

CMR REPORT

CENTER FOR MILITARY READINESS POLICY ANALYSIS

JUNE 1995



Number 9

DOUBLE STANDARDS IN NAVAL AVIATION

Late in December, 1994, the Center for Military Readiness (CMR) received credible information from a known source, relating to an extraordinary and unusual pattern in the training of two female pilots for combat aviation assignments. One of these, Lt. Kara Hultgreen, was killed while attempting to land an F-14 on the carrier *U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln* on October 25, 1994. The second female pilot, identified as "Pilot B" to protect her privacy, is still on flight status.

Because the assertions were very sensitive as well as serious, CMR sought the assistance of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) in obtaining verification from Navy officials. In a January 16, 1995 letter to Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC), Chairman of the SASC, Elaine Donnelly, President of the Center for Military Readiness, presented nine detailed pages chronicling rocky training records for the two women. CMR also quoted a signed letter from a concerned individual who wrote that all of Lt. Hultgreen's colleagues had great respect for her courage, but as dedicated professionals they could not allow a pervasive climate of political correctness to deter them from initiating a frank discussion of factors which may have contributed to the tragedy:

"In their haste to get women into combat billets as soon as possible, Navy leaders have denied unit commanders the tools they need to make integration workable. Lt. Kara Hultgreen was an F-14 pilot with limited abilities who, had she been a male, would arguably never have graduated to the fleet. (Her colleague, 'Pilot B, J was a substandard aviation candidate who unquestionably should not have graduated to the fleet, but did so only because of gender.

"... Unfortunately, Navy policy on integration isn't one of 'stretching the truth a little.' With the first two female F-14 pilots, standards weren't just broken, they were shattered."

From January of 1995 through March 24, Mrs. Donnelly met once at the Pentagon with Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jeremy Boorda, and three times with then-Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Stanley Arthur. At the March 24 meeting with Adm. Arthur, which was also attended by Chief of Naval Information Rear Adm. Kendell Pease and an aide for Senator Spencer Abraham (R-MI), Mrs. Donnelly was shown a non-published Navy document that confirmed, with only a few minor points of disagreement, that the facts and chronologies presented in the January 16 letter were largely accurate.

CMR's purpose in releasing this information, presented here in condensed form, is to clarify the issues since the tragic death of Lt. Hultgreen, and to challenge the Navy to be fully candid about current and future training practices that treat women differently. If the Navy intends to defend the practice of extending extraordinary concessions to female aviation trainees—and it appears that they are prepared to do just that—the families involved and the entire nation have a right to know and debate the wisdom of that policy.

The question at issue here is not whether women should serve in combat squadrons, but whether women—and all trainees—should be held to the same high standards that have worked in recent years to reduce accident rates in aviation, the most dangerous occupation in the Navy.

Vehement protestations that both women were technically "qualified" are meaningless as well as misleading, because the definition of that word has been radically changed by practices that forgive low scores and major errors in training so that certain people will not fail. Extraordinary concessions and dual-track standards that treat men and women differently heighten risks because the aircraft itself does not forgive. Even proponents of women in combat should agree that these practices are simply indefensible.

Above all, CMR hopes that disclosure of this information will enable Navy personnel, family members, members of Congress, and the American people to engage in a responsible discussion that leads to constructive reforms, before heightened risks result in the needless loss of more young lives.

LT. KARA S. HULTGREEN, USN: Excerpts of F-14 Training Records

In June of 1993, Navy Lt. Kara S. Hultgreen began F-14 (Tomcat) transition training from the retiring A-6 community, and her training quickly established an unusual pattern. Instructors included some positive remarks for encouragement, but throughout her training at Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) VF-124, records accompanying the full-length version of this report indicate that Lt. Hultgreen struggled with the F-14.

PAGE 2 -- CMR REPORT - JUNE 1995

NOTE: As indicated in VF-124's official grading criteria, various kinds of "safety of flight - downs," or "pink sheets" are given to document and correct serious errors in performance or attitude among aviation trainees. In the highly-competitive environment of naval aviation, as few as one or two downs may result in dismissal of the trainee, depending on the seriousness or patterns of the offenses, and other factors such as low cumulative scores.

DOWN NO. 1: 29 OCTOBER, 1993 - While on her third flight in the familiarization phase of her F-14 training, Lt. Hultgreen received a safety of flight - down for a near mishap while landing at NAS Fallon Nevada. Despite a briefing on the hazards of landing at high elevation, she came on the brakes too aggressively, and blew both main mount tires.

FIELD CARRIER LANDING PRACTICE: 28 FEBRUARY - 4 APRIL, 1994 - At the completion of her first series of Field Carrier Landing Practice (FCLP) periods, (field landings preparing for shipboard qualification) Lt. Hultgreen had the lowest landing grades of the nine pilots in her group. Her cumulative field grade was 2.82, which is below the conventionally accepted minimum required to attempt carrier qualification (CQ). The June, 1992 FRS Grading Criteria and Issues Manual rates a score of 2.90 as "Unsatisfactory Performance."

NOTE: A review of flight training records dating back to 1986 reveals only four other cases where individuals were allowed to attempt carrier qualification with field grades at or below 2.82. All of these students had unmarred performance records in previous phases of F-14 training, and were needed in the fleet during a period of pronounced military build-up and severe pilot shortages.

DOWN NO. 2: 22 MARCH, 1994 - While preparing for her first attempt at carrier qualification Hultgreen received a safety of flight - down, primarily because she failed to make timely power corrections to fix glide slope deviations.

DOWN NO. 3: 31 MARCH, 1994 - Lt. Hultgreen received a second pink sheet in phase for *"making power corrections that were erratic and unpredictable."* The down was significant, in that the primary reason for FCLP is to gain confidence that the Landing Signal Officer (LSO) can predict and trust in the reactions of each pilot.

NOTE: Two downs in a single phase normally justifies a Field Naval Aviator Evaluation Board (FNAEB) and possible dismissal from F-14 training. Downs No. 2 and 3 indicated problems in technique similar to those evident on the day Lt. Hultgreen crashed.

FIRST CARRIER QUALIFICATION ATTEMPT: 12-13 APRIL, 1994 - As acknowledged by the Navy, Lt. Hultgreen failed to qualify "at the boat" on her first attempt because she failed to achieve minimum scores for qualification, which were 2.60 for all phases-day, night, and overall-plus a boarding rate (percentage of attempted landings successfully achieved) of 60 percent.

NOTE: Navy officials were widely quoted in November of 1994 saying that it was not unusual for a pilot to disqualify (DQ) on their first attempt, and that about 25 percent of aspiring F-14 pilots fail to qualify on their first try. But the carrier disqualification rate for West Coast Category 1 (initial training) pilots since January, 1986 was just over 13 percent. Inclusion of additional disqualifications in 1994 brings the percentage to about 16 percent.

Following disqualification, Lt. Hultgreen was required to complete another FCLP workup in preparation for a second try at CQ.

DOWN NO. 4: 9 MAY, 1994 - Lt. Hultgreen received another safety of flight - down during the conventional weapons phase of her training. She failed to safely perform a pop-up delivery maneuver with simulated bombs. If she had been carrying live weapons, the too-shallow dive and bottom-out altitude well below the fragmentation zone would have destroyed Hultgreen and her aircraft.

On numerous runs during this flight, Lt. Hultgreen also continued to press the target without having the proper symbology on her heads-up display (HUD). On several runs she unknowingly left the HUD in landing mode for the entire run on target, and on two runs attempted to simulate bomb release without proper symbology on HUD, while engaging incorrect switches.

SECOND CARRIER QUALIFICATION ATTEMPT: 19-27 JULY, 1994 - During the 5 week work-up period prior to her second try at carrier qualification, Lt. Hultgreen earned cumulative scores improving to 3.24. Her second CQ overall grade was 3.10, which was widely described as above the 2.99 average.

- Category 1 pilots (first tour in the F-14 aircraft) require a total of 20 passes at the ship to carrier qualify. During her second carrier qualification Lt. Hultgreen received a total of 32 practice landings, which raised her overall average and boarding rate.
- Lt. Hultgreen's second try (second look) CQ average of 3.10 was higher than the 2.99 average of other pilots on their first try, but below that of other pilots since 1986 on their second look, which was 3.13.

OCTOBER 25, 1994 - Lt. Kara Hultgreen was killed while attempting a landing on the carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* in clear daytime conditions off the coast of San Diego. Her back-seat Radar Intercept Officer (RIO) successfully ejected from the rolling aircraft, but she was killed instantly when she was ejected into the water at low altitude, a fraction of a second later.

PILOT B: Excerpts of F-14 Training Records

Pilot B reported to VF-124 at the same time as Lt. Kara Hultgreen, but she did not have the tactical jet flight experience that benefited Hultgreen. Instructors provided considerable encouragement, but significant problems were evident from the beginning.

DOWN NO. 1: 27 OCTOBER 1993 - Before she actually flew the F-14 aircraft, Pilot B received an unsatisfactory grade on her FABT 170 safe-for-flight simulator test. She landed 4,000 feet long during a simulated emergency landing, and her hook missed the arresting gear. Rather than take the plane around for a second pass, she stayed on the ground, ran off the runway and into the water at North Island and was simulated "killed" when she failed to eject.

NOTE: Starting with this failure at a critical early stage of training, a precedent was set that continued throughout Pilot B's F-14 training. Whenever she encountered problems, she received extra training, specialized one-on-one tutoring, and a series of special concessions not normally afforded other individual pilots in a single course of instruction.

DOWN NO. 2: 15 NOVEMBER 1993 - Pilot B received a signal of difficulty - down when she failed to secure the right engine upon entering the refueling area at NAS Miramar. Despite the obvious hazard posed by her inattention during this incident, which should have triggered a more severe safety of flight - down, Pilot B was allowed to continue without any action being taken.

Note: Ground refueling of the F-14 is normally accomplished through "hot pitting," during which ground crews attach a fuel line to a probe just forward of the engine intake, while the plane is still running. A pilot's failure to secure the right engine during this process, which takes place in a high-noise environment, can result in a crewman being sucked into the intake and killed.

INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED TRAINING - During March and April of 1994, Pilot B's classmates were required to "double cycle" their training; i.e., complete one tactics flight and one field practice (FCLP) flight during a single day. Since Pilot B was unable to perform effectively in both tactics and FCLP, the commanding officer (CO) of the squadron had her tactics training deferred so she could concentrate on CQ-a luxury not afforded to any of her classmates.

After her tactics training was postponed, Pilot B's performance did improve marginally. Her FCLP summary sheet for the period 28 February - 4 April shows that at 2.889 she had the second lowest field grades in her class, only slightly higher than Lt. Hultgreen's.

DOWN NO. 3: 7 MARCH 1994 - Pilot B received an unsatisfactory safety of flight grade on her third field carrier landing practice event, CQPF 030, for "overshooting starts" and "finessing a low." Failure in these areas indicates deficiencies in the most critical skills needed for safe carrier landings, including the ability to predictably follow the instructions of the Landing Signal Officers.

DOWN NO. 4: 21 MARCH 1994 - On 21 March 1994 Pilot B received her first unsatisfactory performance grade in the tactics phase when she scored a 2.85 on tactics flight TAPF 060. The VF-124 standardized grading criteria states that any grade below 2.90 is unsatisfactory and documentation of the failure is "required." Nevertheless, the commanding officer of VF-124, who was the instructor on the flight, elected to change the grade from unsatisfactory to incomplete, and annotate it, "Count this as a warmup."

FIRST CARRIER QUALIFICATION ATTEMPT: 12-13 APRIL 1994 - Pilot B failed her first attempt at carrier qualification with a day grade of 2.46 and a night grade of 1.25, with a 0% boarding rate-the lowest night grade in the history of the training squadron, excluding incompletes. A Landing Signal Officer described her performance as "well below average" (LSO's emphasis).

NOTE: A Human Factors Board (HFB) convened on 19 April, 1994 found no mitigating psychological or physiological factors causing Pilot B's poor performance, but was divided as to recommending a Field Naval Aviator Evaluation Board (FNAEB), which normally would have been convened for any student receiving two consecutive unsatisfactory performance grades during a single training phase.

The commanding officer elected not to convene a FNAEB. Pilot B was given another full FCLP work-up cycle and was allowed a second attempt at carrier qualification. No student, in the history of the west coast F-14 FRS, has ever been allowed to attempt re-qualification with a cumulative field grade (rounded up to 2.89) as low as Pilot B's. In fact, training records indicate that other students with first-time field grades higher than Pilot B's have been permanently disqualified after their first CQ.

DOWN NO. 5: 24 MAY 1994 - Pilot B failed her FABT 180 Naval Aviation Training and Operational Procedures Standards (NATOPS) check-a flight simulator session to certify that she was qualified to fly the F-14. She made numerous basic procedural errors, such as failure to properly check hydraulic and flight control systems and to follow standard operating procedures. In actual flight, any one of these errors could result in a serious emergency or loss of an aircraft.

Despite her three downs in phase and five total in training to date, squadron training and operations officers failed to convene an HF13 or FNAEB. Instead, Pilot B was again provided extra trainer periods and specialized one-on-one tutoring, and was allowed to continue flying.

DOWN NO. 6: 21 JUNE 1994 - Pilot B's tactics training resumed, and she received another unsatisfactory performance down on 21 June, 1994, on her TAFP 160 flight. Her grade sheet for the event indicated that Pilot B "*seemed to have lost her grasp of basic tactical concepts: positioning, mutual support, visual responsibilities, weapons employment, engaged communications and maneuvering.*"

PAGE 4 -- CMR REPORT - JUNE 1995

A second Human Factors Board was convened on 22 June, 1994 which found no mitigating psychological or physiological problems. Still, no FNAEB was convened by the squadron CO. Pilot B was not required to re-fly the event at which she had failed.

FINAL STAGES - TACTICS - The tactics flight phase is an 18-sortie syllabus that takes approximately 4 weeks to complete. In Pilot B's case, as the complexity of the missions became increasingly difficult, it took over 32 flights and 3 months to complete.

On 25 occasions when it appeared she might be progressing toward an unsatisfactory grade, Pilot B claimed aircraft problems and aborted the mission. Of these incidents, 23 either could not be duplicated, or were signed off by subsequent pilots as non-existent. This tendency to ground good airplanes became so pronounced during the latter stages of tactics training that it became necessary to have an extra aircraft turned up and ready so that Pilot B would have no choice but to complete the scheduled event.

NOTE: Based on a cost per flight hour of \$2700, and an average of 1.1 flight hours per tactics sortie, Pilot B's 14 extra tactics flights cost the Navy about \$41,580.00.

DOWN NO. 7: 27 JUNE 1994 (UNRECORDED) - Pilot B received another unsatisfactory grade when she scored 2.875 on her last tactics hop (TAPF170), but this flight was not recorded. Despite the standard Grading Criteria, which designated 2.90 as an "unsat" grade, the CO directed the flight instructor not to record the flight as a down, and then re-flew it with her himself. Contrary to Manual requirements she then "passed" this event with a score of 3.03, even though she had failed the two previous events with no re-flies, and no FNAEB.

SECOND ATTEMPT, CARRIER QUALIFICATION: 19-27 JULY, 1994 - Pilot B qualified for carrier landings on her second try. Her CQ phase summary sheet for that period states that she earned an FCLP grade of 3.17, a CQ day average of 2.92, and a night average of 3.00. Her overall CQ phase average was 3.01 and she was ranked 5 of 7.

- Again, comparative ratings are misleading because Pilot B, like Lt. Hultgreen, was able to raise her qualifying average by being afforded 8 more passes at the ship than the 20 required.
- Her class ranking was also skewed by comparing her second try performance against others on their first try, whose average was 2.99. Compared to the 3.13 average for all second look pilots since 1986, her 3.01 score is considerably below the mean average.

PRESENT TIME - Pilot B deployed with the carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* in April of 1995.

THE NAVY'S RESPONSE

Post-Accident October 26,1994 - February 25,1995

Following the fatal crash on October 25, 1994, Navy officials began to undermine their own credibility by breaching long-standing tradition with regard to post-accident public statements.

- Statements suggesting that mechanical failure of the left engine, not pilot error, would be the primary focus of the investigation were highly unusual and questionable because of their potential for influencing future investigation reports.
- Navy officials also assisted the family in releasing selected portions of her flight records, suggesting that her carrier qualification scores were slightly above average. In response to an unsigned letter, (which was not circulated or quoted by CMR), Navy officials used pejorative terms to impugn the character and motives of anyone suggesting that Kara Hultgreen may have benefited from special concessions in training.
- By focusing on engine failure as the likely cause of this accident, the Navy sidestepped a crucial question: If a compressor stall did occur and was the catalyst that resulted in this mishap, was it the result of a mechanical failure of the engine, or was it induced by the pilot's flying technique?

NOTE: Compressor stall can occur when a pilot overshoots (turns too wide) on approach to the carrier, and compensates with an overly-aggressive turn back to center line that can cause the left engine to stall, due to normal air flow being disrupted or blanked off by the nose of the aircraft. That condition is usually not fatal, however. All pilots are constantly trained to handle a single engine fly-away situation. Excluding the possibility of catastrophic mechanical failure, which clearly did not occur in this case, the consequences of faulty flying technique should have been acknowledged as a likely factor.

- Finally, the Navy authorized a difficult and costly effort to raise the aircraft from a depth of 3,800 feet, despite the existence of a survivor, many knowledgeable witnesses, and video tape of the accident. The rationale for this effort has not been explained.

Navy News Conference, San Diego, California: February 28,1995

The tone and "spin" of the February 28 news conference at North Island Naval Air Station near San Diego, announcing the results of the Navy's own 39 page Judge Advocate General Manual (JAGMAN) investigation, heightened concerns that the Navy was being less than candid about the circumstances of Lt. Hultgreen's death. "Vindication" of Lt. Hultgreen became synonymous with vindication of the Navy's judgment in qualifying her to fly the F-14.

- Early that same day, a San Diego Union-Tribune report entitled "*Hultgreen Cleared of Blame in F-14 Crash*," said that Lt. Hultgreen's family had been briefed on Sunday, February 26, about the official report which, the family said, basically confirmed what the Navy had been saying all along: "*It was engine failure.*"
- On February 28, reporters were handed or sent a news release from Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, which said "*The emergency resulting in the mishap was precipitated by a left engine malfunction at an extremely vulnerable moment as the aircraft was approaching the carrier to land.* It also quoted Vice Admiral Robert J. Spane, Commander Naval Air Force, US Pacific Fleet, saying, "*This pilot did her best to keep this aircraft flying under conditions that were all but impossible.*" A series of endorsement letters covering the JAGMAN Report acknowledged pilot "*inexperience*," but left the clear impression that engine failure was the main cause of the accident.
- The dissembling continued during the February 28 news conference, and an appearance by Vice Adm. Robert J. Spane that same evening on ABC's Nightline. Nothing was said to contradict the widely-reported conclusion that Lt. Hultgreen had been "*vindicated*" or "*cleared of blame*" in the F-14 crash.

These news accounts were followed by a rash of scathing letters to the editor, commentaries, and editorials written by prominent feminists and their sympathizers, who escalated the personal attacks on anyone—especially male aviators—who questioned the perceived conclusion that Hultgreen was virtually blameless in the fatal crash.

But anyone who took the time to study and translate the acronym-encrusted details buried in the JAGMAN report would have found that: a) There was essentially nothing wrong with the aircraft; b) The left engine stall was largely caused by poor pilot technique; and c) The stall alone might not have been fatal if the pilot had executed proper procedures for single-engine fly-away. (Single engine fly-away is one of several BOLDFACE emergency action procedure instructions that pilots and crewmembers are required to memorize and recite on demand.)

That information could have been discussed in a sensitive but straightforward fashion, without demeaning the memory of Lt. Hultgreen or any other naval aviator whose inadvertent errors had contributed to many other fatal accidents in the unforgiving F-14. (A graph attached to the full-length edition of this Special Report displays relatively flat lines representing non-combat death rates in occupations ashore and on ships, compared to steep death rates resembling mountain peaks for naval aviation.)

Instead, the Navy chose to shade the truth and spin the story in an entirely different direction:

- A reporter in attendance at the news conference asked whether Lt. Hultgreen had any downs in her record. After a noticeable hesitation, Rear Adm. Jay B. Yakeley responded only that she had one down, rather than four.
- When asked whether Lt. Hultgreen's death would cause changes in the Navy's training programs for female pilots, the Admiral responded, "*Absolutely not.*"
- The entire performance, which an April 9 Detroit News editorial described as "*a masterful job of obfuscation*," was disheartening to those who recognized double standards and a calculated "spin." In the absence of official candor, high standards in training and selection procedures, which are essential for reducing risks and saving lives, were clearly at risk.

The Mishap Investigation Report (MIR)

In early March, a person or persons unknown to CMR released to the media a copy of the closely-held Mishap Investigation Report (MIR). Newsweek and the Los Angeles Times carried short accounts about the differences in tone and the conclusions of the MIR and the JAGMAN Report, while the Navy Times and San Diego Union Tribune provided extensive analysis of findings in the MIR that clearly pointed to pilot error as the primary cause of the accident.

The Navy Times went a step further by putting the MIR on the interactive computer network, America Online, and advising readers on how to access the document. (The entire Mishap Investigation Report can be found on Military City Online, using the keyword MCOHQ, selecting Libraries, then Text.)

Charging that someone had violated a sacred trust, Navy officials reacted to release of the MIR with anger and dismay, and actively urged editors to avoid writing about its conclusions. At no time did Navy officials explain the discrepancy in their own public statements, which clearly differed from the technical contents and conclusions of the JAGMAN report, as well as the MIR.

The Simulator Tests

As the controversy continued, Adm. Jeremy Boorda, Chief of Naval Operations, and several other officials continued to focus on engine failure as the primary cause of the accident, asserting that 8 of 9 F-14 pilots were unable to safely fly the plane out of a replicated situation in a simulator. But on April 9, 1995 Robert Caldwell of the San Diego Union-Tribune challenged that assertion, and suggested that the tests had been manipulated to bolster a false conclusion.

Citing three independent and confidential sources, Caldwell reported that the Navy had rigged the simulations by forbidding the use of crucial BOLDFACE emergency instructions, which aviators must memorize and use instantly in order to fly-away safely on one engine. Forbidding use of the BOLDFACE instructions in the simulator virtually guaranteed that "crashes" would occur.

An April 13 response to the San Diego Union Tribune written by Vice Adm. Robert J. Spane did not deny the allegations regarding the rigged simulator tests. Instead, the piece diverted attention by inflating the importance of an apparent midcompression bleed (MCB) valve malfunction, suggesting that "*a failed engine component unknown to the pilot that reduces the operating envelope by approximately 26 percent must be a significant issue.*"

By contrast, the MIR states that a fully functional MCB valve can reduce the risk of stall by "*up to 26 percent,*" but the viability of the engine does not depend on that valve alone. Poor pilot technique can still cause a stall, but that need not be fatal if proper procedures are followed to fly away on one engine. Admiral Spane's article may have served to mislead uninformed readers, but it cannot withstand comparison with the unadorned analyses in the MIR, as accessed on America Online:

"The left engine was found to be fully capable of producing normal power at impact."

"Mishap pilot (MP) failed to follow NA TOPS single engine waveoff procedures, exceeded maximum safe angle of attack (AOA), and allowed mishap aircraft to depart controlled flight at an unrecoverable altitude, due to external distraction and cognitive saturation."

Another published letter signed by a former squadron commander who conducted the frequently-cited simulator tests indicated that his exercise was unofficial, for training purposes only, and no record of its procedures or conclusions exist.

Rationalizations and Risks

It is most significant to note that at the March 24 meeting with Admiral Stanley Arthur, before Navy officials reviewed the supporting documents appended to the full-length CMR **Special Report: Double Standards in Naval Aviation**, they conceded, with some reluctance, that the training records cited by CMR in January were largely accurate.

Some Navy spokesmen have pointed out that other pilots have benefited from occasional "breaks" during training, but they have also conceded that it was unusual for a single individual, such as Pilot B, to benefit from a series of special concessions, combined with low scores, in a single course of instruction.

In an attempt to divert attention from the main issue, some officials have attacked journalists who have written about this report. Others have chosen to rationalize and defend double standards by alleging that unnamed male pilots in the past—such as the Vietnam era—were allowed to fly despite aptitude problems and multiple downs marking unsatisfactory performance.

But such practices were risky then and cannot be justified now, especially when there is no shortage of highly-skilled aviation aspirants. Equating poor performance with excellence is demeaning to women, embarrassing to the Navy, and ominous for the future of naval aviation.

In one generation, questionable precedents condoned by Navy officials in 1994 could erode and destroy training and selection procedures known to save lives, simply because future trainees will claim "discrimination" if the Navy attempts to wash them out with records better than those of Lt. Hultgreen and Pilot B. Under the politically-charged affirmative action system emerging now, which tolerates dual curricula and flexible standards, the word "qualified" has no objective meaning.

Since the 1970s, the extremely demanding and competitive training and selection process, which can end a flying career because of minuscule differences in performance scores, has proven its worth with declining accident rates. If the Navy is determined to change that system for the benefit of favored individuals or groups, instead of demanding excellence in aviation, that is a major policy decision that deserves urgent scrutiny.

Those who tolerate or encourage the degradation of sound standards and procedures, for whatever reason, do so at enormous risk. Congress has the right—and the constitutional responsibility—to investigate this matter with tough questions, and to correct the course with constructive oversight.

Sons and daughters of Americans everywhere risk their lives every day flying naval aircraft off of carriers stationed around the world. They deserve to know that their safety and well being will not be undermined for any reason. In the interests of safety and morale, Navy officials must take firm, principled action to abolish even the appearance of double standards for women or any other favored group.

Without such action the safety of naval aviation, and the integrity of naval leadership, will forever be diminished.

