



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

Air Force: Fly High **by Scott McPherson**

A popular bumper sticker reads, “Don’t Steal. The Government Hates Competition.” A new bumper sticker should read, “Don’t Deal Drugs. The Government Hates Competition.”

According to an Associated Press report in the January 3 issue of the *Washington Times*, David Beck, attorney for Maj. William Umbach, one of the U.S. Air Force pilots who dropped a bomb on four Canadian soldiers last April in southern Afghanistan, “says he will show at a Jan. 13 hearing ... that the Air Force routinely pressures pilots to take dexamphetamine, a prescription drug also known as ‘go pills.’ He said the drug can impair judgement and is not recommended for people operating heavy equipment.”

Like F-16 fighter jets?

Some humor could be gleaned from this incident were it not for the tragic deaths of four Canadian soldiers. No one is suggesting that either Umbach or fellow pilot Maj. Harry Schmidt intentionally targeted allied troops. The Canadians were involved in a live-ammunition ground exercise at the time of the attack, and it is certainly plausible that their small-arms and anti-tank fire was misinterpreted by the two pilots as anti-aircraft fire. An Air Force inquiry found Umbach and Schmidt to have “‘demonstrated poor airmanship’ and ignored standard procedure by not making sure the area was clear of allied troops,” the AP reports.

Now the two U.S. pilots face possible court-martial for wrongly killing friendly forces. But what if, at the behest of their military superiors, they were hopped up on “go pills” at the time?

This could just prove to be another of the U.S. government’s many dirty little secrets. As the commander in chief of U.S. military forces beats his chest back home about the evils of drug use, it seems his Air Force pilots are routinely intoxicated on prescription amphetamines, with Uncle Sam as the approving physician. While the Office of National Drug Control Policy loves to frighten people with the image of a doped-up maniac behind the wheel of a car, our military is pressuring fighter pilots to take speed while flying combat missions.

It certainly gives a whole new meaning to the Air Force motto, “Aim High.” Before the federal government spends another cent, passes another law, or imprisons another drug user in its failed, immoral, racist, and destructive “war on drugs,” it ought to first stop dealing drugs to its own military personnel.

Scott McPherson is a policy advisor at The Future of Freedom Foundation in Fairfax, Virginia.