



LYKKE'S LITTLE THREE-LEGGED STOOL (PART 2)

By Arthur F Lykke, Jr., Mark Duckenfield and Jacqueline E. Whitt January 24, 2020
<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/podcasts/lykke-stool-pt-2/>

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Welcome to A Better Peace the War Room podcast, and to the second part of our interview with Retired Army Colonel Art Lykke, War Room Editor-in-chief Jacqueline Whitt and the Chair of the Department of National Security and Strategy Mark Duckenfield. Lykke, a former instructor at the U.S. Army War College, is the creator of the three-legged stool model that incorporates ends, ways and means as the foundational elements of strategy. In our previous episode, Art explained his inspiration for the model and just how it came to be central to modern-day conversations about national security. We'll continue the conversation in this episode with Mark explaining how the stool is still prevalent in the Army War College.

Mark Duckenfield: Our students now, many of them, have given their faculty members as a gift, a three-legged stool. I go around the department visiting offices and I see lots of uneven three-legged stools as gifts from the seminars to their faculty members. I don't think there's a War College student who graduates without being aware of the three-legged stool. In this regard, it serves as a leaping off point in our class for discussions and there's been some criticism of the stool model in terms of thinking about strategy. How might you respond to people who say that it's just not a good model or it's not a useful model? I'm sure you've seen this over the years.

Arthur Lykke: Yes, I've had some criticism and so forth, but it doesn't really bother me at all because I talked back to them, I said look it can't be all that bad. It's been used by the Army War College now for about almost 40 years, and it was useful to the Senate Armed Services Committee and so forth. Then I say to them, this was never meant to be the be-all and end-all. Let's remember this title of my little four-page magnum opus, it turned out to be, on the three-legged stool and strategy. It was entitled "Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy." It was never meant to be the final solution. So, if you want to join the crowd and come on in and let's try to make it better, that's fine, but I see no problem with it right now. It's being in use and it's useful and the students remember it.

Jacqueline Whitt: So, if you were to talk to our Army War College students today, Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels, civilians and international students, what would be the things that you would want them to think about or to remember? What do you think is maybe most important for them?

AL: I'm laughing now because I want them to be just exactly who they are. I am amazed at the ability of War College students. They can do anything and everything that you ask and the faculty must remember that and push them and demand the best. Now for instance, that little stool being around, okay, I love the humor of the Army War College students. One day in one of my very best seminars, I walked on in and a student got up very formally and said, Sir, we would like to make a presentation to you. I said that would be wonderful and he started talking, making a wonderful speech and then he said we have found an emblem here that just demonstrates your ability and your background and the stool and so forth and he opened up a kind of a big box and in the box was a little beautiful little three-legged stool which I still have today. I looked at it carefully and then realized there were three legs of course, and the top of the stool had been cut in half so there was not a full circle, there was a semicircle. It was found I think in a florist shop some way for decorating with flowers and so forth and so on. But of course, it hit me right away what they were doing, and I said to them, well, I wonder what kind of a strategist would use a stool shaped like this and they started to giggle. I knew I was onto something. So, I said, you are giving me this because you realize that I am a half-assed strategist and they just roared. I got it. That was what they were trying to prove. I love the spirit of the War College students. They'll do anything that you ask them, but to the faculty, make them do it. Make them understand that this is not just a year of reflection and being with your family and having fun and so forth, this is a year of preparation for the senior leadership of the Army for years to come. And you got to push them. You have to demand that they think. I had a wonderful experience. I just came to the War College and there was a faculty member leaving after three years who I had known before. He became a four-star general and he said, Art, I want to tell you something. He said the War College and the students are not interested in what *you* think. *You've* got to get after the students and find out what *they* think and if they're not thinking, you got to make them think. He said there is a problem here with some instructors who have been in other institutions and teaching and so forth. They tend to lecture to the students again and again and again for most of the period. He said, that's not what we need. You got to get the War College students to think. So, I would go after that every time. What are you thinking about? And I would tell them, you can do a better job than the Pentagon. And they'd say why, how come? And we'd discuss it why they can because there is no interservice rivalry here. We're a member of a team and you've got to be a team member.

JW: I think that's such an interesting way to think about it. I'm struck by how similar our discussions are amongst the faculty right now, about asking students to think critically, to think carefully, to think through problems, that it's not right, it's not a year off, there's plenty of time,

Carlisle is a lovely place, but that it's a really important year for their professional development. What would you ask students to do during their year here? To think hard? What else?

AL: Of course. General DeWitt Smith was my first commandant to work for way back in 1976, the 200th birthday of our country. Wonderful man who was a commandant for a while and then left to be the Army DCSPER and then came on back after one year as a three-star general. He's a wonderful man and he kept on saying you got to have the right atmosphere here for taking care of your family, meeting your family again, getting on with them, but also thinking and you got to push them. For instance, if we were having a sequence of problems and working sessions on strategy, I would pull out, is there still a little blue book that's the national military strategy or something like that, that's derived in the Pentagon and I'd say, you are going to do a better job than this right here. And they'd kind of gasp and say why, how can we do that? I said because there's no interservice rivalry. We're all a member of a team here and think of the teamwork that we have. This is not known. Why do we think that? It's not just Army at the Army War College. We have navy personnel, air force personnel, civilian personnel in the government and the wonderful addition in 1978 of a new program, called the International Fellows Program. We started off with six students, and it's now grown I believe, Mark, it's up to about 80 or something.

MD: 78 to 80.

JW: Almost.

AL: Right. That's a fantastic program. Think what we are doing. We're building friendships to all of those future generals and leaders of their country. It's a tremendous idea. So, we have to keep on working here. But I keep on urging the faculty, you got to push them. You have to demand the best. Now may I just say this too, as far as teaching the students and so forth, I don't think it's necessary to be with them all of the time. When they're given a problem, it's not necessary to monitor it every second of every day.

JW: You don't have to look over their shoulder the whole time.

AL: Thank you for saying that. I really mean that because nobody really wants to have their rating officer watching them all the time, right? And that's what they have here oftentimes. I would oftentimes say my students, here's what we're going to do: I want you to come up with the best strategic thought in a lecture of about 15-20 minutes in two days and I want you to be able to do a better job than is produced in the Pentagon. And if you have any questions at all, I can always be reached in my office, telephone number so forth and so on. But when you do that, you have to make crystal clear exactly what you want and exactly what you expect, and guess what? They will do it. When pushed or asked or coerced or begged to do it, they will do it.

JW: I'm pretty constantly amazed at the work that our students can produce when they put their minds to it and when they're asked to do hard things.

AL: Exactly, you are right. I couldn't agree with you more. It's wonderful.

JW: And I really like the idea of asking them to do a better job than the Pentagon as the standard, that that's an instruction that we could give them. I think I'll adopt that.

AL: Wonderful, because well, at first, they will not believe it. And then I'll say let's have a little gab session right here, let's think it out. What are the problems in the Pentagon? Because I've been there and had the fights with the other staff and so forth. After one all-night session of action officers meeting, the word went out from the other services, please don't send Lykke down as an action officer for the Army.

JW: We'll be there all night?

AL: For sure, right.

JW: Earlier on, you mentioned that you really enjoyed Sun Tzu as a strategist. Are there other strategists or thinkers that you really remember and enjoyed teaching about or learning more about while you were here?

AL: Sure. There was a Brit, BH Liddell Hart, I think was his name, and he was very helpful. Clausewitz of course. Now I should mention, one of the international fellows from Germany, came here 15-20 years ago, and he asked me to come back to Germany and give a lecture. I said of course I will. What is the group I'll be talking with? And he says, the Clausewitz Association which was kind of... because I have not been a big fan of Clausewitz. I was quoted in the Washington Post one day when they had a person come up and talk to the faculty about Clausewitz and strategy. And I said there are an awful lot of Clausewitz nuts around here. We think he is the be-all and end-all and he's not. He's worthwhile to study and so forth but he's not the greatest of all time. And there I was going to speak before the Clausewitz Association, and I did.

JW: It's close to heresy in some circles to say that Clausewitz isn't the greatest of all time.

AL: Oh, that's for sure. So, I went there. A very helpful general helped me get my slides in order in an air machine which is different than ours, but I got it all set on up and I spoke to them and gave them my pitch in English, of course. And they were taking notes. I thought it went over pretty good. And then I was surprised at the end of the conference when a general got up and he

was reviewing the conference and was mentioning the different lectures and then he said something, and then on the second day we were fortunate to have Colonel Lykke from the Army War College come and speak about strategy. And there was a thunderous amount of noise. Everybody was banging on the tables. I didn't know that was a good thing. I thought it was that they were angry with me or something like that. I was told later on, no that's an expression of goodwill and happiness and thankfulness for coming over here. Even though I've not been the most ardent Clausewitz fan in the world, it was a wonderful experience and they treated me with great respect and great honor.

JW: That's fantastic. Mark, anything else?

MD: You have talked about challenging students, but I was wondering, as a faculty member, what sort of ideas or concepts did you find difficult to teach to challenge students with?

AL: I really didn't find any difficulty with the students. They were wonderful as long as they were challenged, and they knew that you were in their best interest. May I just say a quick word there. It's so important to get to know your students. There used to be a little pamphlet. It was called the biographical sketches. Do you still have those?

JW: They are on the computer now. We still have biographies for the students.

AL: I think when you get a copy of that thing and you see the 15-20 students that you going to be having, you got to study that in great detail and memorize almost everything. You've got to know your students, what their strong points are, where they've been, where they've been stationed before, what jobs they had. And I always tried to have one interesting subject from their background that I could question them on to have something to talk about with them. It showed that I was interested in them as people. Another subject came to mind here. You're trying to build them as a team. If you played football in high school, you know there might be a star quarterback or a running back, halfback, but even you as an insignificant lineman have an important job along the way and it's a team effort. If you get that across, everybody's got to be a team member here. I was helped out tremendously one year by a female in the class. She put her hand up one day to study. This was a very good, darn sharp seminar group, and they had strong points and weak points as far as individuals. But this one day she raised her hand and said, may I please make a statement to Bob who was another student, a male student who was very sharp but kind of on the quiet side, didn't do all that much speaking but a wonderful student. So, this young lady who became a bird colonel while she was at the War College, and she said, Bob, I want to talk to you directly here. Every time you open your mouth and speak, I learn something and I'm asking you fervently, please speak more often because I want to learn and you are a fantastic teacher, so please speak more. How could I get a better help than that?

JW: Right. I think it's a conversation we have with lots of our quiet, introverted students is you have things to say and we would like to hear from you.

AL: And guess what? Bob started talking more often.

JW: When it's students who help each other understand that rather than just from faculty, I think it's really important.

AL: And guess what? That young lady became G-2 of the whole U.S. Army later on. Wonderful lady.

JW: So, lots to learn from everyone who's at the table.

AL: Oh, gosh yeah.

JW: I'm going to ask you one more question that we didn't that we didn't plan for. You've lived in Carlisle for a long time. Are there things about the town or secret spots or things that you enjoy that you think our students or our faculty here should take advantage of?

AL: Oh, okay this goes way back. At first when I was here, if you wanted to get out information to your students, the best way to do it was to make 16 copies.

JW: Still may be the best way to get information out.

AL: And then fold them into small pieces so you could go down to the mail room and stuff them into each individual mailbox. That was the fastest way. And then along came something called a computer and so forth and so on. Although I wasn't the first one to use it, I did realize that was a fantastic opportunity for fast communication, so I started something that was fun for me, maybe for my students to. I had been here giving for quite some time and I wanted to let them know the highlights, the best restaurants or for instance, there was a wonderful area that used to be for a flea market, a large flea market. I would put out a little note at least once a week. Why don't you try this? Go to this restaurant, they're having a special this week. Why don't you try, if you want to look for odds and ends, take a look at the flea market up the road? It's a wonderful opportunity to try to get closer to your students and you got to build teamwork. They have to be a member of a team. If you show that you're making an effort, they'll make an effort.

JW: I think that's great advice.

MD: I just have one final question for you. Massey's or Leo's? Which do you prefer?

AL: My home was just off of the football field of Dickinson College in the 700 block of West South Street which was about a block and a half or two blocks from Massey's. Massey's frozen custard is to die for.

JW: For those of you who aren't local, Massey's is a frozen custard place in Carlisle, and Leo's is ice cream and they're very close together, and people have very, very strong opinions about which one they prefer.

AL: Right.

JW: And so, we have Art who has weighed in on the side of Massey's, I believe. Is that one of your favorite places?

AL: Oh, absolutely.

JW: It's pretty good if you're in the area. You should take a visit. Well, Art, I'm going to wrap up our podcast today. It's been a real pleasure to talk to you. I've learned a lot about the history of the Army War College, about the way things used to be and also the way things have changed but in many ways I'm struck by how many things are still the same, the things I learn from my students, the things my students learn from each other, the importance of the seminar and building the team that we have here in Carlisle and the idea of what the Army War College is really supposed to be for this year, for our students. So, thank you so much for taking the time this afternoon to sit down with Mark and with me and we hope you have an enjoyable rest of the day and happy fall.

AL: May I just say it has been an extremely wonderful pleasure for me to do this and I thank you for letting me do that.

JW: It's absolutely my pleasure. We'll get this all edited and put out for the world and then we can keep propagating the three-legged stool and the wonders of the Army War College. Alright, so this is Jackie Whitt. I'm signing off for us at War Room. We'll hope you'll join us next time.