

# The Importance of Airpower Education in a Changing World

by

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Military theory may not sound like a thrilling subject to airmen, but it is a crucial part of professional military education and indispensable to those responsible for employing air and space power. To the military practitioner, the word "theory" is like the word "doctrine"--both are thought of as far too abstract to be useful. Yet surprisingly, the Air Corps Tactical School in the early developmental years based most of its instruction on the employment of the air weapon on theory, because there was no precedent or established body of doctrine. To the early pioneers of air power, *theory* was their picture--how they visualized the fight in the third dimension.

Understandably, this might lead one to wonder about the relationship between professional military education and the successful employment of air and space power. After all, education doesn't provide firepower, drop bombs, or transport anything to the fight. However, military education does provide the military professionals with the requisite foundation from which they can continue to build on the insights derived from various experiences of warfare.

First recognized following the air experience of World War I, the Air Corps Tactical School (designated in 1926) grew from the need for officers specifically trained in the employment of military aircraft. Its mission was to train air officers (and selected officers of the other arms and services) in the strategy, tactics, and techniques of airpower. Certainly, the body of knowledge on which to base instruction was lean during those early years. Yet, over the decades, air power concepts were developed and tested in the crucible of war, rendering an integrated body of concepts for the employment of air and space power.

If anything, the need for education and the study of military theory have increased simultaneously with advances in technology. Consider for a moment the commanders who must make time-critical decisions based upon judgement, experience, and recommendations. We must groom commanders beyond technical competence, to a point where they have an almost instinctive knowledge of the operational level of warfare. The Air Force also needs educated officers who can advise commanders and develop effective air campaigns.

If future wars are, in large part, wars of technology and information, it may well be the airmen's ability to think, anticipate, prepare, and execute better than the adversary that is the measure of victory. With an adversary competing at nearly the same level of technological expertise, it may well be the war-fighter with the best honed problem-solving and critical-thinking skills who will succeed. As Archduke Charles of Austria said, "A great captain can be formed only by long experience and intense study; neither is his own experience enough - for whose life

is...sufficiently fruitful of events to render his knowledge universal?" Certainly, one of our nation's most effective weapon systems is the educated mind.

No one will argue that academic pursuits by themselves will develop air and space power visionaries. Yet, education produces a repository from which all air and space power strategists can draw as they plan and execute air and space operations. It offers both a point of departure as well as comparative historical accounts, which increases one's understanding of air and space power concepts.

As airmen we believe air and space power doctrine is dynamic--continuing to grow, evolve, and mature as new experiences, reinterpretations of former experiences, and advances in technology emerge. Professional military education contributes to that dynamic process as one's professional knowledge increases and, more importantly, becomes more forward thinking.

Just as the Air Corps Tactical School's visionary instructors--Harold George, Haywood Hansell, Kenneth Walker, Donald Wilson, Laurence Kuter, Muir Fairchild and others--saw airpower as more than a support weapon for the land and sea forces, today's airmen who make theoretical and historical study part of their continual education are on the cutting edge of their profession.

While we cannot predict with certainty the threats that our nation will confront in the future, we must continue to prepare ourselves as military professionals to meet all challenges. One of the best ways is through continued military education which provides the intellectual skills of vision, confidence, and decision making that throughout history have proven to be a margin for victory. As Sir William Butler reminds us, "The nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards."

The Air Force will continue to provide our nation leaders schooled in the application of air and space power. Not only will those leaders allow us to *win in war*, they will provide us with the intellectual vision to adapt to a changing world and thus, *preserve the peace*.

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