

CONTRIBUTIONS TO AN INSTITUTION: WEST POINT'S INVOLVEMENT IN
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY
1946 TO 1955



BY

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LD720: THE AMERICAN MILITARY EXPERIENCE and the UNITED STATES
MILITARY ACADEMY

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15 NOVEMBER, 1996



On 11 July 1955, at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver Colorado the United States Air Force Academy welcomed the 301 cadets of the Class of 1959. In attendance for this auspicious event were: the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy, LTG B. M. Bryan; The Commandant of Cadets, BG E. J. Messinger; The Senior Cadet Captain and his staff; the USMA Cadet Color Guard; the leadership of the Corps of Cadets down to Platoon Leaders and Cadet K. Harmon (1957), son of LTG H. R. Harmon (USMA 1915), Superintendent, United States Air Force Academy.¹ The welcoming of the first class to attend the Air Force Academy was certainly an occasion to commemorate; but, why would the Air Force Academy invite and welcome such a large contingent from The United States Military Academy and what significance can be attached to West Point's show of support for its new sister service school? The reasons for the large show of support and significance are that West Point's contributions and involvement with the Air Force Academy in academic, administrative, organizational, material and manpower resources during the period 1946 to 1955 were essential to the development and start of the Air Force Academy. This paper will discuss the history of the Army Aviation at West Point, the growth of the Air Corps into a separate service and West Point's assistance and association with the Air Force.

Army Aviation at West Point was first recommended in West Point In Our Next War, written by LTC Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull in 1915. In this book, LTC

Woodhull advocates cadet aviation indoctrination (orientation flights) as part of their training in the areas of observation and reconnaissance.² In 1921, the Academic Board, encouraged by Superintendent General Douglas MacArthur, approved the inclusion of aviation courses in the curriculum. Courses in aerial photography, air to ground communications, orientation flights in balloon and airplanes, aerodynamics and air service organization, logistics and administration were taught to all upper classmen. These classes were taught by the Engineering, Drawing, Tactics, Chemistry and Ordnance and Gunnery Departments.³ 1927 saw the first permanent assignment of aviation assets at the Academy. A detachment of six officers and enlisted men and one amphibious airplane were given the mission to provide currency and proficiency training to Air Service faculty and staff.⁴

Growth of aviation at the Academy increased dramatically during the mid 1930's and to the eve of World War II. On May 13, 1936, the city of Newburgh sold the Stewart Farm to the War Department for one dollar. The sale was the result of the donation of the property from Mr Samuel L. Stewart to the City of Newburgh on the stipulation that it be used to build an airfield. The city could not afford to build an airfield so they sold the rights to the War Department.⁵ This purchase would become significant to West Point's instruction of Air Cadets during World War II because Stewart would become home to the Air Cadet Corps during World War II.

Germany's blitzkrieg demonstrated the battlefield applications of the airplane and as a result, Army Aviation training and academics became extremely important at West Point. In 1941, those First Class cadets, who passed a flight physical and were

selected to join the Air Corps, received familiarization flight training at Stewart Army Airfield. This familiarization training changed radically after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The Superintendent, General Eichelberger, proposed that all interested cadets take a flight physical in their Yearling year, forfeit two weeks of summer leave and receive additional flight training so that by commissioning, each flying cadet would have accumulated 400 hours of flight time.⁶ General Arnold proposed to General Eichelberger that cadets fly three days a week and on Sunday to ensure all air cadets were properly trained pilots.⁷ These changes led to the most significant wartime change in the academy, the separation of the Corps of Cadets into Air and Ground Cadets.

In 1942, a proposal was circulated at the academy and then forwarded through channels to the Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson for approval. The proposal, endorsed by the Academy Superintendent, the Assistant Secretary of War for Air, the Chief of the Air Corps, General Henry (Hap) Arnold; and the Army Chief of staff, General George C. Marshall, included the changing of some tactical training for flight training, commissioning fifty percent of an academy class into the Air Corps, graduating these Air Corps Cadets with their pilot rating and wings and the split of the Corps of Cadets into the Air Cadets and the Ground Cadets.⁸ West Point's roots in the development of an aviation academy started with this 1942 proposal that was approved by Secretary of War Stimson.

With the proposal approved and funded, the Academy proceeded to expand Stewart Army Air Field (AAF) from 220 acres to 1200 acres, constructed housing for 500 cadets and 1500 support personnel, added two addition runways to the existing two

and acquired three additional auxiliary fields in support of the flight training program.⁹ The first class of Air Cadets began flight training at the Stewart facilities on August 25, 1942.

Besides the physical separation of the cadets, there were differences in academics and tactics during the four year curriculum as well. Air Cadets did not participate in dismounted drill, field artillery training, engineering, military intelligence, special operations, movement by motor/water/rail or inspections. Instead they received training in chemical warfare, aircraft identification, navigation, weather, aircraft engines, Morse Code, (aircraft) armament, (aerial) gunnery (aerial) bombing and (air/ground) communication.¹⁰ Tactical training for Air Cadets was significantly less than ground cadets as well. A ground cadet received over 2000 hours in tactical instruction while an air cadet received little more than 1400 hours. While these differences in academic and tactical training may seem substantial, the air cadets had 150 hours less free time than their ground cadet counterparts because of their flight training schedules.¹¹ Air Cadets received approximately 100 hours of ground school, 150 flight hours, 20 hour in a Link Trainer (Instrument Training) and 20 hours of (aerial) gunnery.¹²

During the early stages of the war, Congress approved and the President signed legislation to accelerate the West Point curriculum from four to three years. These changes also forced changes to the flight training program as well. Flight training was accelerated to include observation, elementary flying, basic flying, single engine aircraft transition and multi-engine aircraft transition. Some of this training required the cadets

training at Army Airfields besides Stewart. As a result, the Air Cadets did not fully participate in the West Point experience as did the Ground Cadets.¹³ While living and flying at Stewart AAF, the Air Cadets were under the control of the Commandant of the Flying School, a position separate from the Commandant of Cadets. Discipline, training and administration were all controlled by the Flying School Commandant.

The first class of Air Cadets to graduate completed training and pinned on their wings in January 1943 (the original June 1943 class). This first graduating class consisted of 164 new Army Air Corps Pilots.¹⁴ During the war years the academy graduated a little less than one thousand air cadets as Army Air Corps Pilots.¹⁵ With the surrender of the Japanese in the summer of 1945, West Point attempted to return to a four year curriculum and proposed the end to the Air Cadet program at the Academy. The majority view, held by both members of the Academic Board and members of the Curriculum Committee, stated that flight training was too specialized and was not consistent with the mission of the academy, therefore; the flight training program ended in 1946.¹⁶ While insignificant to the total number of qualified pilots being produced Army wide, the Academy's experience and expertise in the development, staffing, curriculum and training of air cadets would impact on the contributions the Academy made in support of the development of the Air Force Academy.

When the Army Air Corps became the United States Air Force on September 18, 1947, of the many issues facing the new service, development of a separate Air Academy was addressed as early as August 1948. The first major question was the structure of the Air Academy. In the first formal correspondence addressing the issue

between West Point Superintendent, Major General Maxwell Taylor and Air Force Chief of Staff, General Vandenberg (USMA 1923). Taylor stated that West Point was available to help in the development of an Air Academy.¹⁷ The Superintendent then proceeded to direct a study of possible courses of action in support of an Air Academy. The resulting document provided a frame work from which several Military Academy Superintendents would provide support to the Air Force.

The Information Paper, Subject: "Air Academy Proposals," provided four separate courses of action for the structure of an Air Academy: 1. Navy and Army provide 1/3 of their combined graduates to the Air Force, then the Air Force trains the officers to fly (estimated cost: 179 million dollars). 2. Build an Air Force with a curriculum similar to that of the US Military and Naval Academies (estimated cost 65 to 90 million dollars). 3. Fund Air Force officers with two years of civilian liberal arts undergraduate college and two years of Air Academy training in the sciences and technical aspects of the Air Force. 4. Fund Air Force officers with two years of civilian liberal arts undergraduate college and three years of Air Academy training in the sciences and technical aspects of the Air Force.¹⁸ The paper also discussed the subject of flight training. Army proponents for flight training at the Air Academy stated that recruiting would be easier and that academics would be more significant if flight training were included in the curriculum. Army proponents against flight training at the Air Academy cited West Point's experiences with the Air Cadet program, conflicts between academics and flight training and logistics as major detractors. Also stated was the obvious fact that an institution large enough to accommodate both requirements did

not exist and the administrative support such a facility would need was hard to comprehend.¹⁹

Taylor embodied the view of this information paper in a speech to members of the Air Force's Air University at the Maxwell Field in late August 1948.

“...Uniformly trained graduates imbued with the attributes of character and of leadership necessary for a high minded officer corps. ...A four year degree program should include general education, aeronautical sciences, tactics and moral values in an eleven month school year, similar to the Military Academy. If pilot training is necessary, dedicate a fifth year to in so as to not detract from the academics. Civilian schools do not provide character training. An Air Academy needs to instill vocation for service to the Air Force.”²⁰

Taylor presented a blue print for the Air Force to follow in this speech and provides several significant points in justifying the need for an Air Academy. The most significant point was to develop a leader with character and moral values. Given that the senior Air Force officers were Academy graduates, Taylor's comments focused not on the military or academic necessity of an Air Academy but on the higher moral ground, the West Point way all are familiar with.

The Commandant of the Air University, Air Force MG Robert Harper (USMA 1924), was given the official charter from the Air Force Chief of Staff to develop an Air Force Air Academy. He immediately requested information on the psychology and leadership programs conducted at West Point.²¹ The rationale was the success of the leadership training obtained while at West Point and the ideas of leadership that were taught to the cadets were skills needed by Air Force officers.

Air Force Chief of Staff, General Vandenberg (USMA 1923) approved the structure of the Air Force Air Academy on August 23, 1948. Vandenberg approved a four year, non flying Air Force Academy with a curriculum to follow "very closely the organization and operation of West Point." While there is no direct evidence to show that Vandenberg agreed with Taylor, the approved structure was similar to that recommended by Taylor and course of action 2 in the West Point information paper. Also present was the idea that flight training should not be a part of the program. This was also in keeping with West Point's experiences with flight training during the period 1943-1946.

The next issue collaborated on is the problem of staffing the Air Academy. The notion of staffing the Air Academy was an issue on the minds of many West Pointers during this time. Taylor directed a formal staffing of the question and the collective view of the Dean, the Commandant of Cadets and members of the Staff was that:

"a. A cadre of officers is favored by all and most agree that both Air Force and Army Officers should be included. These officers could come from Air Officers who have just completed a three year tour at West Point, were previously assigned or currently assigned.

b. A cadre from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd classes is favored by all except the Dean. The Corps of Cadets could provide a large percentage of the cadet cadre and that upon graduation they should then be permitted to graduate from West Point with their class and to enter either the Army of the Air Force."²²

The Air Force liked this proposal and began drafting a plan for staffing the Air Academy as early as September 1, 1949. The initial request for cadet cadre was for 100

Second Class, 125 Third Class and 200 Fourth Class. The Air Force justified the request by explaining the sum total of upper classmen would out number the initial freshmen class and that these cadets were a portion of the 40% the Academy was required by law to provide to the Air Force upon commissioning.²³ An even better reason for wanting the Cadet Cadre was stated by COL Delmar T. Spivey, USAF (USMA 1928)

“West Point Cadets are desired as the cadre source so that we may obtain a foundation of determined worth on which to establish discipline, worth-while class traditions, and a cadet-controlled honor system.”²⁴

West Point's next contributions to the design of the Air Academy consisted of providing Social Science and English lesson plans to the Air Force working group, officially designated the Air Force Academy Planning Board. Two professors, COL Stephens and COL Beukema were specifically requested by the Air Force Academy Planning Board to assist in the development of both English and Social Science courses.²⁵ There was also a similarity in both name and function between the Academy Academic Board and the Air Force Academy Planning Board.

Taylor's offer to assist the Air Force Academy Planning Board led to the exchange and review of all proposed Air Force Academy curriculum and legislation being developed. All Air Academy curriculum and legislation was staffed through the Dean of the Academics, the Commandant of Cadets, the Chief of Staff, the Staff Judge Advocate and when necessary individual department heads. After this staffing was completed the documents were submitted to the Superintendent for concurrence or non-concurrence then returned to Air Force channels. Of the Air Force Academy curriculum

submitted for review, West Point officers discovered that the Air Force did not consider Military History, Tactical Instruction in Map Reading and Projection for inclusion in the curriculum.²⁶

In November 1948 the first draft Title 10 legislation was reviewed by the USMA Staff Judge Advocate, COL Robert Chandler. The legislation he reviewed provided for the funding and establishment of the Air Force Academy. Of the recommendations made to the bill were that the initial Air Force Cadets be awarded diplomas from which ever academy they initially came from or choose to receive an Air Force Academy diploma.²⁷ This review went back to the Air Force which revised and submitted the bill up the Air Force chain to the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Executive Budget Office. The Executive Budget Office, in commenting on the Air Force's bill "...recommends that all service academies review all laws and regulations governing the academies and insure that all three academies (Army, Navy and Air Force) operate under the same rules and regulations."²⁸

In response, by Special Orders Number 8, West Point convened a:

"Board of Officers consisting of COL Gerald A. Counts, Professor USMA, COL Boyd W Bartlett, Professor USMA and COL Robert E. Chandler, JAGD is appointed to convene at call of senior members for the purpose preparing definite recommendations pertaining to the laws and regulations governing the US Military Academy. Findings will be submitted to the Superintendent with the least practicable delay consistent with nature of assignment."²⁹

For the next three months this board met and reviewed all governing legislation and recommended only minor changes in the wording of all applicable legislation.

In the summer of 1949, Taylor changed command with MG Bryant E. Moore. Moore continued the support to the Air Force Academy Planning Board and until October of 1951, there were no significant correspondence other than an occasional review of legislation through the Staff Judge Advocate's office. The Korean Conflict probably distracted the workings of the two Academies.

On 12 October 1951, draft congressional legislation to "provide for uniformity in the administration and government of Armed Forces Service Academies" was submitted for legal review to the USMA JAG.³⁰ While there is no comment from the Academy on this legislation, Congress did not take up the matter of service academy legislation until the Summer of 1951. The summer of 1951 also saw the change of command between MG Moore and MG Frederick A. Irving.

Superintendent Irving provided the Air Force Academy Planning group with support in the form of the involvement of the USMA Department of Tactics. The Department of Tactics developed a joint Air Force/Army review panel for the purpose of evaluating and commenting on all proposed military subjects and instruction contained in the four-year Air Force program. The Commandant of Cadets and the Chief of Staff USMA were also involved in the workings of this committee.³¹ This contribution was most significant because the Air Force leadership attempted to pattern as many of the Academy's ideas and methods as West Point was willing to provide. In the words of LTG Harmon, USAF (USMA 1915) "we aim in all matters of character building, as in many other features, to make our academy as close a copy of West Point as our most diligent efforts can achieve."³²

From the summer of 1951 until the summer of 1953 very little correspondence occurred between the Air Force Academy Planning Board and the Academy. Again, this lack of communication may be attributed to the continuing conflict on the Korean Peninsula or the possible shift in Air Force emphasis on the Academy. The possible shift would be the push for the congressional legislation to fund and start building the proposed Air Force Academy. Whatever the reason, significant coordination did not occur until the summer of 1953.

During the period August 1953 to October 1955, the academy provided four final pieces of support to the Air Force: construction and blue prints on facilities, entrance testing procedures, food service operations and procedures and cadet uniform and uniform regulations. The Air Force requested assistance in the development of cadet facilities, cadet mess, administration facilities, academic facilities, athletic facilities, officer quarters and the Superintendent's quarters.³³ The G-4 provided both blue prints and tours to Air Force Committees on all requested facilities. The Air Force adopted the Academy's entrance test procedures known as CEEB Test in the summer of 1954. These entrance tests evaluate the mental qualifications of all academy applicants and were also used by the Naval Academy.³⁴ Concerning food service operations, the mess hall and the procedures used to feed the Corps of Cadets were studied in great detail by the Air Force Academy Planning Board. The food service operators even provided plans of the food service layout and copies of the menus.³⁵ Lastly, the academy provided the Air Force with a complete pamphlet including 28 color pictures of uniform combinations and the regulations for the wearing of cadet uniforms.³⁶

Over a period of nine years, the United States Military Academy provided the Air Force with practically every available resource to support the development of the Air Force Academy. The reasons for this support may be many but can be boiled down to two key reasons. First, the Air Force's leadership and key players were West Point graduates who looked to the Academy to provide the guidance to their service that it provided to them. Second, these Air Force leaders recognized that the future of the Air Force Academy lay in the history of the Military Academy and the success it had in developing leaders of character. For these two reasons, the basis for cooperation and assistance were established and the Military Academy contributed significantly in the development of the Air Force Academy

¹ Memorandum, From: LTG B. M. Bryan, To: LTG H. R. Harmon, Subject: Invitation to the Air Force Academy's Opening, (USMA Archives, 1 Mar 1955).

² Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull, West Point In Our Next War: The Only Way to Create and Maintain an Army. (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1915) 1-71.

³ Hamlin Cannon, Flying Training at West Point, (Director of Historical Studies, United States Air Force Academy, 1970) 19.

⁴ "Stewart Dedicated in August of '42" The Evening News. (Newburgh, New York) 21 June 1962, 3.

⁵ Memorandum, From: MG G. Richards, To: COL Weiss, Subject: Acquisition of Additional Land and an Airfield for West Point. (USMA Library, Special Collections, 18 March 1972) 2-3.

⁶ Letter, From: MG H. H. Arnold, To: MG R. L. Eichelberger, Subject: Flight Training of Air Cadets at USMA, (USMA Archives, 24 Oct 1941).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cannon, 45.

⁹ United States Military Academy, Annual Report of the Superintendent, (New York: USMA Printing Office, 30 Jun 1942).

¹⁰ United States Military Academy, Annual Report of the Superintendent, (New York: USMA Printing Office, 30 Jun 1943).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Cannon, 73.

¹⁵ Cannon, 75.

¹⁶ Ibid., 117.

¹⁷ Memorandum, From: MG M. Taylor, To: GEN Vandenberg, Subject: Air Academy, (USMA Archives, 2 Aug 1948).

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- ¹⁸ Information Paper: Air Academy Proposals, (USMA Archives, August 1948), 1-4.
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- ²⁰ MG Taylor Comments, prepared Speech at Maxwell Field, (USMA Archives, 9 Aug 1948).
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- ²³ Letter, To: MG Taylor, From: COL Delmar T. Spivey (USAF), Subject: Cadet Cadre, (USMA Archives, 3 Nov 1948).
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Disposition Form (DF) 897, From: BG Harris Jones To: Dean, Academic Board (USMA, Archives, 8 Nov 1948).
- ²⁷ Disposition Form (DF) 897, From: SJA COL Robert E. Chandler For: Superintendent, Subject: Legislative Review: Air Force Academy, (Archives, 10 Nov 1948).
- ²⁸ Memorandum, From: COL Morris Lee (USAF), To: G-3, COL Hughes, USMA Subject: Draft Bill for the Establishment of Air Force Academy, (USMA Archives, 16 Nov 1948).
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- ³⁰ Letter, From: G-3, Department of the Army, MG Charles L Bolte, To: Superintendent, USMA, Subject: Service Academies Act 1951, (USMA Archives, 21 Sep 1950).
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- ³³ USMA AG Form 1-2, Memorandum, To: Mr. John M. Ferry, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, From: G-4, Logistics, USMA, Subject: Building Plans, US Military Academy, (USMA Archives, 19 August 1953).
- ³⁴ Memorandum, From COL Wm. W. Bessell, Jr, Chairman, Admissions Committee, To: Superintendent, USMA, Subject: Conferences in Washington, 6 May 1954, (USMA Archives, 7 May 1954).
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