



LOOKING TO THE PAST TO CHANGE THE FUTURE

By John Terino and Jacqueline E. Whitt February 4, 2020
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Jacqueline Whitt: Hello, and welcome to A Better Peace the War Room podcast. I'm **Jacqueline Whitt** Professor of Strategy at the U.S. Army War College and the War Room Podcast Editor. Thanks for joining us for another episode. One of the things that we talk about in the realm of professional military education is the importance of ongoing education for military officers and the different military services, the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, the Marine Corps all have different ways of sort of managing this problem. My own career has been spent in professional military education really since it started. One of the first places I was at was the Air War College down in Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama and that is a place where the Air Force has a really consolidated lots of its education programs. I've asked **Dr. John Terino** who is the Department Chair of the Department of Air Power at Air Command and Staff College, again located in Montgomery, Alabama, to join me in the studio today to talk about some of the history of Air Force professional military education and the training of its military officers. He's going to tell us a sort of historical story and think about some contemporary things. John is a retired Air Force officer and has been working in PME for much of his career and also now as a civilian for about 10 years and has a PhD in history. That's an important piece of his bio too. John, welcome to War Room.

John Terino: It's great to be here.

JW: Alright, so if you look at people who are teaching at the Air Command and Staff College these days, civilians and military, you might notice, astute observers might notice, a new piece of flare that they are sporting. There's a pin that the civilians have and there's a patch for the military officers and it says that the old Air Corps Tactical School patch or pin. That's the story I want you to tell us: how we sort of resurrected this old piece of air force history.

JT: Basically, when I took over the department, I thought one of the things we needed was kind of an identity. To have a good unit you have to have good morale. You have to have things that that people are proud of and make it work. Toward that end some of the guys that worked for me

really got into the history of what we were doing, and these are military officers who really weren't much in history before this and when they found out that, back in the 1930s, air force officers who were assigned instructor duty at the Air Corps Tactical School which was the only sort of PME that the Air Corps had during the interwar period and it was at Maxwell. After about 1931 it moved from Langley Air Force Base to Maxwell Air Force Base. They found out that these instructors would wear these little—literally if you're an Animal House person—pledge pins on their uniform, little blue pins that said ACTS (which is short for the Air Corps Tactical School) instructor with little prop and wings on it. And they thought this was really cool. So, being pilots, the first thing they thought of was well, let's make it a patch. So, we kind of had a morale patch. The Air Force allows you to wear these kinds of patches on Fridays typically, and the rest of the week you wear a regular patch that's sort of uniform specific and follows regulations. But the morale patches can be a little different than that. So, they came up with a version of it and they really quickly went viral. They saw my guys wearing it, other guys in the building wanted it and then the guys from the headquarters wanted it, and all of a sudden, everybody had these. Now, we were selling these, to kind of add money to our morale fund, but they really became a point of pride. We started giving them to some of our guest speakers in thanks for them coming to do it. Some places you'll get a coin which we also had a department coin which was different because the rest of the school didn't have it. Then the Commandant of our school started giving our coin to people and one of the more notable ones on that was General Casey came down and was speaking in front of the students and he got our coin and he was really impressed that had a bottle opener feature on it too. It was not just decorative but practical.

JW: Practical. Absolutely.

JT: So then, we were running out of these patches and the old pin and patch were blue, blue background with gold lettering. And this was just about the time the Air Force was shifting to new utility uniforms with the OCP and so I said to the guys, we need to order the blue ones because the aviators, the pilots will wear those. The rest of the guys are going to need patches now too because the OCP has more patch stuff on it than the old air force uniforms, utilities had. So, I said so we need to get them in the correct OCP colors.

JW: The subdued colors.

JT: In the subdued colors, so find out what the right color is. They did some cursory research like many of us do.

JW: They googled it?

JT: Yeah, they googled it and called somebody or something, but we ended up just defaulting to a different color, so we got sort of black ones with kind of a more subdued gold and navy and we started selling those too. And of course, those went like hot cakes because not only could pilots wear them if they wanted, but all the support officers could wear those too. And then the guys who were running my morale fund, my snack bar...

JW: This is very important.

JT: It's real Air Force stuff. Yes. This is vital to morale [laughter]. The most important officer that works for me is my snack officer and surprisingly, it's rather competitive to who gets the job. They've done some amazing things the last couple years and our snack bar is essentially the snack bar for the whole building. In some fashion it really has become that. So, they were kind of realizing there was kind of a marketing opportunity because civilians didn't have it and they really wanted to get back to what the original pin looked like in some sense. So, they figured out how to get one of these on order and literally this week we just got the first batch of these. I posted one of them on Facebook and all of a sudden people are posting all these memes of guys throwing money at you. Take my money. There was almost a line outside my snack officer's office on Monday morning when these things came to work.

JW: To get the pins. So, for morale, for identity, this is really I think an important piece of military culture, certainly to feel like you're part of a unit, to feel like you're part of a team and have that visual identity as well. What was the Air Corps Tactical School? What does it mean?

JT: The really important part of this in another sense was not just the morale but exactly what you're getting at. The Air Corps Tactical School was the first place in the United States Air Force, or its predecessors, the Army Air Corps, where there was an intellectual component to what air power was going to be. It started with the Air Service Tactical School and it was supposed to be about getting mid-career officers or just below that, captains, to be prepared for greater leadership in the Air Corps and to start teaching them about more parts about air power than they might have actually experienced so far. By the 1930s it became much more sophisticated in what it was doing in that it became the crucible for where the thinking about strategic bombing as an independent mission for the Air Force, what would ultimately be the Air Force, was really thought through and analyzed and given intellectual heft to what the idea was. And this is kind of interesting because it wasn't supposed to be that. Everything they were supposed to do had to be in accordance with Army doctrine and they were doing that and their syllabi were looked at and their lectures were vetted, but at the same time, they were laying the foundation for this other way of using air power in a different form than most of the rest of the Army wanted it to be used.

JW: Really a new way of thinking about air power and what it can accomplish. It seems like there's a couple of things at play, right? So, the interwar period is important, the fact that this is happening in the 1930s as people are figuring out what air power can do and how to modify its uses from the first World War. But it's also at Maxwell, right?

JT: Correct.

JW: So, what is the move to Alabama do for the Air Corps Tactical School and air power thinking more broadly?

JT: I would say there's a couple things that happened because of that. Originally it was at Langley Air Force Base which is still the premier Air Force Base for the United States Air Force even until today. And ironically one of a number of Air Force bases that are actually named after civilians. But Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery is named like most other bases are after an aviator who perished usually in a plane crash in some way shape or form. When the Air Corps Tactical School was moved to Maxwell, it came at a time when there was an increase in budget for the Air Corps at the expense of the rest of the Army, and so essentially, Maxwell became a showpiece Air Force base. It has a certain architectural style because the Corps of Engineers created this sort of French revivalist kind of architecture. It's got a lot of red tile roofs on a lot of the buildings. The housing there is historic. It was laid out in a different fashion as a unified whole which is something that the Air Force and the other services I think have embraced lately—you have to have an architectural plan for your bases. There's a utility section of the base, an industrial section as it were where the flight line was, where the hangers would still exist today, these Art Deco hangers for maintenance and all the things that are associated with the airplanes. And then there's a housing side that's on the other side that's laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted-inspired architecture so it's very green and it's designed to be like a parkway. And in between is where the Air Corps Tactical School was put in the building that is now the base headquarters. And so what you did was you ended up gathering all the best officers in the Air Corps. This was a feather in your cap to go down there and be on the faculty. You had to go through as a student. The statistics out of World War II are something like of say, the 500 top Generals in the Air Corps, virtually all of them, we're talking like 495 went through the Air Corps Tactical School at one point. My stats are probably a little off coming off the top of my head but they are pretty close to that.

JW: Close.

JT: Close enough for government work as it were. It gives you an idea of the impact that the school had and a lot of historians who looked at the development of the Air Force and strategic bombing, they tend to focus on the fact that this was the main thing that was going on at

Maxwell at the time, was thinking about how to do the industrial web theory of strategic bombing that is unique to American airpower.

JW: When I think about Maxwell and living in Alabama, even when I was there in 2012 to 2016, it's not the easiest place to get to. It feels a little bit more isolated certainly from the D.C. area, certainly from like the churn of the Pentagon and other places. It's not as close as Carlisle, it's not as close as...

JT: or as Langley.

JW: as Langley. Do you think that matters? Is it actually isolated from some of the other things that are happening?

JT: I think in some sense that may have been almost intentional when it was first established. There were political factors that were involved in it. Lister Hill who was a famous Senator, ultimately a Senator from Alabama, this was sort of his baby, getting the base there and the money that flowed, and the jobs that came with that in the 30s. I think there was a sense, let's put these guys a little further away from the rest of Washington even though Leavenworth was sort of the centerpiece for Army schooling at the time and it's much further away from Washington than even Maxwell is. But there was I think a counterpoint to this which is the sense that air power aviation was going to close distances and unite people even closer. So, getting to Maxwell by air on a direct flight is really not that hard in a sense. And the irony today is that until very recently, we didn't have direct flights from Montgomery to Washington D.C. but now we do, and it actually has shrunk the distance incredibly in the time and it allows us to get speakers more readily because it used to be it's like a two-day thing to come to Maxwell.

JW: We would joke that you could get to London from New York faster than you could get to Montgomery.

JT: Pretty much [laughter].

JW: But Maxwell continues to be a sort of intellectual home for the Air Force, for generating ideas about air power, for thinking about the role of the Air Force within national security and national defense. At the same time, the role of professional military education in the Air Force and within the services more broadly, the role of the Command and Staff Colleges, of the War Colleges is changing, and we don't see the same maybe prestige attached to instructing at PME institutions. There's all sorts of opinions about why that is and what we might do that to change it. How would you envision Maxwell in its current conception and iteration contributing to intellectual and professional development within the Air Force?

JT: Maxwell as a whole has a very vital role right now. The current Secretary the Air Force Heather Wilson has a PhD. She's been a president of university. She's going to leave that position and go be a chancellor or president, I believe at the University of Texas El Paso. She's very much big on education and what it means and kind of wading through the kind of statistics and things that get thrown through. One of the first meetings we had with her last year when she came down, she was very very interested in how we picked our instructors, what they were teaching, what our accreditation was, what it really meant. And so, there's an initiative in the Air Force now, in spite of talking about this for the better part of ten or fifteen years, to actually value instructor duty again and to make it prominent on people's records and pick people and board it, essentially, to pick the best instructors. We're kind of, at the Air Command and Staff College, on the leading edge of that in one sense, but the rest of Maxwell is kind of a part of that. The current Air University Commander, General Cotton, recognizes that it's been very difficult to get people to Maxwell because of the geographic issues. There's lots of problems with public education in the city of Montgomery. We have one of the finest high schools, our magnet school, in the country, but at the same time, if you're not in the magnet school, it's very very bad. So, there are a lot of officers, potentially as instructors or students and even civilian faculty, who have been...

JW: It can be a hard sell.

JT: Yeah, they have been offered jobs or been told they are coming and they've either refused, looked elsewhere for employment or come without their families. There's an increasing number of officers that do that. So, part of this, everybody believes, is the educational issue, and it's ironic in a bad way that the center of Air Force education which has contributed so much over the last 75 years or so to the life of Montgomery. There's a lot of transplanted people like myself who live there—my daughter, my youngest daughter is essentially a native Alabamian I've been at Maxwell for so long in that sense—that have contributed to the intellectual growth and everything that goes on Montgomery, and yet the public school system is failing, and it makes it very difficult to juxtapose how can this be in a place that values education so much. So, when I say we're on the leading edge at the Air Command and Staff College, one of the things we've been really doing in the last 5 years is increasing the quality of our faculty. We are in a sense a lodestone for the intellectual development of the Air Force Officer Corps because we have the most students. They have the most opportunity to contribute to the Air Force after they graduate and they will end up making a difference in that sense just out of sheer numbers and if the quality is there, then it can really enhance that difference that they can make whereas the War College is a little smaller and the statistics are about 30 to 50 percent of them are gone, retired after three years.

JW: It's much later in their careers and it's a really different environment, different mission, different student population. I loved working in PME. I think there's really exciting work happening. The students are interesting. They're not that different sometimes from students

everywhere else. But what are some of the sort of exciting things that you're seeing within PME and within your world?

JT: So, the most exciting things at our particular school that are permeating out through the rest of the Air Force educational establishment at Maxwell—higher-quality faculty. We've been on a push to hire much more qualified civilian faculty, so we have a lot more PhDs. My favorite phrase to describe this is “We are not your Commanders Air Command and Staff College.” We have real rigor in our curriculum. We have real instructors. One of the things that we've done in the last few years is we've created a course, where most of our courses involve some level of faculty development because part of our mission is to take Air Force officers and turn them into instructors and to help them develop intellectually too. And that requires a lot of faculty development to get them ready to teach these kinds of courses. Well, when you have, as we do now, about 50% of our faculty are civilian PhDs, we can take advantage of that and we have core courses that are taught only by PhDs. So, there is no faculty development for that because this is essentially what those of us who've gotten those degrees were trained to do just like at a regular graduate school or undergraduate program. We would go and develop the syllabus and go teach the course and we wouldn't need all the kinds of support mechanisms that we have for people who are just learning as they're doing it. So, that's made a big difference in terms of what the students expect from what we do. At the same time, the quality of our military faculty which had gotten pretty low due to the demands of the war and other things where we were being assigned non-volunteers to come and teach, people who didn't want to be there and didn't want to teach either and would tell the students that up front.

JW: It's a really difficult sort of combination of factors.

JT: Yeah, exactly. Teaching requires some degree of passion. It requires some degree of fluidity of mind and other things in the seminar environment to make it work, and if you just don't want to engage in that, there's going to be a big problem.

JW: It's not going to be fun for anybody.

JT: Yeah. Exactly.

JW: There's not going to be a whole lot of learning going on.

JT: And that defeats the purpose of everything. So, what we started doing was telling the Air Force, the Personnel System, no, we're not going to take those officers and we need to get higher-quality officers. Some of the leadership of Air University in particular, General Kwast, when he was there before he became the Air, Education and Training Commander, he backed us to the hilt on this sort of stuff too. And so, we got an increase in quality of our officers. We

created new programs so that some of our graduates, just like in the days of the Air Corps Tactical School, you would come as a student, and select numbers would graduate and be put on the faculty as a premier position. We can't give you Wing Command or Squadron Command coming out of here, but what we can do is give you this position which is...

JW: A great assignment.

JT: A great assignment and virtually equivalent to that when the boards look at that. And this is, I think, going to be one of the outcomes of what Secretary Wilson has been trying to do. We're going to elevate PME and instructor duty. It's going to help the Air Force Academy which has had similar problems getting faculty because our personnel management has been structured towards producing people who can go down range in Afghanistan and Iraq which is vital and important, but also the same time, at the expense of looking at career broadening in a holistically better sense for what it does for development of officers. And so, the quality of our military faculty has gotten incredible. About five, six years ago, I had no rated officers in my department. We're supposed to teach air power and we have nobody who flies or had flown aircraft in the Air Force. This is a minor point in one sense but a major point for credibility. Now, virtually all of my fellow B-officers, the ones who are going to stay on a sort of a fellowship and teach with us, are all rated. I have some of the finest operators that I could ever wished and they're really good instructors at the same time. They help us on the civilian side with credibility because they've been in the airplane, they've done the missions.

JW: There's a combination of academic expertise, practical expertise that really, I think is essential for professional military education. It's not purely academic environment nor is it a purely military environment.

JT: No, 100 percent.

JW: You need to have both and work together.

JT: The best example you can say is we are more like a pre-professional school, like a law school or a medical school in the sense that and we need practitioners to help us on that part of it and we need the academic side to help with intellectual development and the way to look at problems in a different way. The way we kind of characterize what we've been doing is we're trying to develop habits of mind and patterns of inquiry for the students. And so, we need faculty that can do that kind of stuff. I think we've come a long way towards making that happen and our faculty is really strong for that sort of stuff. And getting back to the Genesis of this in a sense, the pins and patches are just an example of this in a sense where we're using the cultural heritage of the Air Force, Maxwell specifically, and we are kind of getting people excited about what we do in a way that harkens back to the intellectual tradition that many people kind of disregard that the

Air Force has but it's actually been very strong, having people think about what is it you need to do to be effective to meet national security goals with military power, and specifically, revolutionary military power that is the kind of aircraft that were being developed in the 1930s that we're going to need for space and cyber and integrating to multi-domains that are going to be essential for us to be successful in the conflicts of the future that hopefully we won't have to do, but we've got to be prepared for.

JW: That space of professional military education, of space set aside, time set aside for professional intellectual development is really critical both for professionalization but also for coming up with new ideas, new ways of thinking about American national security, about defense, about the military enterprise. John, thanks so much for joining us on War Room, a kindred spirit in the PME world. I'll have to talk to you about getting one of these very special pins, maybe I can.

JT: Oh definitely. There's one coming to you.

JW: Alright. Thank you so much.

JT: Thank you.