Aerospace Nation: Lieutenant General Richard M. Clark

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**SPEAKERS**

Lt Gen Richard Clark, Mike Boera, Roy Miller, Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula, Rachel Cohen

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 00:32

Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to our Aerospace Nation series today. I'm Dave Deptula, Dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, and a senior scholar at the Air Force Academy Center for Character and Leadership Development. So, I'm really pleased to have Lieutenant General Rich Clark join us today. General Clark is a superintendent of the United States Air Force Academy, where he guides cadets through a four-year training program, academics, athletic and character development, leading to a bachelor's degree and a commission as a second lieutenant. Before his current assignment, he was Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration at U.S. Air Force headquarters. And we were happy to host him on this program before that transition. He's also served as the commander of Third Air Force and Eighth Air Force, and has more than 4200 flight hours, including 400 in combat. So, what I'd like to do is start out today by giving General Clark the opportunity to share his thoughts on his objectives as the superintendent. So welcome, and thanks for taking the time to join us. And over to you, Rich.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 02:14

Thanks, General Deptula. I appreciate it. And thanks for the opportunity to join you and, and the Mitchell Institute team. Again, it's always a pleasure to spend a little bit of time with you. We look forward to getting you back here in Colorado. So soon as you can come back, sir.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 02:29

Hey, I'm ready.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 02:30

Anxious to get you back. But it's been it's been awesome. As you mentioned, I was just in DC, four months ago, before coming here to USAFA to take over superintendent. But it's been amazing. Enjoy the job so much and such an honor to be here. And coming in. Really, I had four objectives as priorities, I would say. And the first one is the one that we always have. And it is to develop leaders of character. And that is our Prime Directive here at USAFA. To make sure that we're developing officers for our Air Force and our Space Force who are ready to go out serve our country, to live honorably, with courage, and to be the types of people whether they're on active duty, reserves, guard, retired, whatever they're doing that they take away from their academy, education, that commitment, and I think internalize what it means to really be leaders of character. So that's, that's always going to be first and foremost for us. The next one was--is to prepare leaders for future conflict. And that's important for us now, as a country, as you know, our current strategic environment of great power competition is driving us to really think forward for a long time we've been in a sort of counterterrorism fight, and our adversaries have been thinking ahead, they've been looking downrange at how they may present problems to us, that that we can't solve that may deter us, or if we do get into conflict that that they could actually have the heavy edge. We need leaders that are thinking ahead, not graduates that are ready for the first five years that they graduate but looking at 10 or 20 years, what's the environment going to look like be able to anticipate the changes in in the character of war. So that's hugely important to us, especially right now. And especially given the guidance from General Brown, to accelerate, change or lose and to be able to move forward and to make the kinds of changes and to think about the strategic environment that we may be facing. The third objective for us is to demonstrate a culture of dignity and respect. And for us here at USAFA. It's not only during the cadets time here that we want them to demonstrate that, but as leaders, and that's going to be important for them, as soon as they get out because of the people that they're going to have to lead a diverse country that we live in is going to provide diverse airmen and guardians that our cadets are going to have to be prepared to lead. So that is a strategic imperative, because it's not just now, but our country is growing only more diverse. And in in 10 or 20 years, it's going to be more important for them to be able to lead an environment where people don't necessarily look like them that they have to lead. But it's also about connecting with allies and partners, allies and partners, our strategic center of gravity, and for our leaders as they become more senior, and even our junior leaders to be able to connect with people from different backgrounds, different countries, different cultures, and to be able to drive our national objectives in those environments is going to be really important. So, we want to help them to have that skill set, and really, to internalize that desire to be leaders who employ dignity and respect and everything that they do. And then finally, probably more of a near term goal or objective is to defeat COVID-19. It is something coming into this, when I came in the country was, I think, at sort of a low in COVID. And then about three or four weeks after I got here, the country hit a spike. And we, we have been fighting that since day one since the day I walked in the door. And it's had its ups and downs. But the fortunate thing is that we have a great system in place. We have great thinkers here. And it's allowed us to continue our mission and to continue to move forward. So, defeating COVID-19 is it's a goal that I came into the door with, but it's a goal has been vitally important to us during my time so far. And I think we can talk more about that later. But those are the four, four objectives that I have developing leaders of character, prepare leaves for future conflict, demonstrate that culture of dignity and respect, and defeat COVID-19.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 07:16

Well, that's excellent, Rich, thanks very much for that context and insight. And thanks for all you and your team are doing in the regard of your top priorities to cultivate the next generation of airman and guardians for our Air and Space force. Um, so let's just jump right into some questions. I'm sure our audience would be interested in hearing, your first experience with the Academy was in the mid-80s, as a cadet, now, I'm the academy I'm sure, actually I know, is in many ways, a very different place today than it was then what do you consider to be the academies place within the Air Force, and within the broader national security establishment, and have the Academy's essential duties and missions evolved much since you were a cadet?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 08:07

Well, obviously, as I mentioned, developing leaders of character for our aerospace force is our Prime Directive. And we at the academy have to be able to adjust with our Aerospace Forces in our in our Department of Defense, our country, and how we've evolved is pretty important, right? Since the 1980s, it has changed tremendously with the environment. But I think at the core, the people that we that we bring into the Academy, the people that we train, are every bit as patriotic every bit as committed to mission and a higher purpose, as we were when I was there. And certainly, when you were here, sir. And I think, though, what I see is, the people that we bring in are a lot more technologically savvy, they are a lot more globally aware of things that are going on in the world, just because it's at their fingertips now as opposed to you know, back in the in the 80s. I hate to even say that, but man, but I, I just think that they have evolved with the environment and with the world. And so, we have to evolve with them, and we have to meet them where they are. But you would be proud of them. I mean, you'd be proud of our cadets, and some people. One of the things that I hear a lot from maybe older grads, is that Oh, they're not physically fit. They're, you know, they're engaged with people, things like that. I will tell you, first of all, they take fitness a lot more seriously than people did. When I was a cadet. If you remember the physical fitness test, the same one that every cadet has taken since I think since the inception of the Academy. We have more people That's that a max bat test, getting a perfect score on it now than we did when I was a cadet by almost tenfold. Because they take fitness differently, there's more scientific approach to fitness. And, and they really do take pride in how they carry themselves. But also, when we talk about that global environment and their technological skills that they've been dealing with, since they were little kids, you know, they were picking up iPads and computers since they were three years old. So, this is an environment that they're very well suited in there, they're very comfortable in working with. So, I would say, yes, things have changed in those aspects. But there, those are good changes. But then in the core at the core of what we do here, it hasn't changed that much, maybe the way that we do things. And, and some of the things that we introduce our cadets to are very different. But at the core leaders of character, people who are committed to our country, to support defend the constitution, and to commit to that long term, I think is still there. So, I'm excited about that. But we have to continue to change and we can't rest on our laurels. Just because things have evolved. We have to keep evolving. And we have to keep moving forward. So, we're in a good environment now. And we have great thinkers here on the staff and faculty. And I think we're moving well with the pace of change. But we have to continue to do that.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 11:36

Well, speaking of change, the class of 2020 featured a historical first Academy's first class to include members of the space force. So, what are you doing now with the faculty, the curriculum and other programs to build young officers ready to take on the challenge of serving in and ultimately leading the space force?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 11:59

Yes, so there's a lot of things that were being done before the space force was conceived. And a lot of that just dealt with the fact that our Air Force was deep into this space mission. And we had to change there too. So, before the space force came on board, we already had a Space Operations. Major, we have a space minor now, we've been working on the Falcon set program where our cadets actually get to, to launch and, and operate satellites. So, there's a lot of things that we've been doing, to educate and to develop our cadets so that they can have that awareness of what space really means to all operations across all domains. But now, where I think we're becoming more deliberate, because we're getting direction from general Raymond, and the space wars is what they want to see in a cadet. One of the things that that general Raymond mentioned his he says he wants every guardian to be fluent in one language, and that language is digital. And, and that's something that we've taken very seriously here. So, things like that, where we can deliberately develop our cadets to serve in the space force and have the skill sets that are required, I think is very helpful coming from the leadership, General Raymond, General Thompson, is very helpful. We also have our own liaison here. Colonel Cap Greenwood, he is a guardian, a space Force officer, and he is instrumental into helping us shape the cadets that will go into the space force. And last year, we had 86 cadets that commissioned into the space force. This year we were in, we're in the ballpark of 115 116 cadets, that went into the space force. And I think that'll sort of normalized as the years go on as the other commissioning sources get on board with normalized processes of how they bring young people into the space force. But right now, we're able to basically be the meter to help meet the needs that the space force has. So not only are we able to develop them in, in skills and just building that sort of space warfighting mindset, but also the numbers that we need to provide for the space force. So, we're doing a lot and it is first and foremost in our minds right now to make sure that we're looking at both services, the Air Force and the space force and making sure that we're very deliberate in providing the product that they need us by way of airman and guardians.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 14:46

That's very good now, you're bringing to your new role as a superintendent, wealth of experience serving in long range and nuclear air power roles versus a be one pilot and as many Up front as Deputy Chief of Staff for strategic deterrence and nuclear integration, what do you want cadets to understand and know about the role of nuclear weapons?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 15:12

Well, I think, as we look at this environment that we've had, I kind of alluded to this a bit in the beginning. But when we talk about great power competition, and we look at what our adversaries have done over the last 20 years, I think, especially in the nuclear realm, which as you mentioned, I've dealt with in my last job, Russia has modernized its nuclear program, China has accelerated the modernization of its nuclear program. And both of them have been on a quest for a long time to catch up to where we were and pass us if able. So that's not just in the nuclear world, though, that's across the board, cyber space, nuclear, they are looking at these strategic capabilities, so that they can have that advantage, that competitive edge in this competitive environment for years to come. For decades to come. We have to start moving forward too. And as General Brown has told us, accelerating change or lose is imperative for us as a force. And I think that goes for both the Air Force and the space force. So, I want our cadets to understand that we have to look forward, we have to be strategic minded, and the things that we do, and understand that even tactical actions or tactical operations can have strategic impact, especially in the world of cyber space, and even kinetically. There's just a lot of strategic implications to the things that we do. But I also want them to understand that competition doesn't mean kinetic conflict, competition could be below the level of a hot war. So, we have to be thinking all the time, how do we improve our position on the global environment and in the in the security realm globally, so that we're always in a great position for to achieve our national security objectives. And a lot of that is going to fall on the shoulders of our air, air force and space Force officers. So, they need to understand the world that they're going to be entering. And looking back at the, at the nuclear of strategic deterrence and what nuclear integration does for us. That ability to deter strategically isn't just in the realm of nuclear, we can deter strategically across the board, we can deny the adversary strategy, we can demonstrate consequences for bad behavior by our adversaries, that can come in the form of cyber actions space, across all domains. So, I think that our cadets need to understand that that old Sun Tzu axiom to subdue the enemy. without fighting, that's what we need to go. And we have to think about that as far as strategic deterrence goes. But it's not just nuclear. It's across all of our strategic capabilities. And I want our cadets to understand that. That's the world that they're coming into. We don't want to go to war. But if we do, we have to win. So, I think we're moving in the right direction with a couple of different. I say, initiatives that we're embarking upon here, the Institute for future conflict, our Cyber–Innovation Center, the Madera Cyber–Innovation Center, and all the activities that we're doing in space. So that strategic deterrence comes in a lot of different forms. And we have to present our enemy with problems that, that they can't solve, to change their calculus. But we also have to be prepared to solve problems that we don't even know about yet. So, thinking about it in in all different domains, and all different aspects that come and bring different I'll say capabilities to bear is going to be critical at the strategic level for our cadets are future officers to be able to think about.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 19:16

And I think that's great, rich, I think it's important. As you're talking, I'm thinking back 30 years ago, is still today, we have some problem with some people equating the term strategic with nuclear. And you know, I've been on a quest for 30 years, 30 plus years to get people to understand that I'm strategic is an outcome. It is not associated with solely nuclear now that goes back to our history, because, you know, in the 60s and the 70s in the 50s. Before then, there was a tendency to equate the term strategic with nuclear, but that's not the case. So, I'm glad you bring that point up. And you also mentioned one of your centers, which is a good segue into my Next question, which is about the initiative that's still in development. And I know you plan on continuing it, Nessie Institute for future conflict, which is going to be one of the academies 27 research centers. So, could you elaborate a little bit more, at a time when the Air Force in that country is confronting new threats, which you already hit upon? What the value of this center is going to be? Both the cadets as well as the broader Air Force community?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 20:29

Yes, sir. I, I'm very excited about the IFC, that's too for future conflict. And as I mentioned, in sort of my opening remarks, preparing leaders for future conflict is a is a high priority for me, and the rest of our staff and faculty. So, this institute, is going to really be that place where we integrate all the force all the power of the Academy, and, and help that to shape our cadets not in just the intellectual realm, but in the moral domain and the physical domain, in every domain, so that they are able to go into the space and the air forces. And, and be prepared, be the bold leaders, be the innovative thinkers be the risk takers, be the people that will lead us into the future in the right way. And it takes the, I think, the force of the Academy to do that, and there needs to be that integrator. So, we are excited about that we're in the hunt for right now and a director to help us to lead that and we have to find that right person that understands where we are in the global environment right now. So that they can help us to think through what this institute should actually be to the Air Force, we're already embarking on a lot of activities to help us to move forward in this realm, but we're going to get only get better, but also for the broader Air Force. Because I think it'll be a place where we can stop and think where we can take a breath and think about what the future needs to look like. So often, we get wrapped up in what's going on right now, what are the challenges that we're facing today. And next week, we want to be thinking years into the future. And we want to have that opportunity. And I think the Institute will bring this to the Air Force, where we can bring in the greatest minds, the best strategic thinkers, not only to have an influence on our cadets for the future conflict, but also to help our Air Force think through what that conflict might look like, and what kinds of things we need to do as an Air Force and a space force to advance ourselves to that future. So, I'm excited about it as an integrator for the Air Force Academy, but also as a center for thought for future conflict for the broader Air Force. So, and, and the broader space force. So, I am thrilled, we're on the ground floor of this, but we're moving fast, and we have a lot of interest in it. Not only from our grad community, but the Air and Space Forces. So, this is an exciting time for us. And we're gonna move forward smartly on it.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 23:21

Well, I applaud you, and in all the folks who have been working hard on that, because as you say, we really need to cultivate future leaders who are not afraid of challenging the status quo. You know, we've unfortunately, about the last 10 years, we've kind of fallen into a rut of going along to get along. And I think that this institute is something that will cultivate leaders to be able to come up with new ideas and encourage Mavericks out there. You know, the, to think about innovation and new ways of doing business.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 24:05

And I know you mentioned Oh, I'm sorry, you mentioned how our cadets are different now than maybe back in the 80s. They are hungry, to be bold thinkers and to think out of the box and to be different. And not just to march to the to the same drumbeat all the time, they want to be different, they want to get out there and be creative and, and use their, their innovative abilities to do different things and they're hungry for this, this type of a capability here at USAFA. So, I think we're gonna see some amazing things come out of this institute once we get it stood up.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 24:46

Well, very good. And you also mentioned Joe Browns piece on accelerating change. In his inaugural speech last year, he did emphasize the critical importance of developing leaders who are comfortable with delegating authority, noting that airman, our most valuable resource, so what kind of values and skills of the academy seek to cultivate? And it's can its cadets enabled to be able to do this, you know, along the lines of, yeah, discipline is extraordinarily important. But the notion that the chief talks about in terms of pushing authority downrange and not asking mother, may I before taking action, are those the kinds of elements that you're teaching cadets today?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 25:39

Yes, sir. You know, it's when we talk about that realm of a leader of character, and a leader of that demonstrates dignity and respect, and a level of humility. These are characteristics that help us to be more collaborative, that help us to be selfless leaders and to end up push forward, not for, you know, worrying about the consequences that might befall us as individual leaders, but the benefits that are that our organization may gain, and, and we try to build these or help our cadets to instill in them that boldness, and that willingness to step out and move forward. And so throughout all of our activities in the center for character and leadership development, as well as the things that they do on a daily basis, it's about, let's be bold, let's be willing to be creative, and to step out, but also, let's be ready to listen to others, let's have that ear for those great ideas that we can harness and pull in, so that we can move forward as a team. And so all of the characteristics that we that we bring forth, I think they're not only for, to harness individual capabilities, but also to harness the capabilities of everyone around us. And that's what we expect of any great leader. So that collaborative spirit, I think, we do encourage that here, we require that here, I would say, because we look for leaders that do those, those kinds of things and demonstrate that capability. And we talked about it earlier—dignity and respect, being able to collaborate not only with people that look like you, but people that maybe don't look like you or don't think like you or don't come from the same background as you, we as leaders have to be skilled enough to pull them into the group to make them feel comfortable enough to put their ideas out on the table. And then to find the best ones or the best pieces of those ideas, to formulate the absolute best so that we can move forward. So, it's critical for us on not only how we lead ourselves, but also how we treat the other leaders around us so that we can all move forward together. So that is something that's very important to us. I know it's important to Joe Brown and general Raymond as well.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 28:08

And that's great to hear, rich, because, you know, well, it's a sore point we ought to learn from it. But 1213 years ago, when Secretary Gates fired the chief of staff and the Secretary of the Air Force to top civilian and military leadership and our air force that sent a message to the force Have you better not speak truth to power, because if you do, and I don't like it, you're gonna get a bullet between the eyes. So unfortunately, that kind of led to a decade's worth of you know, people, quite frankly, not wanting to speak up. So, I'm glad to hear that, you know, we're beginning to throw off that approach and encouraging people to speak out and to articulate what they actually believe, is correct. So, I mentioned the accelerating change piece. The chief has encouraged the Air Force to do just that. What does it mean to accelerate change in the context of an educational institution?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 29:14

That is a great question. And honestly, sir, if we don't accelerate with our curriculum, if we don't change with the changing environment, then we become irrelevant. And our Dean general Jeetendra and our Commandant, General, Edmonson are all about us moving forward and not being stagnant not only in our training for cadets from a military standpoint, but their education from an academic standpoint. And I think when we have opportunities and that we look at what the external environment is requiring, from us from our Aerospace Forces, but also from the world writ large, our staff and faculty are not shy about making changes. In fact, just yesterday, we had an academy board meeting, and we voted on about seven different curriculum changes that would help us to move forward in the direction that that our leadership needs us to move. So, you have to stay relevant as a as an academic institution. And I think you see; all the great institutions do that. They make changes, they don't remain stagnant. And they look externally to see what is required from our environment, and from the people that we are putting out there and who they're going to be serving, to be relevant and, and produce the kinds of leaders that that need to be produced. So, we're going to do that we're going to continue to stay flexible, and dynamic in the things that we do, and make smart decisions as to how we're going to change as an institution.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 30:56

Super now, just a month ago, less than a month ago, cadets at the academy completed the joint all domain environment exercise, which simulated a kinetic strike by remotely piloted aircraft. How do these exercises prepare cadets for some of the operational and technical and cultural differences they'll encounter when operating in different domains and with other military services?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 31:23

Well, I think from the aspect of the joint all domain, that part of it is, is so important for us as an Air Force Academy, because it is not just about the Air Force and the air domain, it is about all domains. And for us to be able to go from sensor to user or shooter in in the in the fastest way possible, to be able to turn our OODA loop faster than our adversaries, and to be able to move that data in a way that it gets from the actual data source to wherever it's needed, in whatever domain is needed. And we can't be tied to only operating or only thinking in one domain, we have to think all domain, it's almost like, there can't be a domain, we just, it's just got to be ubiquitous, it's got to be universal in the way that we think, so that we get the information to whoever it is, whoever needs it, wherever they need it, and when they need it. And that's something that I think our cadets get from having these types of exercises, these opportunities, they have to speak digital, they have to be able to move that data fast. And if they're not, as general Raymond said, if you're not becoming fluent or building that fluency in the digital realm, then they're not going to be able to move that that information where it needs to go. So, having even a small exercise, like this join all domain exercise that we had. Even a small one demonstrates that it can't be limited to any domain, we have to speak all domain and we have to be able to do it quickly. So, having that now, as a as a cadet, before they even get into the air force or the space force is critical because even when I was a cadet, we thought about air domain, we built air mindedness, we went to the airfield. And we learned airmanship and we understood that. And honestly, we operate it in a single domain, very stovepipe, these cadets, like I mentioned earlier, they are more global, they understand the global environment. And they understand other domains and the importance of it and for us to be able to operate in them. And I think this example plus the other things that they get to do in the space domain, in the cyber domain, and everything else that we're doing here is going to help them to build that fluency that they're going to need so that they can traverse any domain as needed when needed. And it just gets them started that way. So, there's no sort of adjustment of thought or sort of broadening their horizons when they get out though their horizons will be broadened, we're starting to do that here. So that they're already have a leg up when they hit the operational Air and Space Forces. So, we're very excited about those types of exercises. But there's so many other things beyond that exercise that are helping them to move forward. And I think build that digital fluency that we all need to have.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 34:37

And that's very good. As a bit of a follow up how to remotely piloted aircraft and cyber technologies feature into the curriculum at the Academy.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 34:47

We have our cadets are so well engaged. We have competitive cyber technology teams, we have competitive RPA opportunities for them, they are building RPA flying RPA is I wish I could show you, I have here in my office a picture for cadets and they're flying an RPA. But it's a picture from the of the RPA coming down looking at them controlling it, you know, that they took of themselves. And it's just a, it's a fantastic picture because they built this RPA, they launched it, and they are the ones that are able to control it to use it for whatever capability that they're, they're required. So, our cyber teams, our cyber defense teams are just really, really incredible as to what they're able to do. And when they go out to compete against other universities, our teams come out on top almost every time. So, it's something that we as an Air Force Academy take great pride in. And when you talk about our cyber innovation center that we're that we break ground on in just a few months, we will build that, but we're building it because we need it. Because our capabilities and the hunger for more education and more innovation in the cyber realm is only growing. So, once we get that built, I think it just gives it expands our opportunities in the horizons in the cyber realm. So, RPA cyber space. We just we have to be able to operate and to understand those and our cadets as they go out, need to have a certain level of expertise when they hit the ground. So, we're very excited about all those capabilities.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 36:36

Super. And one program that was fostered by our predecessors is the quad. That's a partnership for our audience between the Academy, Colorado College Pikes Peak Community College and the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, in the Quad helps graduating innovators build careers that matter in the Colorado Springs area, what's your take on the value of the Academy's collaboration with liberal arts universities?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 37:07

Sure, I think it's huge value. First, going back to something you talked about service collaboration, it gives our cadets the opportunity to go out and collaborate with people who are in a completely different environment. These are liberal arts schools, some of them are a bit smaller. And the students come from different backgrounds, they have different focuses. But our cadets have the opportunity to go out and talk and collaborate and think with students and people from different places. And this is exercising that ability to be collaborative. It's also great for our community relations as a as an institution, as we're not only an institution, but we're also a military installation, that depends on our great community for our support. So that is a way for us to outreach and, and to be able to, I think, connect with our external community here in the Colorado Springs in the Front Range. But I think more importantly, when you think about the liberal arts, we can't be one dimensional here. Our cadets have to be able to be broad, and to be able to think and be well rounded people, when they go out into the air and Space Force and into the world writ large. So, having the ability to go to these liberal arts colleges and understand what some of the challenges that they see, or the futures that they see, get, give us opportunities to be more balanced in our education. We don't want people who are, are strictly stem, although that is a strength that we seek and that that we provide to our cadets. But they have to have, and we've always prided ourselves here at the Air Force Academy of having a broad education for our cadets so that they can be the kind of leaders that we need. So, I'm excited about the quad. They are excited our quad partners are always willing to engage with us, and to be a part of different efforts in the community and also even broader in the state. So, I think it's an exciting, very exciting partnership that we have. And we will continue to cultivate that one as well. Well roundedness, that's what we want from our cadets broad thinking officers that can do more than just the technical aspects of what's required of an air or space Force officer but including the other types of thought that we have to have from them.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 39:45

That's great to hear. And also, I might add ones that fully understand their Air Force, heritage, history, and background. As you know, that's one of my belly button issues because if you don't understand the past or Not gonna understand how to articulate and advocate for the virtues and values of Air and Space power. And that's what airmen and guardians need to be able to do. Okay, I'll get off that high horse.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 40:11

You're absolutely right, sir.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 40:13

I can talk about for an hour, but because we're running up on time, but back to one that's near and dear, and I'm sure it's top of your agenda, and that's the broad scope of challenges created by the Coronavirus virus pandemic. Getting students back into the classroom I know, presents a number of problems with the academy doing to ensure that number one cadets are saved. In number two, can you maintain the same level of academic rigor that you had prior to the upgrade?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 40:48

Yes, sir, that that's a great one. And, again, going back to my four priorities, that was that is the most tactical priority that we have right now. Because we are in a fight it is it is a fight in my private my goal to all of you Safa, and that's not just our cadets, that's our medical group, that's our airbase wing, our flying group, prep school, all of us is to defeat COVID-19. So, we are in a fight with that every single day and leading that fight for us as a group that we call our pandemic math team. And we are harnessing all of the power of USAFA. Our academic skills are medical experts, we have mathematicians, neurologists, biologists, doctors, there's probably a few lawyers on the team even but we are bringing all that power in, to help us to determine exactly how the virus is trying to attack us, and what the prevalence of it is within the wing. And also, to help us make data driven decisions as to how we need to address adjust our program. So, we have certain levers that we can pull, given the prevalence of the virus were anything from what the liberties are for the cadets? Can they? Can they go downtown? Can they? Do they need to stay on base? To what their classroom situation is? Like? Can they go to class in person? Or do we need to do virtual classes or a hybrid? How about their physical training? Do we open the gym? Do we close it? Do we have combatives? training? close contact? You know, so in the airfield? Can they sit in a cockpit with another instructor? Or do we need to have only solos? Or do we need to stop flying altogether? So, there's so many different variables and things that we have to consider given the prevalence of COVID. And where we are, and our different leads our athletic director, or Commandant, our Dean, our prep school, our airbase, Wing Commander, all have to be prepared to pull different levers and to make adjustments very quickly and very rapidly. So requires a dynamic approach to this. And our pandemic math team really helps us to have the data that we need to make the right decisions. So, to your question, I think, academically, our team, our faculty has done an amazing job of developing virtual classrooms for every course that we have here USAFA. And we're able to administer every bit of the academic program that we need to virtually as necessary. Our preference is to have an A in person, obviously. But as things change, we can move all the way to virtual or we can go somewhere in between with a hybrid model, or full up in person right now where we're in person. And it's working out for us, we impart, and we demand that everyone follow the guidelines, masks, social distancing, doing all the things that we know are important for us to defeat COVID. But I think that we're doing everything that we can do remain flexible, so that we can be react dynamically to COVID, but also to control the spread of the virus in the wing. So, a lot of things going on here, but it is. I mean, it consumes us from a testing aspect, how much testing Do we need, which we also have to change? We're hopeful for some vaccines for the cadet wing, but unfortunately, cadets are considered all healthy others so they're at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to getting the vaccine. But fortunately, we have some other folks who I think fall into the higher elements of phasing that we can get some of our staff and faculty vaccinated, but until we get you know That sort of herd immunity through vaccination, we're going to be fighting COVID. Until, until that happens. So, it is amazing to see this team do the work that they have, that they've done. And I'll say this that Naval Academy and West Point have modeled our processes here for them so that they could get through. We started these things last semester, we're continuing the Minnesota the other service Academy. So, we're very proud of what our team has done and that it's been exported to other the other service gamma is academies and even some other universities.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 45:39

Well, that's always an indicator of top-notch performance. So, General Clark, thanks again for your time and your insights today. And on behalf of the Mitchell Institute for aerospace studies, and all of a FAA, thanks for your leadership out there at the Air Force Academy.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 45:57

Thank you, sir.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 45:58

Yeah, you bet. As a reminder to our listeners, our next aerospace nation event is a discussion on the upcoming book. And this is a long title, but it's a good one. *Never mind, We'll Do It Ourselves: The Inside Story of How a Team of Renegades Broke Rules, Shattered Barriers and Launched the Drone Warfare Revolution*, unquote. Told you it was a long one. But we'll be hosting authors of the book, retired Air Force, Colonel Mark Cooter, and a couple others tomorrow. And it promises to be interesting, so please join us. Now. Rich, we're going to open a session to questions from the audience who have been standing by and a reminder to our listeners, you can participate using the raise hand function? Or send me a question on chat. When I do call on you, please state who you are and the organization that you're with. So, with that over to you audience, we've got nearly 100 folks rich, so I'm sure there's some questions on their minds. But some of them appeared to be a bit bashful. So, we're, while we're waiting on them, to submit their questions. Let me Here we go. Let's go to Mike Boera.

**Mike Boera** 47:28

All right, I'll try to Hey, rich bow here. So great to see ya. I'm great. And thanks for all you're doing there. And as I've reached out to you before, you know, lighthouse is partnering with the academy on many fronts. And we look forward to continue to do so. With that in mind, can you give us an update on Cyber Innovation Center? And the way forward with that? Certainly, during this environment, thanks. And continued best.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 48:01

Yeah. Thank you, Bo. It's great to great to hear your voice. And, absolutely, we're so excited about the Cyber Innovation Center, the Madera Cyber Innovation Center. And we've had several of our donors that have been so generous to help us to get that up and running. And we should be breaking ground on that. We're hopeful in March, that we'll be able to do that. Of course, everything is weather dependent around here. But that's the goal. And the way that one of the things that I think you'll be interested in is we're building that center on the black gates. And when I say the black gates, I'm talking about the gates that surround the cadet area that we have a very restricted access to, but so that we can actually partner with people like lighthouse and others were building on the Black Gate so they can get access to the cyber Innovation Center without having to go through the cadet area and have that special access because we want to keep it so that that interaction is easy that it flows and that people are welcome to come in. And we build that sort of collaborative spirit within the Cyber Innovation Center. There are some things that we're also doing with the Institute for future conflict that I mentioned. And also, were worth thinking about some opportunities for a space Education Center. So that between cyber space and our thought for the future, we can harness all three of those Institutes as necessary. And in the leader that we would like for the Institute for future conflict. We would like them to be a cyber or digitally fluent person that can help us in that realm and be able to help us to take Together space, cyber, all domains and, and use that as we think about the future, and how we need to educate our cadets in every aspect of their academic and other parts of their training here and Academy. So, I think we're moving very well into building the Cyber Innovation Center, but also in the philosophy and the things that we want to do there for our cadets and in the broader Air Force. So hopefully that answers your question, Bo, but it's great to hear from you.

**Mike Boera** 50:33

Yeah, and that, that's great. And I can just share with you that I think a side benefit similar to your discussion with General Deptula. They're on the liberal arts and they're well-rounded education that cadets been exposed to industry earlier in the career makes it you know, starts building relationships earlier, it gets them more comfortable talking to industry, gives them an understanding of what industry brings to the fight. And we've been, you know, very pleased to be able to help in some of the with our smart guys in our software factory with the help them with the syllabus. For that for that department and those cadets and just been—it's been very satisfying, I think, for both sides, both industry as well as the cadets, because it's always energizing to work with the cadets.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 51:26

Yeah, we appreciate your partnership, as well as our other industry partners. So, thank you for that.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 51:33

Okay, thanks, Bo. Let's turn to Roy Miller.

**Roy Miller** 51:39

Yes. Thank you for your comments. Like many grads, I have a question about the status of the Honor Code. I think some of us believe that because of the lower levels of enforcement could answer, essentially believing they get one free pass. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on the future of that.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 52:02

Well, whether they think they get one free pass or not, I'm not sure. I mean, I'm sure that that that may be a thought that's out there. But what I will say is that the thing about the honor code that we want to make sure that we don't lose is the developmental aspects of it. So yes, it there are some punitive aspects. But that's not the intent of the Honor Code. The honor code is there to develop these folks that we bring in from all different walks of society from all different places, and develop them so that by the time they graduate, that they are honorable living people that they have internalized the honor code, and that they are committed to that honorable living, not only as graduates but out for the rest of their lives, that it is something that they actually believe in. Sometimes, there are attitudes out there where cadets see it as a threat, right. In some ways, it is a threat, because it could have a pretty significant impact on your career, if your career gets to continue. So, having a free pass, I don't know that I would characterize it that way. Having developmental opportunities for a young cadet who comes in and stumbles. I do characterize it that way. And to be honest, we're doing a design sprint on the honor code right now, as a lot of you know, we had last April, we had a pretty significant honor issue here in the virtual learning environment. And it was it was a number of cadets, and we recognized that we need to take a look at the Honor Code and make sure that we're serving these cadets well, so that they are internalizing it, and understanding what it means to live honorably. So, we have a lot of former grads involved in this our species. And I think that this, this design, Sprint is going to reveal a lot of things that we can do to make this honor code more effective for us now, and in this environment, like I talked about earlier. I know a lot of grads and are gonna go How can you even think about anything to change with the Honor Code, but we have to we have to evolve. We have a different, different environment here than we had years ago. And we have to think about how we continue to develop these leaders in this current environment that we're living in. So, I don't think it's going to be anything that that is going to take away from our developing leaders of character. I think it'll enhance and that's the goal to be able to develop these folks instead of having the honor code being a threat that we hang over their head. So hopefully that that kind of gets to your question. But there we do have some concerns right now to be honest with you. But we're, we're addressing them now. We just started couple months ago to start working on this, but it's going to be a bit of a journey for us to figure out exactly what if any adjustments we need to make to our honor system, not the code, but the system and how we employ that here. USAFA Thanks very much. Okay, let's,

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 55:40

let's turn to Rachel Cohen from Air Force magazine.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 55:45

Hi, Rachel, how are you?

**Rachel Cohen** 55:47

I'm just dandy, sir. How are you?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 55:49

I'm good.

**Rachel Cohen** 55:50

Thanks for doing this. I just wanted to follow up really quick. You said that there's about 115 cadets that are headed for the space force, the spring, that's, I think 20 or 30, more than I had heard you guys were sending. So, I'm curious, you know, what you are learning as you guys are going through the process of, of, you know, picking people and working with, you know, the other branches, like OTS, you know, to pick who is going to go up? You know, are you being, you know, more choosy, less choosy, is the demand growing? You know, kind of what's behind the numbers right now?

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 56:24

Well, I think, obviously, the Air Force personnel center, and department Air Force Awan are the ones that really drive the demand signal for us. So, it's not a matter of how cheesy we are. It's about what the space force needs, and how Air Force personnel center and our a one our personnel is on the Air Staff, how they actually meet that demand. So, it's not really a matter of being choosy. It's just a matter of, we're all looking at all the sessions programs. How are we meeting the demand, and right now, I think for us, if there was a greater need, we actually have the capacity and the capability to provide more space Force officers if needed. We didn't even all of our volunteers for the space force didn't get Space Force. So, we have more volunteers than we had slots to give. So, we were we were happy to help with that. I don't know what that will kind of balance out to that was this year. Next year, it could be back to 100 or 86, or whatever the number is. But we have flexibility to meet the demand in case ROTC or OTS don't quite get to the numbers that they're after. Were able to do that. So, the demand signal isn't set by us. It's set by the space force. And then a FPC and a one actually helps us to meet that demand.

**Rachel Cohen** 58:02

Yeah. Right. And one more thing really quick on COVID. You know, last semester, you guys decided to cancel a fall break. You know, and you did some other things with the schedule. I'm curious if you're starting to look at canceling spring break and moving graduation around again, or you know if that's a little too far off right now.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 58:21

Yes, so we, we did cancel spring break, I cancelled that earlier at late last semester, determine that given the state of the country with regards to COVID. And what we felt like we would be facing here, having cadets traveled during spring break just wasn't prudent, because then we have the restriction of movement when they come back, that delays us it eats into the academic schedule by several days. So, we decided rather than have a spring break, that we would take those days and put them throughout the semester. So bottom line is we have more three-day weekends, this semester, because we didn't have the spring break. But what that does is it limits the travel, that that 10 days of travel that the cadets would have had and would have driven even more days of restriction of movement when they got back. Basically, quarantine, we eliminate that, but we still give them the breaks that they need throughout the semester. And I think that that's going to help us graduation will stay the same. We're looking at we're still flexible with that. But we're looking at the numbers of people that we can have and graduation that's probably going to be a variable that will we'll kind of take as it comes and see how COVID and the local guidances, local guidelines how COVID in the guidelines drive us, but we intend to have graduation in the stadium. We intend to have some guests for each cadet. How many we're not sure yet. And We intend to have it on the day that it's been scheduled for some time now. May 26. That's the intent. Okay, thank you.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 1:00:09

Okay, I'm going to squeeze in one really quick one, because we're up against our time. But this is from Tom Goffus is on the Senate Armed Services Committee staff, Lieutenant Joe Clark, the squadron commander is the linchpin of success of the Air Force. If our Squadron commanders aren't good, and it doesn't really matter how good our senior leaders are. On the other hand, if our Squadron commanders are good, and even if our senior leaders fall short, our air force will still be successful. With that context. Does the academy track the percentage of cadets that become successful Squadron commanders, as a measure of metric of the Academy's effectiveness? Tom Goffus.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 1:00:50

Yeah, Tom, great to hear from you know, they're all friend. I don't, if we do track that it's not it’s not a metric that I'm aware of. But I do agree with you. And as General Goldfein, emphasized, during his time as the chief, the emphasis on the squadron is really how our air force will be shaped and can help us determine how successful the Air Force writ large is. So, if we have successful squadrons, we'll be successful in our mission as an Air Force. So, I don't disagree with you at all. measuring how many of our graduates actually become Squadron commanders isn't something that we've done. Could be that'd be something that we look at. But what we do get measures on is the effectiveness of our graduates as they go out into the air force for some time after graduation. So, we look at them for the sort of immediate year or two after out to a few years, from their supervisors and get a determination of their effectiveness as officers early in their career. So that's something that we do measure that's very important to us. and de facto, I think, you know, your early success as an officer a lot of times drives you towards whether you will be selected as a squadron commander at some point. So, though we don't measure exactly whether or not they'll become Squadron commanders, we do measure Do they have that are those early successes as an officer, as indicators of are we producing what the Air Force and the eventually the space force need? So, we track their successes, maybe not as a squadron commander is something I'll have to look into. But it's not a metric that I've heard of. So, I really don't think that we do.

**Lt Gen (Ret.) Dave Deptula** 1:02:48

All right. Well, we've come to the end of this aerospace nation event with Lieutenant General Richard Clark, Superintendent of the US Air Force Academy, to you rich and to our audience. From all of us here at the Mitchell Institute. Have a great aerospace power candidate.

**Lt Gen Richard Clark** 1:03:06

Thank you, sir. It's great seeing you again and great. spend a little bit of time with you and everybody out there. So have a great day out here. Thank you, sir.