somewhere else in the world? How can we protect American citizens? Is there anything we can do? How we protect our military capability because they’ve, so far they’ve been pretty darn successful. This was before Flight 93 went down in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. So it was what was next? That was probably the most memorable thing.
As we got towards the end of the day, the other thing that lasted for a long time was just the smell in the Pentagon that day, the smoke. I don’t know how many people were in the Pentagon that day, but that smoke, it burned for a month or so afterwards. That wood up there in the rafters burned. There was always a little bit of wisps of smoke coming out of the Pentagon.

At the end of the day, I can remember my service dress jacket was in the closet, which I had not been in my office all day, but I go back there to kind of check out. Shelton had gotten back now and they were in a press conference with Secretary Rumsfeld and I think Senators Levin and Warner down in the Pentagon Press Center. I was pretty much done for the day. And I thought well, I ought to take this service dress and get it cleaned. Then I thought, why not just leave it like that for a while just to kind of remind you of what this day was all about.

There were a lot of emotions, but one is the terrible tragedy. Two, what can we do now, and where’s the next strike going to come from? And then that smoke that just reminded you of the day you went through, which was kind of a blur, for sure.

Moderator: Sir, could you say a little bit about the pre-war planning that was given and thoughts given to the stability and reconstruction operations in Iraq?

General Myers: I devote some time in the book to this. This could be a whole seminar, or maybe more, actually. There was a lot of attention given to it. It was supposed to be the combatant command, Central Command in this case, responsible for phase four planning. The facts are, they didn’t do it. And as we got into that year of planning towards the fall, we’d heard a lot about the combat plan and we had a pretty good understanding of what General Franks and his component commanders wanted to do there. We felt pretty comfortable with how that was going. But the phase four planning was not going very well, and the original concept was that once Saddam Hussein fell, the military would be the coalition provisional authority until some point at which time you’d appoint maybe the Iraqis, maybe a U.S. civilian, maybe some UN person. There were all sorts of options out there. And as we all know, that didn’t happen and we appointed very quickly after major combat American civilian Ambassador Paul Bremmer to be the coalition provisional authority.

So on the one hand you had a military command that wasn’t very interested, no matter how much we tried to encourage them, and some of this is in the book, but to try
to encourage them to do their planning, but we had a pretty robust planning effort going on anyway in the Pentagon with the interagency and particularly we had this guy, Lieutenant General (Ret) U.S. Army Jay Garner, who was terrific. Had served, in the first Gulf War had been over there above the green line and new, in the green zone above the line knowing some of the actors and some of the cultural and social attributes of the Iraqi populace. He would have been perfect. So we had him suited up. We even formed a joint task force to help Central Command do the phase four stability. We formed them, trained them, and they were never used. As soon as Ambassador Bremmer was appointed as the coalition provisional authority, Jay Garner quit. He wasn’t fired. We really wanted him to stay. He quit. I think we lost about a year there of implementing good face for planning that had been done.

So there’s a myriad of things you can, I mean you can criticize planning, you can criticize execution, you can be critical of personalities. It was a pretty tough time of trying to get people to do the right thing. We were also dealing with lots of unknowns. And by the way, in May, June, July and August of ‘03, right after major combat, there wasn’t much of a threat from an insurgency. It was pretty quiet. Then it started to build in August. Until you get to about February of the following year, about a year later from the invasion, now you have, you’re at a level of activity that kind of stayed that way for the next three or four years. But that built slowly and it was insidious. I think it’s one of the reasons that the President decided to put a civilian in. Hey, if we put a military person in there, if General Franks and his successor becomes the coalition provisional authority, it’s going to look more like an occupation. We’ll make this look more like liberation if we put a civilian in charge. I think that was reasonable at the time. But if you look at the organization we had in June of ‘03, and you look at the organization we had in June of ‘04, they changed dramatically. We went from a coalition provisional authority to the Iraqis had their own interim government, we had an ambassador, we had the three star was replaced by a four star and a three star, a three star to handle the tactical fight, the four star to handle the strategic issues. So we totally revamped in a year to recognize the realities on the ground. So a very complex, very ambiguous time. There were no clear cut –

I love it. People say if you had just done this, it would have been all perfect. None of those folks were there when we were trying to make these decisions. Nobody had the crystal ball. Lots of people had opinions, and you had to choose and give your advice based on your best thoughts and analysis.
Moderator: The next one concerns the Air Force role in our current fight in the war on terror or irregular warfare. Some would say that it is underappreciated by the public at large and those in Congress.

Would you care to comment on that, sir?

General Myers: I think that’s a true statement. I think it is underappreciated. I think for whatever reason, our Air Force brand, if you will, we have not done as good a job probably as we could have or should have in that work. I think there’s even more the Air Force could bring to the fight if the joint commanders and the component commanders, particularly the Air Force component commander, if there was reliance, good communications, all that stuff that makes those things possible. I think there are a lot of things that we even now could be doing, particularly in the ISR area, but other areas as well.

So I think it is probably not well understood, and it’s a ground fight to a large extent, and that’s the way it is. And that’s fine. But I think the Air Force plays a key role in lots of that, and for whatever reason it’s just not as appreciated as the sacrifices that are being made by the United States Army and the Marine Corps on a daily basis. They’re clearly bearing the brunt of it, but I think both the Navy and the Air Force suffer a little bit from the same thing there. Even though there is a lot of support from dark blue suiters and light blue suiters in this effort.

Moderator: Sir, as you know we have some 350 students from the Air Command and Staff College here with us today.

General Myers: They would never let me leave Montgomery when I was down there. I don’t know what – They must have gotten really pretty easy on this whole thing. [Laughter].

Moderator: The question concerns having navigated very successfully in a very political environment, what advice would you offer a junior or mid-grade officer today to prepare themselves for that type of situation?

General Myers: Let me tell you an anecdote, and this is not to belittle the questioner. It’s a very good question the way that was put. But I am going to belittle a cadet at one of our academies, name to remain anonymous, academy to remain anonymous.

I was coming out of my office one day and my executive secretary Mary Turner said there’s been a cadet waiting outside your office for about the last two hours. I told
him that he couldn’t see you, that you’re schedule’s back to back, there’s no way he’s going to see you, but he insists on hanging around. He’s going to try to talk to you on the way down the hall where you go to the Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting in the so-called Tank.

Sure enough, I walk out in the hall, and sure enough this young service academy person walks up to me and on the way down there he says, “I just have one question for you sir, just one question.” “Sure, what is it?” “What’s it going to take for me to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?” I said, oh my goodness, if there’s any question that requires about four hours of your time and my time, because that is exactly, young man, that is exactly the wrong question. What the hell are you thinking about? Why do you think being Chairman is any big deal? You can get a black car anywhere. You can get a nice limousine anywhere. What do you think is so cool about it? He had exactly the wrong perspective. And I actually was late to the meeting to try to help him, disabuse him of the notion that that’s what he ought to be worried about.

I said are you the best, are you one of the top academic students at the service academy? Well, no sir. I said how are you doing on your military part? Are you one of the top persons in the military scores? Well, no sir. Well you’ve got things to do then, don’t you? Don’t be worried about my job. Be worried about how you can be the best you can be at your job.

But this was a more serious question that I just got from whomever, Joe. It’s a great question.

I think what would have helped me in the job, in preparation, first of all is to have all the right jobs, get exposure. I was Assistant to the Chairman where I had to deal with the interagency a lot. I got to travel with the Secretary of State a lot, two of them. And so it was only a year-long job but I got to see all that. I had the chance to be a combatant commander out at Space Command so I understood it from a combatant commander’s perspective.

So I think part of it is just a natural course of preparing yourself for any good job is going through the other jobs that are the building blocks to give you the tools to operate at the next level of responsibility. So one of it’s the jobs.

Part of it is the education. We’ve got a lot of folks from Air Command and Staff. That’s where I started to take the study of leadership very seriously. I thought Air Command and Staff did a pretty good job of that and they recommended some readings and we had some great speakers. So part of it is to study your craft and your trade.
And I think a large dose of history, for those of you that are not history majors, is to understand the history of what you’re getting into. Whatever job it is you’re getting into. It gives you the context in which you’re going to operate. And there’s nothing more important to give you confidence and a sense of where everything’s been and then where it needs to go. I think it really helps in that regard.

So I think you can do a lot of preparation in the jobs and education. I think that’s the best way to prepare for this sort of thing. And take advantage of the things that are written. Read a lot. And question a lot. Question people like me and others that have been there and been part of it.

I was going to, well I won’t do that. For instance, I had a good friend that is a professor of history at North Carolina. I actually refer to him in the book, Dick Cohen. He was the Air Force Historian for a while. I met Dick first at the Army War College when I was a student and he had a chair up there, and we became friends.

So when I was nominated to be Chairman, the next thing I get in the mail is the unfinished manuscript from Elliott Cohen from John Hopkins, SEIS school, the unfinished manuscript on his book on supreme command where he talks extensively, the whole thing is devoted to civilian control of the military and the proper roles of both. I got this at the 11th hour. You guys can all read this now and then you can form your own opinions about what you think about Elliott’s view of the world.

But I can remember being on the treadmill at Fort Meyer, because I lived on Fort Meyer, I’d go over there to exercise. I’m reading this manuscript and I’m just getting madder by the second. I’m thinking who the hell is this Elliott Cohen and what’s he know about anything, because I was having problems accepting some of his hypotheses in this book. Then I went home and thought about it for a while, went back to the treadmill and read it again. Now it’s kind of a sweat stained document but I’m still going through it. It’s a lot better than listening to everybody else breathing hard around you. So I read through this thing again and came to my own conclusion about how this whole civilian control of the military thing works. People say well, if you’re unhappy with a decision you just throw your two stars on the table, your four stars, and that makes it all right. I’ve thought about those sorts of things.

I can tell you, if Dick hadn’t forwarded me that manuscript, I hadn’t read it and thought about it before I was interviewed by the President or the Secretary to be
Chairman, I think I would have not been as well prepared. I’m going to leave out whether I did a good job, but would not have been as well prepared.

So that’s the kind of thing I think you can do ahead of time, to kind of think through some of these issues. And as you move from the tactical to the operational, the strategic level of responsibility, some of that will come naturally. So you’re at ACSC now, for a lot of you, that’s a good place to start reading about this. It’s the first time in your career you’ve really had a breather and they’re going to say we’re going to work with you for a year here and give you this great education. And the next time is the War College probably, or you pursue education on your own. But that’s how I’d do it.

Moderator: Go back to Vietnam on this question, General Myers. It’s been more than 40 years since you flew the F-4 in Vietnam. Would you care to speak about your experiences there and the combat missions that you flew?

General Myers: I guess what I’d say, they were a hell of a lot easier than the folks in World War II had. We were basically warm and we had oxygen and we had lots of good stuff that, those folks were cold. I guess they also had oxygen. But I mean the important thing about Vietnam is that we went in unprepared as an Air Force. We weren’t trained. We didn’t have the right equipment.

I can remember one of the guys that went through the Replacement Training Unit with me in the F-4 Phantom, the F-4E, getting ready for my first tour over there. He’d never been faster than 180 knots in his whole life and he’s a major. So he’d been flying some kind of prop airplanes. Nothing wrong with that, that’s all good. But now why is he sitting in the front seat of an F-4. Oh, by the way, he’s kind of semi-blind too. He was going faster than he’d ever been in his life, and he had no situational awareness. He was a great guy to get on the schedule next to if you were going to go up and fly basic fighter maneuvers with, because he’s always lose sight of you. That was a good thing, because if they lose sight of you, you can take advantage of that.

We were an Air Force I think in disarray. I remember the wing commander we had at Udorn was, he was not competent to send into combat by himself. He had to go with a very experienced instructor pilot. He could fly the airplane, but he couldn’t fly it and talk on the radios and do all the sorts of things you’d expect a mission leader to do without a lot of help from a pilot, instructor pilot in the back seat. One of the reasons he was there was, the thought was we’re not going to get these guys promoted,
colonels going to brigadier general, unless they’d been through Vietnam and had their tickets punched so to speak.

We’re a much different Air Force today in terms of training, in terms of our equipment, in terms of our readiness, in terms of how we select our leadership. It’s no longer the good old boy network like the Vietnam days. I think we’re so much better prepared.

But that’s the important, those are the lessons that we took out of Vietnam. A lot of folks, my contemporaries like John Jumper, retired Chief, and Ron Keyes, retired out of ACC. When we got to Nellis Air Force Base in the Weapons School, I think we took a lot of what we learned over in Southeast Asia and brought it into the training continuum, trying to make things different and better. And it wasn’t easy because we were doing this thing for the pilots here, especially the fighter guys and ladies, you’re going to laugh at this, but we had a hard time finding places to take the aggressor squadron and go train with a wing in the United States Air Force because the wing commanders out there in the land were afraid that they were going to have an accident because of this more aggressive training. It was hard work establishing realistic training in our Air Force, and it took four stars that had the foresight, the vision and frankly the courage, and it took a lot of captains and majors and even some lieutenants to say hey, this is the right thing to do, we’re going to do it. It was not a given.

That all came out of the Vietnam experience. As far as flying in Vietnam, it was politically a very turbulent time back here in the United States. When you’re over there flying as a captain, that, at least I think over most of the heads of my friends, we were there doing what we were doing to support the U.S. Army in South Vietnam, to make sure the supplies didn’t get to them by bombing the supply trails in Laos and eventually in Vietnam, and that’s what we did, we were proud to do it, and were probably crazy and stupid and actually it was a pretty thrilling time, all in all.

Moderator: Sir, the final question looks to the future. What advice would you give to the young Airmen coming into our great Air Force today?

General Myers: Well, the first thing, and they’re not going to understand this, but they need to know that they’re coming into one of the greatest organizations in the world. I think our leadership, the way we train leaders, is second to none. I think our values as a service. Always challenged. We always get challenged, we always have folks that screw it up, but we take action and we move on. I think the values of the United States Air Force, I’m really
proud. I don’t wear the uniform any more. I think that’s inappropriate. As Chuck Horner says, some of you know General Horner. He says I don’t wear mine any more. I put Velcro on the back and they can use it the last time they put me in the earthy, they can Velcro that thing on and that will be that. That’s probably what I’m going to do as well. I hope I don’t need the Velcro to expand to whatever girth. But to know that they’ve got an Air Force that has a great legacy, as short as it is it’s a great legacy. The things we provided to national security are unmatched if you think about all the different aspects of things we’ve done, whether it’s in air or space or cyber space and that we’re going to do.

So I would tell the young Airman that’s joining up that he’s joining a first class operation. I hope he’s up to the challenge, because it will not be easy. And they will be given great responsibility early on, and they’ll be challenged, and they’ll be held accountable. And there’s no better way of life.

Let me just wrap it up with, I’ll ask you, I’m a little afraid to ask you this question but I’m going to ask it anyway. I hope it fits into what I want to tell you. Maybe it won’t.

Okay, how many of you worry about how much money you make? A couple. Most of you didn’t raise your hand and I think that’s where I want to go with this story.

I’m retired, and I’m doing kind of a national security pitch for some folks at Morgan Stanley. We’re on the 72nd story of some building in New York City overlooking the city. I don’t know how many of you have been up there in one of those high, nice office buildings, but you get a real sense of power up there. We’re waiting for their clients to arrive to have this wide ranging discussion on national security and world events. And one of the young investment bankers, this is before everything kind of fell apart on Wall Street. But this investment banker came up and said, “General, I know you served for 40 years in the military. It must have been really frustrating not to make any money while you were serving in the military.” I said, “Really, I didn’t think about it a lot.” “Oh, I can’t believe that. I can’t believe you and your peers didn’t talk about this all the time, that you just weren’t making any money.” I said, “No, it never really crossed my mind.” We knew we weren’t going to get rich. Somebody told us that early on. We got that part. But we were adequately compensated and we never talked about it. He just couldn’t understand that thought.

So I guess what I’d tell that young Airman is that there’s a lot more about life than making a dollar. Compensation is important. You’ve got to take care of your
family, you’ve got to provide for the health and education and needs of your children and all that. But there’s something above all that and I think we have that in our core values – service before self. We have some great examples in the United States Air Force where people have done that. And that’s what I’d tell that young Airman coming in. This is a lot more than about you, buster. It’s about what our country needs, what our Air Force needs, and I hope you’re up to the task, and I hope you’re not drawn off by other things that will not be as fulfilling in the end, at least in my opinion.

With that, I thank you all for being here in uniform, the ones in uniform. The ones who have served, who are serving. And you wouldn’t be here, as good as you are, sitting in those chairs, because you’re so talented. People want you all the time to do other things. They will clearly pay you more. But there’s nothing more fulfilling I think than getting up every day and looking at yourself in the mirror and saying I’m helping in my small way providing for the security of our country, the men and women who make up the citizens of this great country, and our friends and allies for that matter. That’s a great feeling, and there isn’t anything else like that.

So thank you very much.