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The 'Can Do' Attitude

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'The Can Do'

In 1905 Czar Nicholas II of Russia charged a reluctant admiral with a mission to the Yellow Sea to defeat an upstart Japanese Navy which was threatening the eastern reaches of the Russian empire. He said, "You CAN DO it." When the Russian fleet encountered the numerically inferior Japanese Navy in the waters off Korea, one of the shortest naval battles in history took place. Forty-five minutes after the first shot was fired, the entire Russian fleet was lying on the bottom.

From this example can we assume that the Czar had the CAN DO attitude?

In 1961 President John F. Kennedy pledged to the American people that the United States would be on the moon before the end of the decade. This pledge challenged the American people, led by NASA, to accomplish a tremendous scientific and technical feat. The response to the challenge was, we CAN DO it.

On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong stepped from the lunar lander, Eagle, onto the surface of the moon.

The CAN DO attitude?

In 1960 Captain Jones, who had just completed a tour in F-100s, was checking out in a base-flight C-45 (much to his dismay). The instructor pilot demonstrated a normal landing in the tail-dragging, prone to ground-looping bird after which Captain Jones got his turn with a confident I CAN DO it statement. The C-45 touched down in a near three point attitude, veered to the right slightly, snapped sharply back to the left after an over-application of rudder, whipped back to the right after another too generous helping of rudder, then ground looped twice before the IP could forcibly grab the airplane and apply loads of asymmetric power to get her going straight again.

A dynamic portrayal of the CAN DO attitude?

In 1940 Sir Winston Churchill took the helm of the English government and inspired the English people with a

willingness and resolve that enabled them to withstand the power of the German air armada. The underlying thought in his speeches was, 'we CAN DO it.'

Was this an example of the CAN DO attitude?

In 1972 the pilot who was a recent UPT graduate was checking out in weapons delivery in an AT-33. He made two passes on the range with each pass becoming increasingly more difficult because of a known control problem apparently caused by a fuel imbalance. On the third pass he lost control of the airplane in the base-to-final turn and ejected successfully.

Was this an application of the CAN DO attitude?

In 1968 Major Smith was leading a flight of four F-100s on a cross-country mission. At the third en route stop the weather forecaster informed the pilots that a solid wall of thunderstorms had formed along the flight path and would not be dissipating until several hours later. Major Smith decided to RON and give it another try the following day.

Is this the CAN DO attitude?

The CAN DO attitude is a philosophy that is essential to the objectives of Tactical Air Command. But what kind of a philosophy is it? Is it a narrow beam of mission vision that sees the departure point at one end and the objective at the other with no thought of what lies adjacent to the departure point, surrounds the objective, and litters the path between the two? Is it the brash arrogance of a man who tosses everything aside for the sake of the mission, the expense of the mission?

Of course the proper definition is found in neither of those two questions. The CAN DO attitude is the knowledgeable pursuit of duties to the maximum of one's abilities. And the definition applies whether you are torquing a bolt, flying a mission, or leading a unit.

The definition doesn't reach right out and grab you,

attitude

does it? But let's examine it a little closer. The words 'knowledgeable pursuit' carry a deep meaning. Knowledgeable used in this manner means that you know your own limitations, the limitations of your equipment, the environment in which you're operating, and the relative importance of the mission. Pursuit means that you apply your knowledge to achieve the objective. In other words, you go after it with your eyes wide open. Without the necessary knowledge the pursuit is too often fruitless and the mission becomes compromised. The knowledge of yourself, your machine, and your environment enables you to make the necessary judgments to achieve the goal.

Duty is a word that has undergone some radical changes of meaning in recent years. True? Hogwash! To the dedicated fighting man of today it means the same thing as it meant to the military man two hundred years ago. Your duty is to apply yourself to the task of achieving whatever goal you have been assigned. How far you go to achieve that goal at the risk of your own life, the lives of others, and the equipment you operate depends upon your knowledge of the importance of the mission weighed against all of the other factors. The same balance of risks cannot be assigned to a stateside training mission as it would be in a combat mission. In training the objective is to learn how to hit the target; learning is the goal, the target is secondary. In combat the target is the goal.

The rest of the definition reads "to the maximum of one's abilities." Maximum in this case means stripping yourself of all lethargy and backward inertia. It means chopping away all the laziness and hitting on all eight all of the time.

Ability is used rather than the word capability. There are many who can perform at the upper limits of their capabilities and for those people the words ability and capability are synonymous. By the same token there are

those who, for some reason or other, cannot perform as they are capable of doing. For those people their abilities are somewhere below their capabilities. It sounds like doubletalk but it boils down to the statement, know what you can do and do it.

Let's apply the definition to the examples in the beginning of the article:

The Czar incorrectly assessed the strength of his own Navy as compared to the Japanese armada. The CAN DO attitude? Hardly. Let's call it OVERCONFIDENCE stemming from a lack of knowledge.

President Kennedy correctly judged the spirit of the American people, and the abilities of this country to achieve the goal he established. The CAN DO attitude? You'd better believe it.

Sir Winston Churchill and the English people during the Battle of Britain? A superb example of the CAN DO attitude.

Captain Jones in the C-45? OVERCONFIDENCE again which was the result of an incorrect assessment of his own knowledge and abilities.

The young UPT graduate in the AT-33? Apparently he incorrectly judged the importance of the mission because of a lack of knowledge of his abilities and the goal.

Major Smith with his flight of four F-100s? It's another excellent example of the CAN DO attitude. He equipped himself with the knowledge to make the correct decision and saved the mission instead of potentially losing the flight.

As stated near the beginning of the article, the CAN DO attitude is a philosophy that is essential to the objectives of TAC. But how does all this fit in with safety?

Imbedded in the meaning of the CAN DO attitude is the definition of efficiency. And EFFICIENCY IS SAFETY!