Guardian Ethics Group

Team Member Names: **Year of Graduation:**   **Major:**

Team Member Names	Year of Graduation	Major
Robert Coe	2026	Management. Leadership
Charli Frankenfeld	2027	Marketing, Sales, Management
HeLena McGaugh	2025	Human Resource Management. Leadership
Tristan Patterson	2026	Finance

Advisor: Chase E. Thiel, Ph.D.
Audience: Board of AI Development, Northrop Grumman
Presentation by: Guardian Ethics Group - Internally created team formed to address the issues of LAWS.

Topic: How I Learned to Stop Flying and Let the AI Drop the Bomb:
The Loyal Wingman Dilemma

Executive Summary:

A pair of Apache helicopters circle above a chaotic evacuation. On the ground, three civilian vehicles speed toward U.S. forces. One contains fleeing innocents. Another, a suicide bomber. The first scenario leaves the decision to human pilots with partial visual intel. The second hands it to an AI. Both have a choice. Life or Death. When the dust settles—who is accountable?

Lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) are rapidly reshaping modern warfare. Their promise is clear: faster decisions, reduced human risk, and scalable coordination. But their dangers are equally pressing. Legally, LAWS exist in a grey area. International humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, was written with human actors in mind. When civilians die, and no human pulled the trigger, responsibility becomes opaque.

Financially, missteps are expensive. Failed AI deployments lead to contract cancellations, litigation, and reputational collapse. Investors pull out. Governments freeze funding. Public outcry grows in proportion to civilian harm. And with every high-profile failure, the public's trust in both the contractor and the military wanes.

Ethically, LAWS present a crisis of trust. Under pressure, humans tend to favor confident outputs—an issue AI systems often exacerbate. This automation bias erodes critical human judgment. When pilots defer to systems marketed as near-infallible, we risk turning ethical discretion into a checkbox. This is compounded when defense contractors overstate reliability in pursuit of contracts, encouraging overconfidence in autonomy.

Our SOAR framework offers a proactive path forward:

S – Set Clear Boundaries
Implement accountability frameworks defining AI limitations in measurable, enforceable terms.

O – Operator-In-The-Loop
Mandate human oversight in final strike decisions to preserve judgment and restraint.

A – Assess Confidence Transparently
Require AI systems to display real-time confidence levels and flag uncertainty to users.

R – Retain Ethical Control
Install automated disengagement triggers for ethically ambiguous or low-certainty targets.

This framework ensures compliance with legal norms, mitigates financial exposure, and protects human life by restoring judgment where it belongs—in human hands. In doing so, it aligns with Northrop Grumman's own values: to do the right thing, keep promises, pioneer responsibly, and pursue innovation with integrity.