



BOOK LOVERS NEED APPLY: A DUSTY SHELVES PODCAST

By Dr. Tom Bruscano and Col. John Klug and Ron Granieri November 15, 2019
<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/special-series/dusty-shelves/book-lovers/>

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Ron Granieri: Hello, and welcome to A Better Peace the War Room podcast. I'm Ron Granieri Professor of History in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the US Army War College and your host for today's discussion. One of the newest additions to the War Room has been the Dusty Shelves series which encourages contributors to reflect on books that have been influential in their personal development or within their disciplines as a whole, designed to encourage scholars to step back from the sometimes overwhelming flood of new materials to reflect on their own intellectual inspirations and on the works and ideas that, for better or worse, continue to influence their fields of study. Our guests today are the editors of the Dusty Shelves, **Dr. Tom Bruscano** and **Colonel John Klug**, both faculty members in the Department of Military Strategy, Planning and Operations here at the US Army War College to talk about the program's goals and maybe even to blow some dust off their own recommended readings. So, Tom, what's the point of the Dusty Shelves?

Tom Bruscano: So, Dusty Shelves, we should start by saying it's not a new thing exactly, it's been here for a while, but it has been focused in the past. We've had it on old documents, things primarily you can find in the Army Heritage and Education Center here at Carlisle Barracks, but we wanted to open the aperture a little bit and make it a broader thing. And so, I started with this and I know the guys AHEC are mad about – that's the Army Heritage and Education Center – are mad about us calling it Dusty Shelves and I agree with them, I don't really like the name dusty shelves. The archivists don't like it because, as a matter business, none of their shelves are dusty.

RG: They are definitely not dusty.

TB: Yeah, so they get very mad about us calling it that, for one thing, but on the other hand, some of these books have gotten dust gathered on them and old books, old documents, some things that are out there that we have forgotten about. So, we widen this out, and I don't like the name because of this idea of it being antiquarianism. I think we have these old books and you have them because they look neat on a shelf, but there's not much of value in them because time

has passed them by. And I think what we find is that that's not true, that a lot of great stuff out there, if you go back and look at it again, you know, we reinvent wheels all the time. It's like the Army's pastime, that's his favorite sport to play, his reinventing wheels and we'll still roll. So, I think that's a problem. So, one of the things we are trying to do is encourage people, and we want contributions and stuff, to start talking about older books that can't believe older readings, older things that that are lost or were never really well known that really should have been. And so, that's the emphasis on it. This happens a lot. If I'm in the habit of making fun of titles, one of the titles I want to make fun of is this one, *A Better Peace*, which comes from B.H. Liddel Hart. Now I would say it comes from his book *Strategy*, although if you know Liddel Hart at all, you know that he, nobody was a master of self-plagiarizing as much as Liddel Hart.

RG: So, if it's from one of his books, it's from all of his books.

TB: That's correct. And so, including the phrase "better peace," it is in *Strategy* in two places, exactly the same. About 15 pages apart in the book, he uses the exact same wording to talk about the phrase "a better peace"—that the object of war is a better peace. And I think Liddel Hart's *Strategy* is a good one to start with. It could be an example of something we look at because, if you actually look at the book *Strategy*, the better peace part—I think came on to the first page it's on, and in one of the additions I have is page 351 of the book—it's in the section we like to use which is his theory of strategy overall that he talks about in the latter part of the book, that's the last 40 pages of a 400-page book that he talks about this. And the problem with that is that the first 300-plus pages of the book in the later editions are... problematic? would be a way of describing them.

RG: Problematic is a very good academic word. In other words, what you're saying is the first 300 pages of the book have a lot of stuff in them that is wrong.

TB: Well, it's, put it this way, as a historian, Liddell Hart tortures history pretty bad to make it, to compel it to agree with his thesis which is that everything in warfare should be done through an indirect approach. Including, he makes the case for World War II, in the latter part of the book which is bizarre, because it's pretty hard to treat D-Day and the aftermath or the Soviet campaigns on the eastern front, or the dropping of the atomic bomb as indirect. Those seem pretty direct to me. So that's a problematic thing, so we can maybe question whether or not we should be using a theory that is in part derived from a pretty tortured, bad history. So, not to say that there's... I think there's great value in that latter part of the book, but it's one that's worth revisiting and it would be interesting if somebody were to go back and say, hey what are the some of the problems with Liddel Hart?

RG: Well, and I think that's something to consider with any book that, at the time, was considered to be cutting edge, to realize that the cutting edge gets a little dull, or perhaps we've

sharpened things a little differently. In addition to Liddel Hart, John, what other books are out there that the Dusty Shelves have either commissioned or are interested in including in the series?

John Klug: Well, I think one of them is from naval history from the study, there is Mahan. So many people are familiar with one book, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, but Mahan wrote a whole series of books, and one of them that comes to mind for things that I've been working on is *Naval Administration and Warfare*. So, it shows a bit of the change in his thoughts and one of the things that he talks about is naval sea power being noiseless, steady and exhausting.

RG: Sounds like historical research.

JK: Yes, fair enough. For those of us who are rowing in that area. The other thing though is a lot of times people point to Corbett as being somehow an opposite from Mahan, but if you look at Corbett's work, again, he is another author who has written several different works, and we only focus on some principles. We don't look at some of the other works he's done, and one of those I think that people would benefit from looking at is *England in the Seven Years War* because he really looks at naval warfare in strategy as a larger system and we talk about systems thinking here quite a bit. And you're talking about, you know, late 19th century early 20th century when we're talking about Mahan and Corbett, both of them thinking in that way already.

RG: Tom, is it better to write a review of a book that is "still good" and "useful" in the way that it initially was, or is it better to make you talk about Liddel Hart to re-examine or to use another, since you used the word "problematic," if I use the other academic buzzword and say "deconstruct" a book that people have thought as influential but may need to be looked at differently?

TB: Well, I think the answer is both. I think that's the answer. So, we have the ones that are maybe books that we consider classics that maybe need to be taken down a peg, or two, or ten, or discarded all together. So, we'll have some of that that's going to come out in this series. And I think the other one is old classics that have been forgotten, there's stuff like that. So, Mahan has a series of books that were as influential as John points out and we should look at some of those. So, there's those books that have wrongfully been forgotten, I think. And there's a lot of them, your army equivalent of Mahan and Corbett is always Clausewitz and Jomini, and those are both fine, although again we can probably read the whole things instead of just talking about pieces, parts of them which we usually do. But also, books that were highly influential. I'm doing World War I era stuff right now and pre-World War I, end of the 19th century, there's a ton of books, classics, that were really good that have just been lost. Von Der Goltz's *Nation in Arms* is one that was highly influential on a lot of these guys, much more directly than you'd see somebody

like Jomini and Clausewitz. So those are really good ones that we could talk about and go back and say, hey is it worth looking at these again? Why is it that we thought that these were important back in the day? And maybe they still are. And I'm sticking to military history, but I know that some of the people I've talked to about making contributions have brought up diplomatic history books both by historians or by actors at the time. So, William Langer is one that I've ever heard has been brought up. I think you could make the case that a lot of people have kind of forgot about E.H. Carr. There's another one that would be a really important one that we could come back into and like to see. And again, this is just sort of within the heads that are in this room, the three heads that are in this room right now, we could probably come up with a whole list of them. When you throw this out there, the feedback we've gotten already has been great. People bring up Hans Delbrück and others. There're all these ones out here that probably need to be looked at again and brought out, and I think that they can be pretty helpful and give an entree back. And the other thing that's great in this digital era that we have now, is especially some of these old ones, there're all public domain.

RG: True, for the older books.

TB: You don't have to buy the thing. You just go to Google Books and read it online, if you want, you can peruse it, you go to HathiTrust and then look at those things. So, there's a lot of stuff out there that's really interesting and I think those are all good ones.

RG: I think one of the... everybody who's gone to graduate school knows that you are given a long list of book titles and then the challenge is to figure out every title and boil it down to a couple of sentences that you can mention in your orals to suggest to your examiners that you've actually seen those books. And sometimes, well I won't speak for anybody in this room except myself, but let's just say that we haven't always read all of those books as closely as they could be read.

TB: Well, and there's that issue to of books that you might have read within your field but didn't read it in terms of, thinking in terms of national security issues or military affairs, and then you go back and look at them again and realize they have a lot to say about that. So, I could stick with the progressive era and do, you know, William Appleman Williams, is one that somebody brought up, who wrote about foreign policy, American foreign policy, and *The Tragedy of American Foreign Policy* I think is the name of the book and that's one that some people read as part of seeing an example of a progressive-type historian, a new left-type historian critiquing American foreign policy in a way that isn't quite as cheap as a lot of the critiques of American foreign policy have seemed to become, sort of trite and rote. He's actually saying stuff that's a little bit interesting, little bit different perspective. So, you've got people like that who are interesting and might be worth going back into. You know Eric Goldman writing about the Progressive Era is one that you don't see, Richard Hofstadter.

RG: It is interesting because a book can go from being a secondary source when it was written to becoming a primary source about the era in which it was written.

TB: Absolutely, and that's another perspective and you can say, okay, how they critiqued foreign policy or how they amplified, so someone like Samuel Flagg Bemis, at the time his reputation is great. He was a fan of American foreign policy and you don't see a lot of that, so much so that his nickname was Samuel 'wave the flag' Bemis is what they call him, which is always a good one. But his two volumes on John Quincy Adams, for example, are as good a history of early American foreign policy as you'll ever find. And they are sort of buried in a biography so if you are interested in John Quincy Adams, you get a great John Quincy Adams biography but then you also get this amazing review of the early American foreign policy that I think would be valuable to people to understand the foundational aspects of American foreign policy and the ways that it hasn't really changed as much as we'd sometimes think. And if it has, why? Is that a bad thing, is it a good thing? Those are all the things we introduce by looking at these older books.

RG: So, John, where are we as of as of right now this afternoon? Are there any works coming up or that have been commissioned that we can subtweet any writers out there so that they can turn in their review on time?

TB: Well, I'll take that one. Whether or not people... the other thing about this, remember is we're talking about a thousand words, in that range, less than 1800, that's our War Room standard, so this isn't that hard of a task, I think. So, my call to people is, and for those people who have suggested stuff, and for those who are thinking about it, throw something up against the wall and see what sticks and I think we're pretty open to a lot of stuff and we really do want an interesting variety of things and you just can't encourage people enough to it to send stuff in. Our first one for example, and its already come out, *Jungle Mission* is fascinating. I had never even heard of the book. It's a great example of what we're talking about. The guy sent it in about 15 minutes after I put the call out there. He sent in this example and it was great to have that and work with it a little bit and it's already out there. I think it's one that people are already interested in.

RG: And it's a memoir of a French officer or it's a study of French policy.

TB: It's a memoir of a French officer talking about being in French Indochina in their part of the Vietnam War, the Vietnam conflict and talking about that. It provides a sort of different... and the author did a great job and Nathan Moir did a great job of talking about how this runs contrary to a lot of ways we look at people kind of going native, you know, or sort of becoming part of the...when they are trying to do these security force assistance type missions to help build up

militaries in foreign lands, about the way that not everybody goes crazy and goes all full Marlon Brando in *Apocalypse Now* and goes crazy, and they are actually somebody who can be, that it can actually be a really useful aspect of doing those types of missions of engaging with the people and doing it in a serious way. I think we see this a lot, you could do this with people who do sort of British... you could do a lot of British memoirs, British Empire stuff, there're all kinds of interesting things. We've kind of done a giant hand wave of almost all of the pre-, I don't know, 2000 for us now, aspects of people doing this and we dismissed it all as orientalism, people are treating these foreign people as lesser people and you know you go back and look and a lot of these guys are actually very astute students of the Near East and they're primarily in the British case. But the stuff that have to say is really interesting. There're things that they say that kind of blow your mind about how engaged they were. We like to think that we've got a much better understanding of these foreign places than they did back then, but sometimes they maybe had some insights that we haven't even thought of or we too blithely dismissed.

RG: This gets to a bigger question and John, I do want to turn to you especially since you are in the process of making knowledge as a PhD candidate.

JK: Right.

RG: I'm really curious. In the social sciences these days, there's a lot of talk about how books are less significant than articles both in terms of what people are producing and in what people are reading. How would you appeal not just to sort of somebody in your position, somebody who's trying to understand the field? Is there value in going back and reading older books?

JK: As a historian, absolutely. My advisor, Mark Milner, went over this time and time again early on. As a historian looking at footnotes, the newer material, they cite previous works and previous works and sadly, a lot of times it gets to be shorthand where they clearly haven't gone back and looked at the totality of what was written, and I'm not talking about plagiarism, I'm talking about the, you alluded to...

RG: The one sentence summary, right?

JK: Right. So, you get a few bumper stickers and that's not meant to be a barb at anyone, it just shows the utility and working your way back through the older books to see what is useful. Again, where I'm looking at the Pacific War in World War II, looking at the strategy, the naval logistics and the operations, you can see right where that goes back to what I was talking about with Mahan and Corbett, because it again, it's a system, but you can't get that until you work your way back through the past material.

RG: Gotcha.

TB: The other thing I would add to that is, we are not limiting ourselves to books on this either.

RG: Good.

TB: In some cases it could be old articles that used to be highly influential, so, I think I mentioned in the introductory article about it, C. Vann Woodward's book *The Age of Reinterpretation* has been used a lot to pirate out a single line where he talks about the Americans had this era of free security where the oceans, where the Atlantic and the Pacific provided the United States with these buffers and allowed us to not spend that much on security, to keep a small army and at times a very small navy, but that that era had ended. Well, that article was about a whole lot more than just that, and it's definitely... and why the change, the end of the era of free security changes the way that we have to interpret everything. Now I would even make the case, you could say that Woodward was wrong, that there was never free security for the United States and that's kind of a mistake, and we shouldn't be operating under that illusion, so that's an example. I think one that we had to know very well when I was in grad school was William Leuchtenburg's *Analogue of War* about how the New Deal used this terminology, the metaphor of war to describe how it was fighting the Depression and how important that book was. And you see this intersection of military and political affairs, the way that we talk about stuff now. You can see this, and obviously this is obvious everybody now, but we have a war on poverty, war on drugs, all of these things and using that terminology kind of comes out of World War I where you mobilize the society a lot more and how that changes the way we look at stuff. So, William Leuchtenburg's article is a really interesting one. It's kind of buried in a couple places it's in an edited collection, a couple of edited collections if you want to go find it. But it was one that we had to know kind of backward and forward, and I don't see a lot of people talking about it and it's an interesting one. It would be great to talk about some more.

RG: If anybody is out there listening and wants to talk about William Leuchtenburg and the concept of war and the New Deal, contact Dr. Tom Brusino.

TB: I ruthlessly pirated that title to say that in World War II, interestingly, I flipped it around and wrote an article called "The Analogue of Work" which talked about how World War II soldiers coming out of the Depression, talked about war in terms of a job to finish, a job to do, which is not necessarily the terminology people used in the past and this has great impacts on how we do things today. We talk about how do you motivate soldiers? Do they talk about causes? And ever since really World War I, American soldiers have been wary about talking about causes and war and talking in large terms about we're fighting. This is kind of come back in recent years but nothing like what it used to be when you go back to the Civil War and these guys talking about fighting for this experiment of liberty, fighting for the country and these things. I think that's

another one that's interesting, that all those intersections that all comes out from just reading a single article to understand the historiography of the New Deal.

RG: John, you've got something there in front of you that looks kind of interesting.

JK: Yeah, Tom had mentioned looking at other sources, and like a lot of us after 9/11 and fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, we had a lot of learning to do and going back and looking at the irregular warfare history. I had to work on doctrine, counterinsurgency doctrine in those days, and I went back to some of the old classics there, *War in the Shadows*, and just walking my way through the history bit. One in particular that stood out that's a little bit different kind of source was RAND did a counterinsurgency symposium in 1962, and it really had a whole host of interesting characters to include Galula was there, Kitson was there, Lansdale was there, and they posed several rather pointed questions and got some really interesting answers to those questions and it was tremendously useful for I think anyone studying irregular warfare but as someone trying to write doctrine about specifically, counterinsurgency at the time. So, that's just another example of good sources that we can take a look at it and contextualize to figure out are these useful to us today? How can we draw lessons from them? What do we have to be careful about?

TB: So, I would say this falls into another category of contributions we're looking for which is underrated, not just forgotten books, books that used to be classics that everybody talked about, or readings that used to be classics that everybody talked about. But it's also just the ones that never got the love they should have in the first place, and so that's a good one I know you had mentioned another one, Bernard Fall, that you were talking about.

JK: Right. That one in particular, when people were studying counterinsurgency in those days, *Street Without Joy* is one that's well known and quite useful. But like Mahan and Corbett and others, Fall wrote a whole series of books on Vietnam, and I like *Reflections on War*, one of those that was published after the fact and was a series of other articles or essays, but some of those contain some very informative ideas for your study of the topic, kind of not unlike Coffman's book as well.

TB: (24:07) Yeah, and passes a collection of his essays. Mac Coffman, Edward M. Coffman's book. And we were talking about this, and again to sort of prompt this in our potential contributors out there, the people coming in, I would think of it this way, sometimes, and we've all had this experience, any time you write up a book, a dissertation, even articles, a lot of times you have an argument you're trying to make and along the way, almost inevitably, you have a panic attack halfway through when you find some title and you go, oh wow, this already made the argument that I want to make and maybe I should just throw away what I'm getting ready to do, but usually the case with those is that they're insightful in some other way, they're not exactly

aligned with what you're trying to say, but they're amazing sources that no one had looked at. I think I mentioned in the essay about John McCauley Palmer's book, it's Washington, Lincoln and Wilson, three war statesmen, that's not really what the books about, it's much more about the development of American military policy, especially in relation to how you deal with raising a large army, the historical problem, the classic problem is what do you do in the event that we were going to keep a small army. We don't want large standing armies, we still have a hostility to that in a lot of ways, sort of manifests now in the fact that we can't have a general staff, an overall general staff. Our Joint Chiefs of Staff is not a general staff in the way that we normally think of it, but he's talking about how do you raise armies and the different arguments about it, and what Washington actually meant by a "well-regulated militia," and he goes in and pulls out this document, and the book is amazing for the stuff that comes into. And he touches a whole bunch of arguments that I think, I mean I can't believe that people haven't read this book and studied it and thought about it because it's such an interesting one. And if you think that John McCauley Palmer is not important, he is the guy who writes the National Security Act of 1916. He's one of the primary authors of those acts and national security. Is that what it was called? The National Defense Act.

RG: So, is this after his experience in the first World War? He decides to contextualize the work that he did by looking at Lincoln and Washington as previous presidents?

TB: For him it's part of a whole series of writings he did about this issue. So, he's pre-World War I and then the way they revise it in 1920, the National Defense Act, the National Security Act, we can use different names for these things. But the way he talks about how that informed his activities in that throughout. But he's not necessarily using it to make that case and to some degree, he is, yes he is justifying the approach that they take, but he also along the way touches on a whole bunch of other activities including, something for me, an observation I think is really interesting in that book, which you don't necessarily think of which is that, by historical accident, the Battle of Antietam happens, I think 18 months into the American Civil War, and it's this great example of a chance for the North to maybe win the war outright by defeating the Army of Northern Virginia. And they're not able to, and he says one of the reasons that they're not able to, he points out, is because of poor staff work, poor systems of how to run a large field army that McClellan suffers with even with the improvements he made to the Army of the Potomac. And then he points out that the Meuse-Argonne campaign starts off almost exactly 18 months after the Americans enter the war. And the big difference is, and he makes this point, is that the war ends 40 days later.

RG: Because they had better staff work, better preparation.

TB: Because they were able to better do this stuff and he talks about why they were better. It's interesting. It's almost exactly the argument I'm making in a book on Meuse-Argonne right now.

So, maybe don't read Palmer's book, wait for mine, but you get the idea of what we are talking about. He has a lot of other wide-ranging issues that are in that book and it's amazing what he covers and it just kind of been forgotten. So underrated books are somethings that are really useful, those ones you find along the way and go, oh man, yeah, I wish I'd known about this first, as opposed to having to dig through, like John said, you're digging through footnotes and you go back and back and back. And one of those things that happens with footnotes to, I think is that the footnote that initially would have had seven titles in it, you start cutting off those first couple, the older ones, you are like yeah, they have been passed by, and then you lose something along the way. Especially because back in the day, there was great value in how they put together books based on newspapers in a way we don't as much now, and so we lose something there because we're not going through the New York Times as exhaustively as they did back in the day. So, things like that.

RG: So, overrated, underrated, forgotten, or too well remembered, or imperfectly remembered, right, any number of these kind of texts can be candidates for discussion on the Dusty Shelves.

TB: Right, and there's a couple of others I want to throw in there. One would be things that people have found to be really really useful for teaching. So sometimes, there are just books, and I mention I think Walter McDougall, *Promise and Crusader State*, which isn't that old of a book, it's not that dusty of a one, but it is one that I think is amazing for getting people to think about American foreign policy traditions and the sort of continuities and discontinuities in American foreign policy. So, that was one example there. So, there's that one, and then the sort of final category is documents where we go back to the original dusty shelves. So, stuff like, we talked about forgotten speeches that the military leaders or political leaders used back in the past that were interesting. William Tecumseh Sherman's talk at the opening of what became the Command and General Staff College is a really interesting one, talks a lot about approaches to how you teach military ops, how you develop military officers. We're working right now on a cartoon, we are going to have a podcast about a cartoon that got sent around the other day that's just a political cartoon, was an interesting one it has George C. Marshall and Douglas MacArthur in it, and we're going to talk about that one later. So, anything like that. Those kinds of things are what we're talking about.

RG: Great. Well, so Dusty Shelves from the War Room. If you are interested in contributing, please contact our two guests today Dr. Tom Bruscino and Colonel John Klug. Even if you are not contributing, please check out the War Room so that you can see the latest additions to the Dusty Shelves. But that should get people going for today, so thanks a lot for joining us today, Tom and John, and thanks to all of you for joining us for this edition of A Better Peace, the name that we're going to keep for the time being whether Tom Bruscino likes it or not. Please tune in next time, but until next time, for the War Room, the US Army War College, I'm Ron Granieri. Thanks for joining us.