

*The Superintendency of Maxwell D. Taylor and the
Modernization of the Curriculum at the U.S. Military Academy*

CPT J. Kevin Goertemiller

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As World War II came to a close, the United States arguably emerged as the pre-eminent world power in every regard. The nation's military in particular had stood the test of time. The military infrastructure had not only survived a two-front war of the highest magnitude, but had proven itself as a reliable and worthy instrument of the nation's resolve. Emerging victorious and held in high regard as a result of the military's successes were numerous war heroes from the various services. The most colorful and diverse characters of the Army high command were very often graduates from the nation's military academy at West Point. Warfare on the grand scale of World War II offered an opportunity for these now legendary figures to display their battlefield prowess. As a result of the tremendous successes of the Army and its leadership, few considered the need for significant change at the institution which had produced so many of these stars.

In reality, the post-war Military Academy began changing prior to the end of the war. The most obvious change was a return to the four year curriculum as directed by Major General Francis B. Wilby. Wilby served as Superintendent for the duration of the war, but as the war ended, the Army chose a new Superintendent to carry on the proud traditions at the Academy. Major General Maxwell Taylor, a 1922 West Point graduate, had proven himself on the battlefields of Europe and was now given the opportunity to lead the post-war Academy.

Change was about to significantly impact the U.S. Military Academy. In particular, the curriculum underwent various modifications. During the superintendency of MG Taylor, the recommendations of the Post-war Curriculum Board and the Board of Consultants, the outside influences of General Dwight Eisenhower and others, and his

own personal experiences and character impacted the drive for change in both the structure and content of the curriculum at the United States Military Academy.

Born in Missouri in 1901, Maxwell Davenport Taylor was the only son of a small-town lawyer.¹ Taylor developed an interest in the military at a young age, listening to his grandfather who had served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.² While in sixth grade, Taylor stated that when he grew up, he wanted to be a Major General. He was fortunate enough to have a solid education that included a mastery of English. He later wrote one of his teachers that his early education prepared him well for his success in academics at West Point and other military schooling.³ Taylor graduated high school at an early age as the United States entered World War I. Although under-age, he registered for the draft. His education was strong in the liberal arts such as English, but it lacked the appropriate balance for admission to West Point. In order to make himself competitive for consideration, he attended a junior college to bolster his math and science credits. While applying for admission to West Point, he took entrance exams for both the Military Academy and Annapolis. Although passing the West Point exams, he failed the geography exam for Annapolis. He would often joke in his later years that he might have been an admiral instead of a general.⁴

As World War I came to a close Taylor gained admission to West Point.⁵ Taylor was an above average cadet, and despite his propensity for the humanities, the math and engineering heavy curriculum at West Point posed few difficulties for him. He graduated fourth in his class of 104, served as captain of the tennis team, and held the rank of Cadet

¹ Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 21. John M. Taylor, *General Maxwell Taylor: The Sword and the Pen* (New York: Bantam, 1991), 13.

² Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 23.

³ Taylor, *General Maxwell Taylor: The Sword and the Pen*, 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18. Although Taylor arrived at West Point in 1918 expecting to graduate in three years, the Academy returned to a four year curriculum and he chose to stay for the full four years.

Captain on the Regimental Staff during his first class year. Graduating in 1922, he branched Engineers, although he later transferred to Field Artillery.⁶ As a testament to his tremendous intellect, his classmates described him as "studious" and "one of the most learned scholars of the class."⁷

During his last three years as a cadet, the Superintendent was General Douglas MacArthur. Although he had virtually no contact with the Superintendent, Taylor witnessed some of the changes which occurred and benefited him at the Academy. During his tenure as Superintendent, the study of social sciences increased, intramural athletics became mandatory, and MacArthur attempted to change the plebe system. MacArthur, however, was a remote figure for cadets at the time and failed to thoroughly impress Taylor. Nonetheless, Taylor's work as Superintendent later reflected some of the changes MacArthur attempted to implement.⁸

Taylor was very proficient in foreign languages, and his later assignments included a tour as an instructor of foreign languages at West Point and a posting to Japan where he learned the language fluently in two years. Following command of an artillery battalion, Taylor joined the staff of the Army's Chief of Staff (CSA), General George C. Marshall. Marshall impressed Taylor, but Taylor also recognized the need to be more approachable than the CSA had been because he felt Marshall excessively intimidated his subordinates. Taylor next worked as Chief of Staff under Major General Matthew Ridgeway with the 82nd Airborne Division when the U.S. entered World War II. During the Allied assaults on Sicily, he was the 82nd's Assistant Division Commander. Just prior to D-Day, General

⁶ Ibid., 18,20-21,25.

⁷ United States Military Academy, *Howitzer* (New York: Schilling Press, 1922), 191.

⁸ Taylor, *General Maxwell Taylor: The Sword and the Pen*, 20.

Eisenhower chose Taylor to command the 101st Airborne Division, a position he held until the end of the war.⁹

According to his soldiers and officers, Major General Taylor was a demanding leader who stressed attention to detail. Although not extremely popular and "not a GI's soldier," he demanded respect as a "cool professional." His own aide regarded him as being "excessively modest."¹⁰ His combat record as one of the pioneers of the Army's new airborne infantry was nonetheless extensive and distinguished. General Marshall recognized his accomplishments and potential for future service by selecting him as the 40th Superintendent to succeed Major General Francis Wilby. When Taylor assumed his duties at West Point on 4 September 1945, he was the second youngest to ever hold the position.¹¹

His selection as Superintendent flattered Maxwell Taylor, and he valued the independence of the position, having to answer only to the CSA and the Secretary of War. Throughout his tenure, Taylor focused more on curriculum changes and less on administrative changes, although he made some significant contributions to both.¹² His initial focus as Superintendent was to stress "development of character and integrity, give a balanced liberal education in the arts and sciences, and provide a broad, basic education...in the technical duties of junior officers..."¹³ This was very much in line with the Academy's mission outlined by the War Department in 1940.¹⁴ Taylor regarded West Point as a "liberal educational institution" and not a "trade school" focused on

⁹ Ibid., 25,28,37,43,48,54,76-77.

¹⁰ Ibid., 149.

¹¹ Ibid., 152. MacArthur was the youngest Superintendent in the history of the Academy.

¹² Ibid., 152,154.

¹³ Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 113.

¹⁴ Maxwell D. Taylor, *Memorandum to the Director of Organization and Training, War Department General Staff, Subject: Survey of the Current Situation at the U.S. Military Academy* (USMA Library Special Collections: 16 July 1946).

producing cadets who were experts in their particular branch of specialty.¹⁵ This technical expertise would, in his opinion, be taught after cadets left West Point. Taylor would later refer to his impact on the curriculum as a "slight but perceptible shift toward the social sciences..."¹⁶

Major General Taylor made many contributions as Superintendent from 1945 until early 1949. His primary focus and most lasting influences involved changes in the academic structure and curriculum of the Academy in the post-war era. Although the War Department approved any significant change to the curriculum or structure of the Academy, the Academic Board typically had overwhelming influence and was the driving force behind most changes throughout the history of the Academy. Taylor came to West Point with an agenda which included decreasing the overwhelming influence of the Academic Board. He knew what he wanted to change and he wasted no time in setting his plan in motion. Within days of his arrival at West Point, he created the position of Dean of the Academic Board and the number of permanent professors eventually expanded. The Academy soon abandoned the Three Year Program and returned to the Four Year Course beginning with the split of the Class of 1947. In 1946, the Academy initiated a formal program of military leadership and psychology at the urging of the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Dwight Eisenhower. The curriculum in general made a significant shift toward liberal subjects during Taylor's superintendency. These changes were certainly not the only ones to be made in the course of the next few years after Taylor's return, but they proved to be the most significant and lasting of his changes leading to a more balanced and complete curriculum at the Academy.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 113.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

Throughout his tenure as Superintendent, Maxwell Taylor received some support from key sources, but he also faced significant opposition with regard to some of the changes he pursued in the curriculum. It is little wonder that his support at West Point came from his hand-picked Commandant, Brigadier General G. J. Higgins.¹⁷ Although he faced opposition from the Academic Board and the Dean, this was neither surprising nor discouraging to Taylor, who knew well the inner workings of the Academy throughout its history. He knew all too well the natural resistance to change. In the words of Hugh Scott, "West Point is not a subject for [drastic] reform... It goes forward on its majestic course from year to year toward the fulfillment of its destiny,... improved from time to time to keep it abreast of the age, but without need of radical alteration."¹⁸ Academic Boards at the Academy had always been a powerful source of opposition for Superintendents, especially those seeking change. Taylor had learned some lessons regarding how to deal with the Academic Board by observing the tension when he was a cadet. MacArthur, then the Superintendent, did little to keep from alienating the Board in order to get his own way. By 1921, MacArthur was on the defensive because of the battles he had waged against the faculty and alumni. He had so alienated himself from the faculty by the end of his tour as Superintendent that he could no longer affect significant changes at the Academy.¹⁹ Taylor was a bit more tactful and accommodating to the Academic Board, and therefore made fewer waves with his changes than did MacArthur. As evidence of his determination and skill as Superintendent, Taylor usually got his way when it came to curriculum changes.

One of his first acts as Superintendent was to appoint a Dean of the Academic Board. Colonel Roger Alexander, formerly a professor of military topography and graphics,

¹⁷ Maxwell D. Taylor, *Letter to Dwight D. Eisenhower*, USMA Archives, 8 January 1946, 1.

¹⁸ Theodore Crackel, *The Illustrated History of West Point* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 216.

assumed this position on 7 September, just three days after Taylor took command. The Academy experimented with a Dean from September 1926 to April 1928, but the Academic Board pushed for a permanent position following World War II in order to have a position and status equivalent to that of the Commandant. The Superintendent had not originated the idea, but he wisely supported it along with a board of officers and civilian educators from other institutions appointed by the Secretary of War in 1945. The position became permanent in June 1946 by an act of Congress which stated that the Dean would come from among the department heads of the Academy and would hold the rank of Brigadier General.²⁰ Alexander served as acting Dean for almost the entire '45-'46 Academic Year before the position became fully authorized. On 2 July 1946, Alexander received the unanimous recommendation for the permanent position by the Academic Board.²¹ Taylor not only supported this, but was proactive in filling the position. This was perhaps a win-win situation for Taylor. He now had a single point of contact through which he could administer and influence the ever-powerful Academic Board, and at the same time had given the Board what it wanted, a voice with equal footing as the Commandant. Although the idea was not originally Taylor's, the support and quick implementation of a Dean was an intelligent move on his part.

Another significant adjustment to the structure of the academic departments which occurred with the same act that created the Dean of the Academic Board in 1946 was the authorization for one additional permanent professorship in each of the academic departments.²² This was certainly a welcome change for the faculty at the Academy. It

¹⁹ Ibid., 216.

²⁰ Stanley Tozeski, ed. "Records of the Office of the Dean of the Academic Board, 1818-1976." In *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the United States Military Academy*, Record Group 404, (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1976), copy obtained in USMA Library Special Collections, 8-9.

²¹ Proceedings of Academic Board, Volume for 1945, (USMA Archives: Office of the Dean), 174.

²² *Annual Report of the Superintendent, USMA*, Volume for 1946, (USMA Special Collections), 2.

not only created secure positions for outstanding professors, it ensured more stability and continuity for each department. This emphasized the focus on academics by both the Superintendent and those in Washington D.C. by strengthening both the structure and prestige of the faculty. Taylor also recognized the contributions and significance of having civilian and non-regular Army professors at the Academy. During the war, many of the professors were non-regular military and non-Academy graduates given temporary rank and title who served on the faculty but returning members of the military replaced them at the end of the war. Taylor held these temporary instructors in high regard and wanted to start a program which would bring non-regular instructors to the Academy. He recognized their contributions, particularly in the more liberal subjects, and gained approval from Washington to get or retain some of these individuals on faculty at the Academy.²³

Another tremendously important change in the curriculum which occurred early in Taylor's era was the return to the Four Year Curriculum.²⁴ The most significant aspect of this change was not that it actually occurred, but the way in which Taylor managed this dramatic change. West Point had been through awkward transitions in the past, but the wheels were already turning in favor of a return to the Four Year Program before Taylor returned to the Academy. Although the Three Year Program proved useful and effective during the war, many weaknesses existed as well.²⁵ The predominant question by the end

²³ Taylor, *Memorandum, Subject: Survey of the Current Situation at the U.S. Military Academy*, 5.

²⁴ *The United States Military Academy in World War II*, USMA Economics Department, Volume 1 (USMA Archives), 8-9. During World War II, USMA had gone to the Three Year Program for a couple reasons. First, 84% of colleges in the nation had gone to a 3 year program to support the war effort. West Point was seen as a possible refuge for those seeking to avoid the war, and it was felt that USMA should "take the lead" in the effort to produce officers for the war. The change to a Three Year Program affected West Point more than most other colleges because of the density of the curriculum. While other colleges were able to make up the differences by shortening breaks and free time, USMA had little room with which to work. The estimated loss of academic work at the Academy was thus 25%, while the Naval Academy, for example, lost only 4% of its pre-War curriculum.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-32.

of the war was not whether the Academy should return to a Four Year Program, but when and how.

The issue of when the program should begin was in effect a function of how it would be accomplished. The decision in general terms had been stated in August 1945 when the President approved the War Department's recommendation which included the splitting of the Class of 1947 into two graduating classes.²⁶ The finer details of how this should be accomplished were for the most part left to West Point. Taylor stated his preference for division of the class to be based on "maturity" and not merely academic standing. The Superintendent wanted to ensure a balance in the division, but at the same time wanted cadets to choose their preference.²⁷ The wheels began to move quickly, and on 8 September 1945, the decision was solid enough for the Public Relations Office to issue a press release to several major New York press services stating that the four-year course would resume and that the class of 1947 would be split.²⁸

The decision to return to the four-year course appeared to have the full support of Taylor. His reasons were very likely reflected in his decision to split the Class of '47 based on age and maturity as opposed to other methods. The decision may not have been very popular with the cadets themselves, but Taylor made a point to ensure the now Third Class understood what and why they were bearing the brunt of the changes. On two occasions, Taylor personally addressed the class. In October, Taylor pointed out the failure to achieve successful results in splitting a class following World War I at both West Point and the Naval Academy. He then outlined the plan to split the Third Class on the basis of age. The first criterion, however, was the desire of each individual. Cadets

²⁶ I.H. Edwards, *Memorandum for Superintendent, USMA, Subject: Return to Four Year Course at the United States Military Academy* (USMA Archives: 28 August 1945).

²⁷ Maxwell Taylor, *Memorandum for the Dean, Academic Board, Subject: Plan for Division of the Third Class* (USMA Archives: 24 September 1945).

received the speech well as it clearly outlined a plan which appeared both fair and competent.²⁹ In another address in November, Taylor outlined the pros and cons of both the three and four year options. The fact that the cadets could volunteer for one or the other was no small matter. Taylor related how he had faced the same decision when he was a cadet following World War I. He mentioned that he chose the four-year course because the peers whom he most respected were doing so and he "never regretted it."³⁰

The Superintendent wisely included the parents of cadets in the decision-making process. He informed the parents of the Third Class and received several letters in response. The parents who responded appreciated the Superintendent's willingness to share his views, and while some parents stated they would recommend the four-year option to their sons, one letter sums up the general sentiments well:

We will talk the matter over with our son during the Christmas holidays and will try and help him decide which is best for him and the service. We are sure, however, that whatever class to which he is assigned, will be for his and the service's best interest.³¹

The Superintendent faced the challenge of dealing with a potentially sensitive issue and handled it effectively with tact and poise. He divided the class of 1947 and the Academy's curriculum adjusted appropriately over the next few years to accommodate the change.

Throughout the history of the Academy, various boards and committees have been a regular part of the institution's inner workings. This is especially true during periods of transition such as at the end of World War II. These boards and committees consisted of

²⁸ Meade Wildrick, *Press Release by Public Relations Officer* (USMA Archives: 8 September 1945).

²⁹ Maxwell Taylor, "Remarks of Major General Maxwell Taylor to the Third Class" (USMA Archives: 16 October 1945).

³⁰ Maxwell Taylor, "Superintendent's Talk to Third Class," 20 November 1945.

³¹ James W. Barnett, Jr., *Letter to Maxwell D. Taylor* (USMA Archives: 12 December 1945).

both internal and external entities and were a common tool used by Superintendents to examine various aspects of Academy life. As early as December 1943, Superintendent Wilby established the "Four Year Course Committee" to deal with the question of how to return to the pre-war curriculum.³² By 25 August 1945, shortly before Taylor became Superintendent, the Post-War Curriculum Committee submitted their final report recommending a transition period to begin that very year.³³ The Committee reaffirmed the validity of the mission of the Academy and based success of the Academy on the performance of graduates during World War I, the inter-war period, and World War II. Although the Committee did not quote any prominent World War II veterans, it assessed performance of West Pointers in the following manner:

...through reports in the newspapers and other publications, the gallant and conspicuous service rendered in World War II by graduates of all ranks from the platoon leader to the highest commanders in the theaters of operation, is known to everyone in the country. The success of our armies has astounded the whole world. This could not have happened except for the intelligent and meticulous preparations in training and planning which were conducted between these two wars. Here again West Point graduates furnished the leaven to set the standards. This does not mean that West Point has furnished all of our great military leaders. Far from it. But it does mean that without West Point there would be a serious void in our nation.³⁴

Based on this assessment, the Committee determined that "the West Point system of education and training" was effective in carrying out the mission of the Academy.³⁵ The idea that West Point should provide a "broad, basic military education" remained intact. The Committee pointed out that there should be a "balance between the humanistic-social and scientific-engineering academic fields."³⁶ They also placed special emphasis on the

³² *The United States Military Academy in World War II*, 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, 33,37.

³⁴ Post War Curriculum Committee, *Report of the Postwar Curriculum Committee* (USMA Archives: 25 August 1945), 3-4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

idea that West Point should remain purely an undergraduate institution.³⁷ The Committee considered the foundation of the curriculum to be solid, and this laid the groundwork for the arrival of a Superintendent who would follow through with the recommendations of the Committee. Taylor submitted the formal plan for a Four Year Program to the War Department in September of 1945.³⁸

On 25 August 1945, President Truman approved the recommendation by the War Department to return to the four-year course.³⁹ A "Board of Army Officers and distinguished Civilian Educators," appointed by the Secretary of War at the request of the Superintendent in 1945, arrived at the Academy in November of that year with the specific dual purposes of examining the existing Three Year Curriculum and critiquing the proposed Four Year Program.⁴⁰ The board considered the academic burden on cadets to be quite heavy when compared to other college students in ROTC programs, and yet they did not recommend cutting the academic load. Instead, the board wondered if there was too much emphasis on the military programs. In the interest of increasing cadets' free time, they even recommended cutting some of the military instruction stating that it was not all necessary. This time should apparently not come at the expense of academic studies since, in the words of board member Lieutenant General Middleton, "... whatever is done, do not de-emphasize the academic work."⁴¹

In December of 1947, Taylor called for a second look at the Four-Year Curriculum to ensure it was heading in the right direction. The Curriculum Committee, composed of the Dean of the Academic Board (now BG Harris Jones), a few Department Heads, and one member of the Tactics Department, reviewed the young program. They hesitated

³⁷ Ibid., 2.

³⁸ Taylor, *Memorandum, Subject: Survey of the Current Situation at the U.S. Military Academy*, 2.

³⁹ Edwards, *Memorandum, Subject: Return to Four-Year Course at the United States Military Academy*.

⁴⁰ *Annual Report of the Superintendent, USMA*, 1946 volume, 1.

making a thoroughly conclusive statement based on the need for the program to run a full course, however, they did state that the curriculum "is generally well-balanced, adapted to the mission of the Military Academy, and operating satisfactorily."⁴² They made a few recommendations, among them the need to increase instruction in English at the expense of Engineering instruction. They also realized that this required significant shifting of hours between various departments to affect an acceptable balance. The Committee understood that time at West Point was in essence a zero sum game.⁴³ The academic schedule was too packed to simply add course hours without taking other away.

In 1948, the Superintendent called for a restudy of the curriculum by the Curriculum Committee. The report submitted by the Committee summarized the various changes in each of the academic departments. In the Department of Modern Languages, the "spoken approach method of teaching" focused on conversational aspects of languages. The Department of English was the beneficiary of increased course hours as well as the opportunity to teach a course in philosophy.⁴⁴ In order to provide for the increase of twenty periods of Third Class English, the Academy reduced Military Engineering requirements.⁴⁵ The curriculum changed not only as a result of a return to the four-year course, but because of the perceived need for change in content as well. Although some of the content of the curriculum changed following World War II, the guiding principles behind the course of instruction were completely satisfactory. The various boards and committees, some of them formed at the request of Taylor himself, pointed out the need

⁴¹ Proceedings of the Academic Board, 1946 Volume, 67-68.

⁴² Proceedings of the Academic Board, *Memorandum to Superintendent, USMA, Subject: Restudy of the Postwar Four-Year Curriculum*, 1948 Volume (USMA Archives: 14 September 1948).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

for moderate changes. These changes represented only some of the many occurring at this time at the Academy, but accurately reflected the preferences of the Superintendent.

Despite some resistance from inside the Academy, Taylor was clearly not alone in his desire to make changes at the Academy. He received support from significant figures outside West Point. In a letter from the War Department General Staff, Sladen gave strong support to Taylor if he were to choose to follow the advice of the Post-War Curriculum Committee's report.⁴⁶ The War Department, a powerful element in the dynamics of West Point, also recognized the need for change. Perhaps the most influential figure was one who rarely interfered in the affairs of West Point, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Eisenhower. His one letter to Taylor early on in his superintendency obviously had a big impact on the Superintendent. Whether or not Taylor took the advice of Eisenhower as an order or as a suggestion to consider, he immediately took a genuine interest in the idea of implementing a psychology course and quickly acted upon it. The wording of the letter could be interpreted as a recommendation, but Taylor, because of his respect for Eisenhower, took it as much more.⁴⁷ The real explanation may be that this idea fit very well into the vision that Taylor had for the curriculum at West Point. Whereas the idea could have been brushed aside, as the Dean wanted, Taylor incorporated the idea into his own plan for the Academy and its curriculum. The fact that the Chief of Staff of the Army was the one behind the idea was certainly significant.

In a memorandum from the Chief of Staff of the Army to the Superintendent in January 1946, General Dwight Eisenhower expressed his interest in two areas in particular at the Academy. First, he discussed the importance of the honor code and

⁴⁶ Sladen, *Letter to Maxwell Taylor* (USMA Archives: 5 September 1945).

⁴⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Letter to Maxwell Taylor* (USMA Archives: 2 January 1946), 2.

stressed the need for it to be utilized properly. Second, he expressed a desire for a course in psychology to be started. Although not a directive, the wording was strong enough to relate his seriousness regarding the matter:

A feature that I should like very much to see included in the curriculum is a course in practical or applied psychology ... Too frequently we find young officers trying to use empirical and ritualistic methods in the handling of individuals - I think that both theoretical and practical instruction along this line could, at the very least, awaken the majority of Cadets to the necessity for handling human problems on a human basis and do much to improve leadership and personnel handling in the Army at large.⁴⁸

Taylor replied to the Chief of Staff's letter with genuine interest indicating that applied psychology had been a neglected field of study.⁴⁹ The Dean, Colonel Alexander, balked at the idea of creating a separate academic course for the purpose of studying psychology, and instead recommended a few more hours of lectures be given during the Commandant's lecture series already in place. He pushed the responsibility off on to the Department of Tactics with the idea that such a course would unnecessarily cost valuable time of already existing academic courses.⁵⁰ Convinced that the course in psychology should go forward, Taylor turned to the Commandant and put the onus on the Department of Tactics and took forty hours from branch specific training to make room for the new course. This approach reflected Taylor's belief that the Academy focused too much on branch specific training. Taylor effectively implemented the course desired by Eisenhower and at the same time avoided a serious clash with the Academic Board.⁵¹ Although the Chief of Staff appears to have had few directives for Taylor, Eisenhower clearly had some impact on the curriculum changes which occurred.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹ Maxwell D. Taylor, *Letter to Dwight D. Eisenhower* (USMA Archives: 8 January 1946), 1.

⁵⁰ Steven E. Smith, "Maxwell Taylor and the Establishment of the Department of Military Psychology and Leadership" (West Point: 15 November 1996), paper as part of course requirements for LD760, 6.

⁵¹ Ibid., 6-7,11.

Without a doubt, the biggest influence and reason for the changes which occurred at West Point following World War II was the character and vision of Major General Taylor himself. Taylor came to West Point with a vision and plan for attaining that vision already in mind. He knew that the American soldier needed more than just a hard-nosed, lockstep leader. He understood the value of study of the humanities and, in particular, the study of leadership and human understanding. Taylor's character and beliefs regarding education of leaders undoubtedly came from his academic background and his own twenty-three years of experience in the Army, but also came from the generation of leaders of which he was a part.

West Point was no longer the only Engineering school in the nation, and the value of studies of the humanities reflected in the successful leaders of World War II. Eisenhower had shown his propensity for broader studies and the need to understand human nature. Patton had proven to be a highly successful battlefield general, although he was "no book-worker ... [He] had a terrible time with his studies."⁵² He instead focused his efforts on the humanities, such as poetry and military history.⁵³ Times had changed, and the importance of a more well-balanced education had not been lost on Taylor, who worked with many of the great leaders of World War II.

Maxwell Taylor walked into the middle of a dynamic process of change at the Academy, but he quickly took ownership of that process. Most of his own views appeared to coincide with those of the Post-War Curriculum Committee and the Board of Consultants. Taylor emphasized in a survey in 1946 that the job of West Point, according to the War Department, was to "develop character and the personal attributes" of future officers. West Point should have a "balanced and liberal education in arts and sciences

⁵² Marty Maher, *Bringing up the Brass* (New York: McKay, 1951), 169-170.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

and ... provide a broad basic military education."⁵⁴ In addressing the issue of the new four-year curriculum, Taylor acknowledged that the "new curriculum shows a moderate trend toward liberal subjects in comparison to the pre-war period."⁵⁵ Taylor estimated the new curriculum to consist of 40% liberal subjects. He believed in an appropriate balance and did not simply increase all liberal subjects. While he placed an increased emphasis on English instruction, he promoted less foreign language requirements (two years as opposed to three) and increased time for physics and electronics. Applied psychology also received a great deal of emphasis.⁵⁶ Regarding the issue of West Point providing a post-graduate education, Taylor strongly opposed the idea and felt that it would in fact weaken the Academy to pursue such a course and detract from the Academy's mission.⁵⁷

Taylor had a strong desire to implement a formalized leadership course at the Academy. He seemed amazed that no such course existed at West Point. "The training of leaders is a primary mission of the Military Academy, yet nowhere in the curriculum is there a course which has the announced intention of teaching leadership."⁵⁸ Taylor was thoroughly convinced that leadership could be both taught and learned. He stated in a letter to the Department of Tactics, "While the best training for leadership is to lead, I am convinced that there is a school approach to the acquirement of the qualities of leadership."⁵⁹ Taylor's personal approach to leadership keyed on three guiding principles as espoused to First Class Cadets during an address in 1946: "devotion to the troops,

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Memorandum, Subject: Survey of Current Situation at the United States Military Academy*, 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁸ Maxwell Taylor, *Memorandum for Dean of the Academic Board and Commandant of Cadets, Subject: Teaching of Leadership* (USMA Archives: 26 September 1945).

⁵⁹ Maxwell Taylor, *Letter to Officers of the Department of Tactics* (USMA Archives: 17 October 1945).

human understanding and professional competence."⁶⁰ Taylor had a definite prescription for teaching these principles to cadets. His ideas incorporated a mix of new requirements and building on some pre-existing elements. Taylor believed cadets could study great leaders of the past through books, while they could study the living leaders of World War II both through personal contact and through their "principal lieutenants."⁶¹ This would provide cadets the ideal mix of exposure and thought on what composed true and great leadership. The resources were obviously plentiful, having just completed World War II, and the cooperation of the Department of Tactics and the Dean could make such a course readily available and useful. The Lecture Committee, responsible for the scheduling and coordination for distinguished speakers at the Academy, and the Commandant also would play key roles in development and coordination of the new course Taylor wanted to simply label "Leadership."⁶² Taylor's vision involved some adjustments to the existing curriculum, however. He saw a need to adjust the content of the courses taught by the Department of Military Art and Engineering to focus more on the role and character of leadership instead of merely on the tactical and strategic implications of campaigns studied.⁶³

Due in part to the urgings of the Dean to put the new course under the Commandant's guidance, Taylor made the Commandant responsible for the overall coordination of the program. The Dean was straightforward and adamant about the Commandant's role in the proposed course, stating "The Commandant of Cadets is the real director and responsible for coordination."⁶⁴ Taylor gave further guidance to formally label three sub-

⁶⁰ Maxwell Taylor, "Leading the American Soldier," address to members of the First Class, USMA (USMA Archives: 27 May 1946).

⁶¹ Taylor, *Memorandum, Subject: Teaching Leadership*.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ R.G. Alexander, *Memorandum to the Commandant of Cadets* (USMA Archives: 16 October 1945).

courses under the title of "Military Leadership." Sub-course 1 was "Leadership for cadets and for small unit commanders;" sub-course 2 was "Leadership Lecture Series;" and sub-course 3 was "Leadership Instruction in the Department of Military Art and Engineering."⁶⁵ Despite limited resistance from the Dean and the Academic Board, Taylor started the course under the supervision of the Commandant. The Superintendent avoided having to force the Academic Board's hand by placing the primary responsibility on the shoulders of the Commandant. This also sheltered the other departments from losing course hours they so jealously protected. Taylor had again not only made his preferences known, but had effectively implemented a program to fix perceived shortcomings in the curriculum of the Academy.

Taylor repeatedly maneuvered the Academy through changes he felt were necessary while effectively minimizing conflicts with the Academic Board. This was a testament to his tremendous character and political skill. Despite his successes, Taylor indicated that he was not completely satisfied with his accomplishments as Superintendent.⁶⁶ In the 1950's, Lieutenant General Garrison H. Davidson would continue in Taylor's footsteps and further modify the curriculum for many of the same reasons as Taylor.⁶⁷ Even through all the changes after his superintendency, every one of Taylor's curriculum changes following World War II are felt today at the Academy. The four-year course is strong and well-balanced with both the sciences and humanities. Leadership and psychology are both taught by the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, a department finding its origins in Taylor's superintendency. Three main forces impacted changes in the curriculum: various Academic Boards and Committees; recommendations

⁶⁵ Taylor, *Memorandum, Subject: Teaching of Leadership*.

⁶⁶ Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 122.

⁶⁷ John Vermeesch, "Academic Electives at West Point: A Future-Oriented, Philosophical Change" (West Point: 23 November 1998), paper as part of course requirements for LD760, 3-4.

of the Chief of Staff of the Army; and the vision of Maxwell Taylor. Of these three, Taylor's vision was the driving force which enabled him to maneuver through opposition and implement changes affecting the nature of education at West Point. The curriculum of the Academy benefited immeasurably from the vision and determination of a great man of character. The solid, well-rounded curriculum at the Academy today can be traced in large part to the work of General Taylor and his service as Superintendent from 1945 to 1949.

Taylor's character eventually reached far beyond the walls of West Point. On 28 January 1949, Major General Bryant Moore replaced Taylor as the Superintendent.⁶⁸ Taylor went on to command in Europe, played a significant role as commander of the 8th Army in the Korean War, and would eventually go on to become the Chief of Staff of the Army. Called out of retirement by President Kennedy, Taylor became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in 1962.⁶⁹ Throughout the rest of his life, he continued to publish documents related to his work as a public servant. Taylor truly committed a lifetime to the military and the nation and exemplified the ideals of selfless service with character. Included among the list of his accomplishments was his impact on the curriculum of the United States Military Academy. His actions as Superintendent have positively affected generations of cadets since World War II and have helped shape the modern Academy.

⁶⁸ *Annual Report of the Superintendent, USMA*, Volume for 1949, 1.

⁶⁹ Patrick J. Cooney, "Taylor," *Pointer View* (USMA Library Special Collections: 24 April 1987), 4.

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