



HONORING THE PAST WHILE SPEAKING TO THE FUTURE

By Rob Gerlach, Silas Martinez and Ron Granieri, June 9, 2021
<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/podcasts/museums/>

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Ron Granieri: Welcome to A Better Peace, the War Room podcast. I'm **Ron Granieri** Professor of History at the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College and Podcast Editor of the War Room. It's a pleasure to have you with us. Ever since the establishment of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973, the Army has faced the challenge of how to appeal to and attract the widest possible range of new recruits. Our guest today, **Lieutenant Colonel Robert Gerlach** of the Army War College Class of 2021 has conducted special research on this topic as a strategy research project and produced, which is very unusual for the War College, a video which demonstrates how the Army can use museums as a public facing institution to attract new recruits. To talk about how that should work and what inspired him to do that work we have with us Lieutenant Colonel Gerlach and his project advisor **Colonel Silas Martinez**. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Gerlach is an Army reservist who received a direct commission as a medical service officer in 2001. Prior to his arrival at Carlisle Barracks, he was assigned to the newly formed Army Enterprise Marketing Office in Chicago, IL where he developed strategic marketing programs. Employed by Sears since 1986, he is a divisional vice president in charge of various marketing programs. Colonel Silas Martinez, who advised Lieutenant Colonel Gerlach's research project, is the director of leader development at the U.S. Army War College. Interested in research on talent management and selection. Welcome to A Better Peace, gentlemen.

Lt. Col. Robert Gerlach. Thank you.

Silas Martinez: Hello.

RG: So Rob, I want to start with you. How did you decide to make this the topic of your research? Usually strategy research projects are written essays. What made you decide that this had to be done in a different format?

Lt. Col. RG: So I had met with the honorable Dr. Wardynski, who was at that time was in charge of manpower and reserve affairs for the Army—Assistant Secretary—and I asked the

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question, what problem can I solve for the Army? So the inspiration really came from Dr. Wardynski to focus on museums and for me to take it from there. So he described how we have this asset. It's a great asset and there's many, many museums in the inventory. However, there's an opportunity there to capture that enthusiasm someone might feel when going through the museum. And so I took a look at what could be done and how would you approach it. And so essentially I said, alright, so I came up with some strategies, researched it and then asked, what's the best way of describing this to an audience and a paper just wouldn't have cut it. Visual, sound, graphics and so I sought special permission to get a video completed and went through my project advisor, Col. Martinez, and went from there.

RG: Silas, I want to ask you, when Rob came to you for this project—on the one hand it's talent management, it's about selection, but it was something completely new and different—what was it like to advise this project, to shepherd it to its conclusion?

SM: Well, I have to say, as an advisor and faculty member here, I'm always interested in folks who want to solve real problems. And this is a real problem related to talent management in that it always starts with accessions. So last year we did a related project on how the Accessions Command kind of revamped their approach in order to meet their recruiting goal. So this is a real problem. It is related to my interests. It had a real customer. Rob mentioned that it was for the ASA(M&RA) and they had some real money to put behind it and so the idea of doing this in a video format because I think that that had a chance of being viewed at the upper levels, folks don't have time to read 25 page papers but often will have time to watch a 10 minute video, particularly if it's compelling as this one is, those things all kind of got me excited to be involved in this.

RG: Did you face any pushback from the administration about accepting a video as a research project?

SM: No real pushback, but as far as I know, this is the first video SRP to be done. So there are some procedures for getting permission to do it. So outside the hey, this is what I want to do, get permission from the Dean kind of thing, there was no pushback. There was a little bit more administrative upfront, but once we're able to satisfy what the requirements were, who the customer was, what we would be delivering, it was pretty easy to get it approved.

RG: Rob, when I read your bio, there's this interesting division. On the one hand, it's obvious why you might be interested in this topic as someone who is interested in marketing in his civilian life, but how did you get from a medical service officer to the Army Enterprise Marketing Office?

Lt. Col. RG: Yeah so those are completely unrelated activities and honestly, the way that I ended up at the AEMO Office or the Army Enterprise Marketing Office was seeking out free food and drinks one night in Washington D.C. So I was there supporting Army Reserve Medical Command and one of the folks that worked for me said, hey, I've got a friend that is a liaison between the senator's offices and the Army, can I go? And I said, sure, as long as I'm your plus one. So there I am eating my pig in a blanket and having my free drink and some senators walk in and the Secretary of the Army and Chief of Staff of the Army and other folks. So I ended up having a conversation or two and was asked by the Secretary to come to see if I could help and the word help is very open ended. Subsequently, I had a coffee with the general that is in charge of Army Enterprise Marketing and ended up on a tour there and it was a great privilege and a great experience and a whole bunch of talented people in AEMO working with a great agency. It was there where I met Dr. Wardynski and so when I arrived at the War College, I reached out to him about doing a project. So it was really about free drinks and food that led me here. Nothing to do with medical.

RG: So what I'm thinking is perhaps there might be a future SRP for somebody about the appropriate canapé menus in order to attract recruits to the armed forces.

Lt. Col. Yes, that will also be a video.

RG: So I want to talk about the making of the video in a second, but before that, you hit on the use of museums in the fact that there are these Army museums or museums affiliated with the Army related to military questions in various locations around the country. How had the Army, based on your research, how had the army viewed the purpose of these museums before you came along and said they could be used as a recruiting tool?

Lt. Col. RG: Sure. Today, Army museums are basically a tribute to history and they also honor those who have served and so you've got different displays at different bases based on what they stand for. So you've got infantry and you've got transportation, so each of those has their own approach to displaying artifacts that are important to their history or again, honoring those who have nobly served. And so the research questions were basically, if you have somebody touring a museum, what's the outlet for them to express interest? Or just as importantly, if an influencer is touring a museum, the parent of somebody who might be eligible or may want to go into the military, what's the outlet there to learn more or do more? And so the approach that I took was to say if I were walking through a museum and I was interested in the Army, what would I do? I suppose I would leave there and go discuss things with a recruiter. But part of the underpinnings of this also were to say, if you were touring a museum, who's best to tell that story and lead you down the road to learning more? And so I said, alright, what if you had the soldiers of today telling the story of the soldiers of yesterday? So you would walk up to a display and there's an app and we call it the VIP App. The VIP app is an existing app for another purpose I can

describe later, but essentially you would walk up, hit a QR code, that QR code would pop a video about that display, and again a soldier of today telling the story of yesterday, and then say, would you like to learn more about Army jobs? Or would you like to learn more about the jobs that made this possible? The majority of displays in museums are combat arms, but the majority of jobs in the Army are actually support. So there's an opportunity to say, would you like to learn about all the different jobs that made this particular weapon system possible? There are engineers, there are potentially medical folks in the sense that there's related industry or related jobs to whatever that weapon system does, whatever that is. So exposing people to other roles in the military through this app and videos and entertaining them was one major component. The other component to this was an element of gamification, and gamification is taking average things and turning them into fun or exciting games or something along those lines. So essentially what I said was, what if we had a system where you could gain points for touring a museum or get points for challenges such as STEM challenges that someone might go through if they were in a particular job in the military? So then you take all that data and you say, okay, this person just toured this museum, they were interested in these displays, they scored this on STEM, here are the roles in the military they might actually be qualified for. And so there's an element of discovery. There's an element of gamification. There's an element of entertainment. And there's an element of getting somebody closer to having that conversation with a recruiter.

RG: Silas, I want to bring you in on this because I'm curious about what kind of research existed since you study talent management, you study selection and retention, what kind of research existed before about the way that gamification or these kinds of visual stimuli can help to both attract possible recruits, but also to go on to that next step that Rob was just talking about, maybe even give you some insight into who these people are so that you can make a more targeted approach to them later?

SM: Well, the project that we did with recruiting command last year talked about the formation of two specific teams. One of them was involved in cross fitting games, but the other one was involved in actual video games. And so one of the problems that we found was the leads created by folks interested in either of those teams, they had a hard time capitalizing on those leads. And we ran into a similar problem here, but a slightly different one. Maybe Rob will talk about this later, but it is how do we process or interact with children—those who may be under 18—legally, when they show interest, but we really can't be seen to be recruiting minors at this point? So a direct answer to your question, it's a largely undeveloped field as it relates to our Army. And so this is kind of another way to try to figure how do we leverage technology ethically and legally in a way that gives a greater return on investment for things that the Army is already doing?

RG: Right. Because the idea is if I understand you, Rob, is you want to make sure that the videos or whatever the information that people are getting is giving them some straight information

about careers in the Army—since the games are usually about combat, but the Army is not 100% about combat and so many people are in support positions. So having real live existing Army folks explain what it's like to be in the Army, and then finding ways to get that information out to people can be very positive. So which museums did you end up including in this report? Just to start off.

Lt. Col. RG: Sure, so a couple of things first. One of the aims of this is to take the museum and the content and bring it to life so that people want to learn more. On goarmy.com, there's actually a lot of content there, so this helps lead people to some of the existing content as well. The museums that I looked at were the Army National Museum that just opened up in November and the Army Heritage Museum here in Carlisle, AHEC. And actually, we just got the green light to go forward with a pilot in both of those museums, so I'm coming up right now with what that will look like, kind of a skinny down version to get some learning going. I also toured the United States Marine Museum just to get some inspiration on what they're doing. And then I've also been to other museums just throughout my career, Fort Sam Houston, just different museums, but essentially those two, the AHEC and the National will be the two that will pilot. The Marine Museum I toured because they have some good stuff. There's inspiration everywhere. They have some good stuff on what it's like to go through basic training, but those were the two that I focused on.

RG: So when you think about other museums... because a question that I'm curious about is certain museums... we spoke beforehand about the First Division Museum outside of Chicago at Cantigny, which is very much a History Museum of a particular unit, and what I've never understood, and perhaps a lot of our listeners have never understood, is what is the relationship between those kinds of history museums and the Army now? Obviously they're not formally run by the Army, but it is Army history. How high up basically does the army's interest go in shaping these kinds of museums outside of the National Museum? Does the Army have a kind of overarching approach to these museums, even outside of whatever they do with recruiting? Does the army care? Does the Army oversee these museums, or are they left up to whatever the local board or the local organizers decide to do with them?

Lt. Col. RG: So I've been to Cantigny and I believe that's private, so there's no jurisdiction that I'm aware of over Cantigny. So the museums we will focus on are the ones that are actually run by the United States Army or owned by the United States Army. I suppose there could be application to these other museums, and it would be a case-by-case basis because they are private on whether they want it to participate or not.

There's certainly no jurisdiction, but there certainly may be some relationship somewhere, but we would have to seek that out. But the starting point would be those assets that we control.

RG: The two that you included in the video, AHEC here in Carlisle and also the National Museum, which is in Washington, is that right? Is that where the National Museum is?

Lt. Col. RG: Yes, just outside of Fort Belvoir.

RG: Just outside of Fort Belvoir. Thank you. If they're directly connected to the Army, are they run through the Office of the Secretary of the Army, or is it through a particular office of public affairs? What is the Army's institutional connection to those museums?

Lt. Col. RG: I don't know the exact reporting structure, but they are definitely under the direction of the Army.

RG: Okay. What you seem to be describing is that obviously these museums have always indirectly served the purpose of interesting people in the Army, so in that sense, indirectly perhaps they've always had a recruiting purpose, just nobody made it explicit. But what kind of larger policy changes would be necessary in order to make that connection to explicit recruiting lead generation or whatever to make that happen? What would the army have to do differently?

Lt. Col. RG: Yeah. That's a great question, and Silas alluded to this earlier about data and recruiting. We have a policy that we do not collect or store information on people under certain age—17 and a certain grade high school. You're going to have different folks coming into these museums. It could be a class trip of a bunch of freshman or sophomores, they might be underage for this, and they're going to want to download the app, and they're going to want to participate. The goal is to abide by the law and to have everything in place that would allow somebody to participate and still follow those rules. So my assertion in the video is... and I demonstrate a token system, so you can collect just one piece of information, you're not violating any rules from a PII perspective, but still allowing somebody to participate. Once they become of age, then we would collect more information. From an influence standpoint, you have people that are 15-16 years old who are interested in the military, but we want to make sure we're not contacting them or reaching out to them nor storing PII so that we follow the rules. Now those are the government rules. The rules outside the government say, age 13 and up you can start collecting information on people. However again, different rules for the government. So we would abide by those through this token system and ensure their age. One of the questions that would be asked is age and no other real identifiable information other than say an email. So once they become of age, then we'd say, hey, do you want to learn more and then follow a contact strategy therein. The current Army systems do flush out if someone is underage. So if somebody went to goarmy.com and filled out the online piece and said I want to be contacted and they say they're 15 years old, it's automatically going to filter them out. So how do you maintain that allowing somebody to participate but not again have some recruiter contact them? That's part of what I outlined in the video, how to do that.

RG: Silas, I have a bureaucratic question that might go to some of your deeper expertise here. Since I know that recruiting is often territorial, regional, office in the city, when somebody goes through goarmy.com rather than through their local recruiting office to make that initial contact, does goarmy.com pass that along to the nearest possible recruiter so that that recruiter can try to attract that person or is that just something that's done centrally? I'm curious if I am recruiting officer, I want to make sure that I'm hitting my numbers for my recruits and I wouldn't like there to be some kind of computerized system that's creaming off interested people.

SM: So last I checked, which was a lot closer to last year's project, we still haven't figured out how to leverage that and parse those out directly. Is it go to the recruiters who are in the area of the museum or the CrossFit event? Or is it based on their home address? So I really don't know the answer to your question, but we continue to try to solve these things in a way that makes the most good for the Army at large, as opposed to any individual recruiter.

RG: Right, because if you think about the National Museum, a tour group from Omaha is going to Washington and somebody goes through the process, then there's some recruiting officer back in Omaha who might miss out on somebody. But I guess these are sort of the second and third level practical things that would come if you get to the point that you can actually attract and collect this information when it's appropriate and use it when it's appropriate.

SM: As we continue to build these tools and continue to use them and continue to learn the lessons, we can begin to refine the procedures and policies as they relate to accessions and all that stuff, because what we don't want to do is create something that actually decreases faith in our military. You know, hey, I filled this thing out in D.C. and here it is four months later and I'm back home in Omaha and nobody has contacted me. So we really have to work at every level of the organization to make sure that we can actually maximize the benefit from these kinds of tools.

RG: Right and now back to you, Rob, on this as well. When you were talking to people about this project, did anybody say museums, that's not a good idea. Did you get any pushback at all? I guess that's the question.

Lt. Col. RG: Absolutely. There are folks that are concerned about marketing to under aged people. And if you think about museums, when would somebody go to a museum? Either on a class trip or with their parents or on their own. I had a conversation with some individuals who were in their early 20s at the AHEC and asked, if you saw QR code here, would you download an app to use it? Yes, I would. That sounds kind of like an audio tour, but with visual. Yes, it is. Would any of you be interested in joining the Army ever in your life? Two hands went up out of six kids and I say kids, early 20s. I don't know their status. I asked, have you made contact with anybody yet? No, not yet, but I would be interested in joining the Army. We absolutely will get

pushback because there are many reasons why those museums exist and honoring fallen soldiers is one of them which is an important element of the museum. So we do not want the museum to be associated with recruiting in an overt way. You don't want, hey, don't go to the museum, they're just going to call you to join the Army. What we want to do is we want to provide an outlet for people to learn more about army jobs and that might be information just for entertainment purposes or might be for career purposes, but we also want to be able to bottle that enthusiasm that somebody might feel after touring a museum and be able to engage them. If nothing else, it will enhance the museum experience for anybody that goes through it, because now you've got a soldier talking about today. And what we hope for is for somebody to say, hey, you know what? That's kind of interesting. I do want to learn more.

RG: Great. Silas?

SM: One of the things that we talked about when we were talking about, how do we identify who's really interested? There are different things you can do with the metrics. If you give them points for doing things, somebody who has racked up a large amount of points in a short amount of time, that might be a very strong indicator that somebody is really interested in the Army. On the other hand, if you have somebody who got a few points on the visit and then they never come back again, that might be a different kind of indicator. So we still have to really look at what does the pattern of the data say about a person's intent and over time build a corpus of knowledge about how do we interpret that so that we can actually begin to do exactly what Rob is saying, which is honor the purposes of the museum without cheapening them as a recruiting tool but also tapping into potentially highly interested folks who might not express interest in any other way.

RG: Right. As we get close to the end here, we're clearly at the beginning of something with this idea and so Rob, how do you imagine next steps?

Lt. Col. RG: So next steps are to take the AHEC and National Museum and get a pilot going on a limited basis. And as Silas alluded to, an element of this is the gamification of earning points. So you get points for viewing a display, you get points for visiting a museum. But this tool has application outside of a museum. With the app, you could go to a high school event and say okay, download the app and take the STEM challenge. Okay, who's good at science? Who's good at technology? And so next steps are getting these elements in place, testing them in two places, see what we can learn and then building from there, but also expanding it to beyond museums. We can tie some of the swag to earning points as well. So you earn a certain amount of points, you get a hat or an army shirt or backpack, whatever. So then it gives the swag a little bit more umph if you will. So getting the basics built at the museum level, getting the content built, testing, seeing what works and what doesn't work and then build it from there.

RG: The project itself, is it finished and polished enough that the public could see it or is this purely for internal study by people who are going to do this recruiting in the future?

Lt. Col. RG: It would be exposed to the public because it'll be implemented at the museum. It's right now in concept and there is what's called the VIP app, which is in use at the National Museum in conjunction with a game that's there. So we'll build on that app as the platform. The videos still have to be shot of displays, QR codes developed, so absolutely the public will see it once it's developed. I don't have a timeline. One of the things I'm working on over the next couple weeks is a timeline for how this gets built out.

RG: Great. The project itself, the video is what, 19 minutes long? Is that right?

Lt. Col. RG: A total of 19 minutes.

RG: How many hours did it take to put together that video? Just so that nobody gets the idea that this is somehow easier than writing a project paper.

Lt. Col. RG: Sure. Interesting you say that because I'm going to be putting together a one-pager for the CAD or the writing piece for the War College. If you were going to do a video, here's how you would do it. So in the studio was about 150 hours. The editor I worked with here, he logged 159, but we also had some time that we shot over at the AHEC. So about 150 hours in the studio, 9 hours of shooting and then another call it 5 hours of shooting over at the National which I did, and then also the Marine Museum, I took some video there and then about 30 hours of just doing storyboards. So all in with writing, with storyboards, the whole project was about 200 hours.

RG: A seriously labor-intensive project which you managed to complete on time no less. I guess that should be a tribute to your advisor.

Lt. Col. RG: Yes. Good coaching. I can always attribute good things to a good coach. What ended up happening was I came back from Christmas break earlier than other folks and was in the studio for two solid weeks while everybody was on break and got a big part of it done then. I actually started on the project in September because I had the meeting at the Pentagon and then started putting the storyboards together and then wasn't ready to do any editing until right after the Christmas holiday.

RG: Silas, any last word on the subject? Go ahead.

SM: Yeah, I was going to say you can attribute it to the coach, but that would not necessarily be true. Rob did a phenomenal job. He brought phenomenal energy to this and I have to say, this is an example of leveraging the skills that our reservists bring and harnessing those things to

improve the army so you know Rob's civilian skillset and civilian experiences are what even made him think, hey, how can I solve a problem for the army and we're benefiting from it. So I think it's a wonderful example all the way around of quality work, quality drive, great problem and then harnessing that reserve component, active component relationship to really improve our army.

RG: Outstanding, glad you brought that up and Rob, last word for you. What will you be doing after you complete your graduation at the Army War College in the next few weeks?

Lt. Col. RG: So military, I will be taking a battalion command and I'm privileged with command and then I will also be returning to my civilian employer, Transform Co., owner of Sears and Kmart.

RG: Well, Rob Gerlach, thank you for joining us on A Better Peace, and Silas Martinez, it's great to talk to you both about this project and about its future use for the Army. Thanks very much for joining us.

LT. Col. RG: Thank you.

SM: Thank you for having us.

RG: You bet. And thanks to all of you for listening in. Please send us your comments on this program and all the programs and send us your suggestions for future programs. Please subscribe to A Better Peace if you have not already and encourage your friends and family to subscribe as well. And after you have subscribed to A Better Peace on the podcatcher of your choice, please take a moment to rate and review this podcast because that's how more people can find out about us. We're always interested in widening this community for conversations like this one. We look forward to welcoming you to the next one and until next time, from the War Room, I'm Ron Granieri.