

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE¹

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ABSTRACT. An analogy is made between the Persian Gulf War and its effective, high tech weaponry and future vector control program planning. Ever increasing population pressures and environmental concerns are seen as factors driving ever more selective control strategies. Developing positive public mosquito control perceptions will be a result of greater commitment to public education. Participative management and program ownership by staff in a "bottom up" environment is encouraged. The role of host attractant development is discussed as an example of proactive involvement by members.

This morning I want to reflect on analogies between the recent Persian Gulf events and the future of our Association in the context of our everyday work experience. During the recent events of the Persian Gulf, we were all riveted to what unfolded each day. Everyone knew someone there—we were all emotionally connected to the event. In the March 8, 1991, *Wall Street Journal*, I read an article about the bravery of our soldiers. In one particular paragraph of that article, John Fialka presented a clear and succinct description of our impression of this historic event. "Historians will remember the Gulf War as a rout won with high-technology weaponry that caused stunningly few allied casualties. Already there is a popular image of the war as a romp in which the U.S. troops hardly broke a sweat as they sat in their trenches, watched the air war from afar and then greeted hordes of surrendering shell-shocked Iraqis."

In reflecting on this article, several elements emerged which apply to our work. I ask you to think through these similarities with me and mentally connect each of them with your own situation. There may also be others that come to mind for you.

The most obvious element is the high technology weaponry and its deployment. The long range military planning and investment in the development of this high technology were the keys to the incredible effectiveness of our troops. Just as this new technology was in sharp contrast to previous wars, so too must the development of such technology be an example and an inspiration of what can be achieved by having the foresight (and money) to plan ahead and the discipline to follow through to implement the plan. We need to exercise similar foresight and discipline to develop the tools needed for mosquito control in the future. Obviously we don't mean guns, but control strategies and materials

which will, by their specific nature, engender the confidence and support of the public and environmental groups! We have read about the mosquito control methods used in the early days of mosquito control and their public benefit acclaim. The pressure of ever encroaching civilization is forever changing the way future mosquito control will be done. Increased public environmental awareness and civic involvement is focusing the need to preserve our open spaces and wetlands. The informed and involved public has placed the "handwriting on the wall" regarding the direction mosquito control must take in the future to gain public support for programs.

The level of public concern, particularly in urban areas, over the "pesticides" issue is increasing. The Big Green initiative in California reflects the political pressure being brought to bear on this issue. In a paper "Public attitude and pesticide usage in California" presented at the California Mosquito and Vector Control Association conference in February, Dr. Jim Grieshop presented some significant facts. In pesticide matters, public opinion is influenced by public *perception* of the ill effects, and that is what's important. The public is composed of citizen groups, some concerned, some not concerned. It is interesting that in the Big Green vote, 70% did not express concern, 20% were anti Big Green, and 10% pro Big Green (no risk was acceptable). Note this: Dr. Grieshop said that when public referendums are defeated, citizen action groups achieve their aims by turning to state and federal legislatures to push for laws which will achieve the same objectives. Citizens who move public opinion do not go away. We must be aware of this sequence, and each of us must become involved by getting to know our legislators.

To clarify our vision for the future of the Association, I believe we would benefit from a survey of the reasons why people are members of our Association, and we should identify recurring problem areas, which we should help resolve. We could benefit from long term program planning to address future control needs,

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to be better prepared for the future. A public contest, similar to those run by the computer industry, where entrants write descriptions of mosquito control in 2010 could significantly add to our understanding of the future and encourage greater public understanding and participation in mosquito control.

In the Gulf conflict, we would never have gained the overwhelming victory without strong political and military leadership. The military planning and commitment to purpose, learned, in part, from the lessons of Vietnam, resulted in priorities being set on the needed weapons systems. The commitment to follow through on their development enabled the war to be conducted with such impressive precision and results.

Achieving desired results, whether in military planning and follow through or mosquito control, depends on preparedness. Success requires long term thinking and planning and the discipline to carry through. Responsible leadership can focus the attention needed to develop the technology to deliver the results (tools) we need. As an Association we have the leadership and the brains. Do we have the commitment to plan long range? I believe we can and will obtain the funding needed, when our plan is clearly and logically presented to corporate sponsors and foundations which share our goals.

The shift from the Industrial to the Information Age and the associated quantum leap in information challenges us to benefit from technologies developed for other uses. We have heard "The only thing consistent is change." We are all experiencing the impact of this change. Today's public is taking an active part in shaping their community and environment.

To meet the challenge of the changing conditions, we must develop the skills required to communicate problems, present the options and conduct high quality programs with the environmental selectivity of laser guided armament to extract mosquitoes and very little else. Contrary to the public knowing little of the capability of our military until viewed nightly, we *must* become more skilled at communicating our control technology to the public. The public will *ONLY* support programs that they understand and recognize as environmentally safe! If you are not involved with public information and education, make it a priority to educate your public.

On the home front, before the start of the hostilities, anxiety ran high (no one wants their loved ones to be at risk). With few exceptions, the confidence being expressed was that of our informed military and political leadership. The awesomeness of the power brought to bear was a surprise to nearly everyone. Why? Because we

did not understand the professional competence of our military, their weaponry, or, of course, the battle plan. The public supported "what needed to be done" in large part on principle. How much support does the public have for your particular program? It's been my experience that very few citizens understand their local mosquito control program, much less how it operates and what strategies and materials are used. Why? I believe because it's hard to work to communicate to the public, either directly or through the media. As individuals we are very sensitive to the content of media coverage, and find it easier to keep a low profile and "not rock the boat." Consider forming a public information advisory committee comprised of retired or active public relations personnel to help you. Work with your local colleges to have questions dealing with environmental issues related to mosquito control placed in their case study and exam materials. Network with local chapters of public relations professionals.

We must encourage public review of operational programs to increase feedback from the public. This can be done by forming a program advisory board to review your program annually and report to your Board chair. "Our" programs are not "ours." They are the public's. Focus groups are the current best way to learn what the public wants. Each control program should sponsor focus group discussions every 8-12 months, to ensure program efforts are directed to meet the needs of those we serve.

In his *Wall Street Journal* article, John Fialka states "there is a popular image of the war as a romp in which U.S. troops hardly broke a sweat." While the article is about heroism under fire, it does address our popular perception of the ease and confidence of the troops. What appeared easy on the surface, we now know was the result of years of planning. To achieve the military success required commitment to purpose, intelligent leadership preparation, technology development, weapons testing, training and just plain hard work and personal sacrifice. The confidence and readiness of Bush and our military to engage Saddam was based on knowledge of preparations which were in place and confidence in the battle plan.

The heroism and military achievement of our troops in the Persian Gulf has earned our admiration and respect. It has done so for many reasons, one of which is vision and commitment by leadership to be the best and the pride we have experienced by association. It is human nature to want to be the best, feel good about our work and contribute to the well-being of others. Each day we have the opportunity to provide personal service to each family in our

community, to improve their quality of life. . . or to think of our work as just a job. The difference is perception, personal commitment, discipline and a willingness to take risks when you believe what you are doing is right.

The AMCA is blessed with committed, high quality leadership. These persons are ready to lead the Association into the 90s, but *you must each make a personal commitment* to get involved, to contribute your ideas for the future. There are two steps we can all take: first, to identify one good new idea at this meeting and work to implement it during the year upon our return home, and secondly to provide feedback on your needs to your Board members and officers.

We hear a lot about Commitment to Excellence from Tom Peters and the results of corporate investment in quality these days. As a young boy, I remember my Dad kidding me about my allowance "burning a hole" in my pocket each Saturday until I could get to the local 5&10 cent store to buy cheap Japanese toys (some of you remember the kind with fold-over metal tabs) that broke within the first 10 minutes I played with them. Well, you know the Japanese quality story today, achieved via Dr. William Demming.

My last *AMCA Newsletter* column (Vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1-2, 1991) focused on quality assurance. I chose that focus because quality control principles and quality standards for each work task are seriously lacking in mosquito control programs. Efforts spent in quality control will pay rich dividends when commitments are made to institute them.

It has been my experience that public support for vector control programs, and that of governing boards, results when there is: 1) a visible, consistent commitment to excellence and quality by program leaders from the top down; 2) employee involvement in making program decisions which allows them to take "ownership" of the results achieved, by giving them authority and responsibility for decisions; and 3) the presentation of a positive and professional public image of the control program, emphasizing staff recognition, technical competence and program environmental sensitivity.

Five years ago I read an article entitled "Four-Star Management" by USAF General Creech which deeply impressed me and helped convince me to revise our program from "top down" to "bottom up." I want to share my detailed notes on the article.

General Creech discussed the United States Air Force, Tactical Air Command management experience. To force bottom up management on an organization that had been strictly top down

meant pushing responsibility and authority down into the smallest cracks and crevices of his command. Under the centralized TAC organization, commanders in the field felt that they had been stripped of their autonomy and that innovation and initiative were discouraged. People were dehumanized.

General Creech's solution was to send authority down the ranks along with responsibility for meeting clear and simple goals. Field staff were responsible for people, not paper. They had to make their people produce; if they didn't they were out. Groups were responsible as a unit.

Creech's best and most important effort was to remind the lowest level employees that their jobs were tied into the District central mission, achieving high quality tactical response. All administrative staff were ordered to spend time in the field. Don't send staff out to brief; send generals from the top to convey that the matter is important enough to spend the generals' time on it.

Creech set program goals. Staff were set free to design their own way to reach it. If goals were met early, everyone received an extra 3-day weekend (10 extra 3-day weekends are the average now per year).

The pattern developed whereby staff would try something and gather enough evidence to show that it worked. To make it official policy, they then had to write a regulation and send it to administration for approval.

On the theory that quality begets quality, Creech ordered a top to bottom painting and sprucing up. If equipment and facilities are shabby looking, it affects your pride in your organization. You either have a climate of professionalism or you don't. Great people are not sloppy people. Fresh paint gave way to murals, lounges, good furniture, carpets. Inspection tours with press, public, politicians displayed quality. Emphasis was given to respect and recognition of people in the units. Pride is the fuel of human accomplishment. Annual award banquets and citations sparked competition between units.

Directives were given to abolish certain regulations, streamline procedures, whatever was necessary to enhance mission accomplishment. "People who do the job day in and day out know better how to do the job than someone sitting behind a desk."

Decentralization is not loss of control, but actually the reverse. It created leaders and helpers at all levels. Without such a framework, you are a leader in name only. It's not hard to run a large organization. You just have to think small about how to achieve large goals. There is a finite limit to how much leadership you can

exercise at the top. People resent being managed. Things are achieved by individuals, by collections of 2s, 5s, 20s, not larger groups.

Productivity is the bottom line; to improve it you have to create more drive and enthusiasm. The objectives should be to promote morale, motivation, enthusiasm and creativity.

Centralization says there are certain kinds of decisions that have to be made "up high" because that's the only place they can be made in an intelligent fashion. To facilitate that, rules and regulations are used to govern people's behavior. Meanwhile, all decisions gravitate upward. Within certain general guidelines and goals, you can give people real authority down below and give them breathing room to make their own decisions. Charging others with goals results in many people trying to reach the goals. The greater the productivity, the greater the loyalty.

When you delegate authority the attrition rate is higher and incompetence is more visible than in centralized authority. Managers must give themselves the tools to track and view objectively how people are performing, before the barn's on fire or in ashes.

In summary, Creech stressed that authority must accompany responsibility, or people stop. You must hold a few key people accountable. Give authority to hire and fire within guidelines. Results bloom when you give ownership and personal pride.

To start implementing these principles, review your program goals and objectives and discuss with your employees their ideas for the future direction of their program. Make a decision to implement every employee group suggestion. With a good map/plan, staff know what to work toward. Conversely, without clear control

program goals and objectives, it's impossible for staff to participate in any meaningful way.

This past year, I spoke at state and regional meetings about proactive involvement to shape future control technology. What type of technology should we use to control immature and adult mosquitoes in 10 years? It is our responsibility to devise control strategies which every citizen can understand and support. The attractants workshop held Saturday afternoon ("Mediators of the behavior of bloodfeeding insects") and the symposium this afternoon ("Attractants in our future?") are good examples of such proactive involvement. We have a long way to go for the attractants initiative to become a reality.

If you like the idea of bringing mosquitoes to odor stations to control them, you will need to actively support the attractant concept for it to happen. The general public, environmental groups and the press need to understand why this technology needs to be developed. In short, we must create user demand to demonstrate broad based support for the concept. When this happens, industry will hear, understand why, and recognize the potential market advantages of investing in the development of the technology. If you're wondering "What can I do?," discuss how you could use this technology in your program with your co-workers. Encourage your district board to pass resolutions of support and share them with local news media, the AMCA Central Office and influential citizens.

In closing, thank you for the honor of serving as your President this past year! I enjoyed meeting many of you for the first time at state and regional conferences during the year. It's been great to work closely with your Board members, for whom I have gained a great respect.