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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

VIETNAM: INCORPORATING LESSONS LEARNED INTO
THE CURRICULUM OF USAF PME

by

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Abstract

A well-known criticism of the United States' military, and of other militaries around the world, is that they are always preparing to fight the last war. One way military organizations attempt to keep this from occurring is through a comprehensive system of military education. An objective of the professional military education (PME) system of the United States Air Force (USAF) is to teach its officers how to use air power more effectively in future conflicts. It can therefore be assumed that to apply air power effectively in future wars, the institution must learn the lessons of previous conflicts. The question this paper asks is whether the USAF, and specifically Air University (AU), put forth the necessary effort to teach the lessons of the Vietnam War. It will focus on the five years from 1973 to 1978. Although the purpose of this research paper is not to determine whether or not air power was successful in Vietnam, it must examine to some degree what the USAF as an institution believed it learned from the war. Only then can the PME curriculum be examined to determine how effectively those lessons were passed to future leaders. After evaluating the curriculum, the paper will try to answer the question of whether the USAF chose to emphasize only positive examples of air power's success versus examples of its failures and limitations. These questions are significant because of the crucial role air power continues to play in our nation's defense. If the USAF does not take a critical look at its performance in past conflicts, it will enter future conflicts ill suited to fulfill its role successfully.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The unpopularity not only of Vietnam itself but of giving it serious postmortem attention may stem largely from its obvious beginning; and all participants seek to escape allegations of parentage while seeing visible signs that their own roles in that nasty war became perverse parodies of the truth.

Donald J. Mrozek¹

One way military organizations attempt to teach lessons from previous wars is through a comprehensive system of professional military education (PME). An objective of the PME system of the United States Air Force is to teach its officers how to use air power more effectively in future conflicts. It naturally follows that to apply air power more effectively in future wars, an organization must learn something from its experiences in previous conflicts. In the 25 years since the war in Vietnam ended, the conduct of the war has become a major topic in the Air Force's PME system for mid-level and senior officers. The war is woven into the various curricula not only in terms of the application of air power, but in other educational areas like national security policy and the nature of warfare. Today, the Vietnam experience is almost always taught in a negative light and serves as an example of "how not to do it." When compared with the successes achieved in the only major air campaign waged since Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, the humorous maxim often uttered by Air Command and Staff School students when discussing the curriculum is understandable: "Vietnam *bad*, Gulf War *good*!"² It

appears the Air Force has embraced many lessons of Vietnam and pledged not to repeat them. But how long did it take to reach this point? How did the USAF teach the lessons of the Vietnam War in the years immediately following its conclusion?

In her 1985 paper entitled “Study War Once More: Teaching Vietnam at Air University,” Major Suzanne Budd Gehri evaluated how Air University (AU) reacted to Vietnam. She gave the organization high marks. Asking whether an institution like the Air Force had the ability to learn from its mistakes in Vietnam, she concluded that “Air University has been both willing and able to do so and to teach what it has learned.”³ However accurate Major Gehri’s observations may have been in 1985, the AU curricula of the immediate post-Vietnam Era reveal little mention of the war. An institution charged with educating its officers in the application of air power does not have the luxury of waiting ten or more years to find the proper historical perspective. It must stand ready to defend the nation’s interests at any time, immediately after a war if necessary. But can an institution like Air University reasonably be expected to discern lessons from the war during its involvement or immediately afterward so it can incorporate those lessons into its various curricula? It is vital to understand the process of learning and transmitting lessons because there are no guarantees any military will have ten or more years between conflicts to digest what happened in the previous one.

This paper will examine the five academic years (AY) immediately following the Vietnam War, AY 1974 through AY 1978, and attempt to answer whether Air University sought to teach the lessons of that war. The first question that must be answered is whether Air University saw itself as a vehicle for teaching lessons learned at that time. Although that may seem like a strange question, the Air Force has a long history of being

ambiguous in its approach to PME. Second, to expect an institution like AU to incorporate lessons learned into its PME curricula presupposes the idea that the institution itself knew what went on there. In other words, are there lessons the Air Force could have reasonably learned by the end of the war and passed on immediately to its officers attending PME? Finally, what did AU do to change its curricula in order to teach those lessons and why did they do it? This section will focus on Air War College (AWC) and Air Command and Staff College (ACSC). This study will assert that, for a variety of reasons, Air University derived few lessons from the Vietnam War and spent too little time actually teaching those lessons to the future leaders of the US military.

Notes

¹ Donald J. Mrozek, *The US Air Force After Vietnam* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, December 1988), 3.

² Author's student year at ACSC, academic year 1998-1999.

³ Suzanne Budd Gehri, *Study War Once More: Teaching Vietnam at Air University* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, November 1985) 30.

Chapter 2

Unclear Objectives: The Purpose of the USAF PME System

Before AU can be evaluated as to how it adapted its curriculum to learn from the Vietnam War, it must be determined whether AU saw itself as a vehicle for teaching lessons learned. It may seem self evident that a school for professional military education would see itself as a place to teach lessons about warfighting, but the Air Force lacked a clear and consistent vision of what the purpose and focus for officer PME should be. Since AU's beginnings in 1946, the Air Force and AU have conducted scores of studies on its PME system and made just as many adjustments to the mission and philosophy of PME. The influences that drove these adjustments are many. They range from budgetary issues to student feedback about the quality of their education. Despite the many changes in mission and focus, the key purpose of Air Force PME from the beginning has been to teach its officers to win wars with air power.¹ Yet, there are times the Air Force may have drifted away from that ideal.

From 1946 to the end of the Vietnam War, there were many changes in what the Air Force thought was important to teach its officers. However, even though there were times when staff work was the prime emphasis, the obligation to teach the application of air power has remained a constant. In 1946, the Gerow board (named for its chairman, Lt Gen Leonard T. Gerow) was formed to suggest a post-war educational system for the

Army. The central purpose of the new PME system was in-depth instruction on all aspects of national security. Officers would progress sequentially through three tiers, made up of separate schools for company grade, intermediate, and senior-level officers. The portion of the PME system designated for the Army Air Forces eventually evolved to become Air University.² The Air Force PME system was composed of three schools, the Air Tactical School (ATS) for company grade officers, the Air Command and Staff School (ACSS) for majors, and the Air War College (AWC) for lieutenant colonels and colonels. The senior and intermediate PME programs were similar to those run by the Army and the Navy and were 10 months in length.³ General Muir C. Fairchild, AU's first commander, spoke about AU's curriculum in 1946, saying, "The curriculum of the Air University has been designed to prepare students for future war, not for past wars, and to stimulate thought and planning on a global rather than limited scale."⁴

Gen Fairchild, and his deputy, Maj Gen David M. Schlatter, established three goals for USAF PME: "(1) to provide officers with the narrow technical specialization to do their job, (2) to educate officers in the broad context of national security issues, and (3) to encourage forward thinking, unhampered by tradition."⁵ General Fairchild laid the groundwork for AU that carried it through its first few years of operation.

In 1955, Ralph W. Tyler, an analyst and educator working for the Air Force, reviewed all three USAF PME schools. Tyler concluded that the Air Force lacked clear, consistent goals for its PME system because "a comprehensive, authoritative statement of the philosophy of Air University has not yet been put in writing."⁶

One problem with putting a philosophy of PME in writing was that the Air Force was constantly changing the emphasis of PME. Every year, various study groups would

submit a report on PME, each recommending something different from the one before. For example, between 1961 and 1964, at least 32 assessments were produced by various study groups, with recommendations ranging from giving students better English instruction to improving staff skills.⁷ As an institution, the Air Force had to decide whether its PME emphasis would be on warfighting or staff functions. In 1961, the Air Force Educational Requirements Board (AFERB) was asked to determine the needs of Air Force PME. Its December 1963 report finally defined PME and stated its purpose:

[PME is] the systematic acquisition of theoretical and applied knowledge which is of particular significance to the profession of arms. It involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes which are requisite to military professionalism and which form the core of understandings which must be common to all officers, regardless of the specialized activities in which they may be engaged....It is directed to the officer's (sic) thorough understanding of national goals and objectives and the ways and means of utilizing military force to achieve them."⁸

This marked the first time the USAF had a written philosophy of PME. Notice however, that the definition is very broad and speaks of employing military force in general, not air power specifically.

Prior to 1964, those concerned with PME were not interested in setting boundaries on curriculum. Civilian advisory boards suggested broad curricula and the Air Force responded by expanding coverage of national and international affairs at the expense of strictly military subjects like the employment of air power. These changes brought the Air War College curriculum more in line with that of the National War College. Since National War College graduates had higher promotion rates, the war colleges of all three services sought to emulate their curriculum.⁹

Between 1964 and 1966, all three service war colleges changed their focus to be more military and more distinctive in relation to the others. Before this, their curricula

had been so similar, that all three were threatened by political efforts to combine the colleges into joint schools.¹⁰ In order to remain independent service schools, they had to show how unique they were and how they applied to their service's specific competencies. Air Force Manual (AFM) 53-1, *United States Air Force Officer Professional Military Education System*, 5 May 1966, identified the subjects that the Air Force PME schools would teach:

The nature of war, its causes, its tactics and strategies; and how military forces, particularly aerospace forces, are developed, sustained, and employed throughout the entire spectrum of uses of military power.... The political, economic, technological, and psychological factors which influence our national security and international relations.... The fundamental principles and concepts of leadership and management.... The organization, mission, and doctrine of the US armed forces, particularly aerospace forces; and how they are employed, including joint and combined operations.... The doctrine, strategies, tactics, organizations, capabilities, and limitations of the armed forces of allied and potential enemy nations...National and international security organizations.¹¹

This definition of subject matter indicated the mid-1960s shift back to an emphasis on war and its conduct, and away from an emphasis on preparing officers for future staff duties. But it was not long before the pendulum swung back again.

In 1967, the *Air University Objective Plan* stated that the purpose of PME was to...

provide programs of education which will increase the officer's ability to think creatively, solve problems in a logical and systematic manner, prepare military studies and plans, and make clear, meaningful, and logical oral and written presentations. Further, PME programs must develop leadership attributes and create a desire for individual self-improvement.¹²

This illustrated the common state of USAF PME. Although regulations dictated an emphasis on strategy, policy, and warfare, AU wanted to emphasize preparation for future staff duties. Studies on PME at this time tended to be more concerned with the number of graduates and school selection criteria of attendees than they were about the

usefulness of the curricula. However, one 1973 board chaired by Maj Gen Lawrence S. Lightner, Commandant of Air War College and Vice Commander of AU, evaluated the curriculum and the activities of the AWC and ACSC faculties. It concluded that AU was placing too much emphasis on history and should rely more on current events. It also recommended that faculty not be given time for independent research or study.¹³ It seems strange that at a time when the Air Force was just emerging from a long and bitter war, a senior leader and his study group would want AU to de-emphasize the Air Force's past. The philosophy that emerged from the Lightner Board shows an institutional apathy for thinking about the past to learn lessons that might apply in the future. The de-emphasis of research also made it difficult to attract quality faculty members who were interested in developing their own ideas about air power.

By 1976, there was again some specific directions regarding warfighting. The 1976 study by the Air Force deputy chief of staff for personnel, *Report of a Study on Officer PME Policy*, said the purpose of Air Force PME "includes that specific knowledge of military arts and sciences and command and staff expertise required in peace and war. For the Air Force, PME focuses on the theory and application of aerospace power." This report tied the acquisition of knowledge about air power to the readiness of the force to conduct combat operations.¹⁴

Although the purpose and philosophy of PME had been inconsistent over the years, shortly after the war in Vietnam, the Air Staff recommended to AU that their students be experts in the application of air power. However, it appears the leadership of AU ignored this recommendation. In November 1976, the AU commander Lt Gen Raymond B. Furlong, writing about ACSC to General Tallman, Air Force deputy chief of staff for

personnel, stated that he believed “the primary role of the command and staff graduate is that of facilitator.” He went on to say, “Using this focus, we build a 10-month curriculum to develop (1) common staff skills, (2) specific managerial and leadership skills, and (3) functional specialist skills related to broad career areas. To complement these specific areas, we added essential professional information about the Air Force, the defense establishment, and the nation.”¹⁵

The inputs of various study groups, the personal philosophies of the various leaders of AU, and, in this author’s view, a desire to forget about Vietnam, may have caused the institution to lose interest in emphasizing the lessons of the Vietnam War in its PME. By the end of the Vietnam War, teaching air power application was not only required by Air Force regulation, but the Air Force deputy chief of staff for personnel had emphasized a theory-and-doctrine focus. The staff work-versus-air power pendulum was swinging back toward air power. The problem was, the leadership at AU may not have seen it that way.

Notes

¹ For an overall account of these studies and adjustments, see Richard L. Davis and Frank P. Donnini, *Professional Military Education for Air Force Officers: Comments and Criticisms* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, June 1991). This book will be cited specifically when discussing specific studies and changes to USAF PME.

² *Report of War Department Military Education Board on Educational System for Officers of the Army* (Gerow Board) (Washington D.C.: War Department, 5 February 1946),

³ ACSS became Air Command and Staff College in 1954. ATS became the Squadron Officer Course in 1950 and was a subordinate unit to ACSS/ACSC until it became the independent Squadron Officer School (SOS) in 1959.

⁴ Muir C. Fairchild, “The Air University,” *Higher Education*, 3 (September 2, 1946): 4.

⁵ Richard L. Davis and Frank P. Donnini, *Professional Military Education for Air Force Officers: Comments and Criticisms* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, June 1991), 2.

⁶ Ralph W. Tyler, *Analysis of the Purpose, Pattern, Scope, and Structure of the Officer Education Program of Air University*, Project no. 505-040-0003 (Maxwell AFB,

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Ala.: Officer Education Research Laboratory, May 1955), 6, 138 quoted in Davis and Donnini, 4.

⁷ Davis and Donnini, 6.

⁸ Air Force Educational Requirements Board, *Report on Professional Military Education*, in Davis and Donnini, 5.

⁹ Laurence I. Radway, "Recent Trends at American War Colleges," presented to the 7th World Congress of Sociology, Research Committee on Armed Forces and Society (Hanover N.H.: Dartmouth College, Sep, 1970), 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹ Davis and Donnini, 34.

¹² *Air University Objective Plan* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 15 May 67), 3-6.

¹³ Davis and Donnini, 8.

¹⁴ USAF Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, *Report of a Study on Officer PME Policy*, in Davis and Donnini, 21.

¹⁵ Lt Gen Raymond B. Furlong, commander, Air University, to Lt Gen Kenneth L. Tallman, deputy chief of staff for personnel, US Air Force, letter, 17 November 1976 in Davis and Donnini, 38.

Chapter 3

Lessons Learned: What was Reasonable?

In order to determine what Vietnam War lessons Air University could have taught to its officers attending AWC or ACSC in the years immediately following the conflict, it must be determined whether the institution itself had an idea of what lessons were learned. Although the focus of this paper is not to determine whether air power was successful in Vietnam, it must examine to some degree contemporary air power thought and what the USAF as an institution believed it had learned from the war. Only then can the PME curriculum be examined to determine how effectively those lessons were passed to future leaders.

The term “lessons learned” may not be optimal for any organization that wishes to gain from a past experience. The term conjures up notions of concrete principles derived from experience and universally taught so that some similar disaster might be avoided the next time. In the case of the Vietnam War, the lessons have been hotly debated from the very beginning of US involvement to the present time. When looking at a previous war, an institution should more appropriately be examining concepts, causes, patterns, and assumptions that affected its performance and results in the conflict. For example, the idea that air power in the war would have been more effectively employed if under the centralized control of a single airman is a concept many examined during and after the

war. That concept could be looked upon as a lesson. That is not to say that all the lessons gained from the war were the right ones. Many airmen believed the World War II-like bombing, in the form of Linebacker II, was the primary Air Force success that ended the war, and saw that form of air power as the war's central lesson, validating all previous doctrine. Still others viewed the Air Force's emphasis on strategic bombing as the main reason air power failed in the war. The bottom line is that whether one calls them lessons or not, any educational institution charged with educating its officers about the use of air power must give genuine critical thought to the effectiveness of air power after a major conflict. Were there lessons the Air Force could have learned and taught in the years immediately following the war?

Even before the war ended, scholars and airmen alike were debating the effectiveness of air power in the war. In June 1969, two RAND Corporation staff members, Martin Gurtov and Konrad Kellen, published a paper on the lessons of Vietnam entitled *Vietnam, Lessons and Mislessons*. Gurtov and Kellen organized the debate around several key issues. What was the air campaign supposed to achieve? Were restrictions on air power a factor? More importantly, what options did the Air Force have to offer when it appeared the bombing was not working?¹ In the authors' view, it appeared that the conduct of the enemy invalidated all the strategic concepts then held by the US military. Gurtov and Kellen asserted that when strategic concepts are thus destroyed, a vacuum forms, to be quickly filled by new ideas. These new ideas come in the form of lessons learned.² But in the Air Force's case, there was not a flood of new ideas or doctrine. The Air Force must not have seen its strategic concepts as "destroyed."

When bombing did not appear to work, instead of new ideas, the Air Force solution was “more bombing.”³

The significance of the RAND paper was not the specific lessons it attempted to discern, but the fact that, even before the war was over, there were people thinking about the difficult question of whether air power was effective and what lessons could be learned about its future employment. It also leads to another question. Were airmen, especially those at the Air Force’s premier academic institutions, also trying to assess air power’s effectiveness in the war?

A few airmen were analyzing air power during the war. In 1971, retired Major General Richard A. Yudkin wrote an essay for a conference sponsored by the National Strategy Information Center and the Arlie Institute for International Studies whose topic was “Alternatives to Attrition: United States Policy and Wars of National Liberation.” He put forth two lessons from the war. First, there was a failure in the formulation of strategic objectives. Second, our nation should have a better appreciation for the limitations of military force.⁴ Both of these broad topics, strategy and force application, fell well within the curriculum areas of Air Force PME schools. Yudkin went on to assert that the experience of Vietnam did not prove or disprove the effectiveness of strategic bombing.⁵

Yudkin’s essay is interesting in that, nearly twenty years before Major Mark Clodfelter published his book *The Limits of Air Power*, Yudkin discussed how bombing doctrine might not be the proper tool to achieve political or military objectives in some cases. Clodfelter had argued that US political and military leaders believed the lethality of bombing would always assure political results were achieved. Clodfelter however,

asserted that air power's effectiveness as a political tool varied with many factors. He said air power's effectiveness had limits and depended largely upon setting clear objectives for the air war.⁶ Yudkin made those very ideas available even before the Vietnam War ended, but they were neither nourished nor developed. Instead, the Air Force and its education system virtually ignored them for nearly two decades.

Another airman who thought critically about air power immediately after the war was Colonel Donaldson D. Frizzell. Frizzell was a research fellow at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy immediately after the war. By 1977, he was serving as Chief of Strategic Concept Studies at Air War College. Frizzell wrote the chapters on air power in a book that published the results of a 1973-1974 conference held at the Fletcher School. In his critical examination of air power in the war, he wrote that even senior officers had learned some key lessons of the war. These lessons were the need for a single air force commander, the limited use of air power with the expectation of unlimited results, and the decrease in the effectiveness of interdiction.⁷ He referred to Sir Robert Thompson, a conference participant, who said Vietnam did not offer appropriate targets for then current USAF bombing doctrine.⁸ This is more evidence that there were alternatives to the Air Force's standard belief that restrictions kept air power from being effective. To believe Frizzell and Sir Robert Thompson, you must agree that political restrictions or not, Air Force doctrine was not appropriate for the unlimited expectations the US had of air power.

The views of these scholars and airmen were not typical. The views that permeated the PME schools in the few years after the war were those of some of the Air Force and Army's most vocal members, like General William W. Momyer. As a faculty member at

the Air War College, he led the effort to write the new service's first doctrine documents in 1953. As commander of 7th Air Force from mid-1966 to mid-1968, he was in charge of Air Force operations over Vietnam.⁹ His experience and background made him one of the Air Force's most highly regarded air power thinkers.

Momyer gave the Air Force lessons that furthered the interests of the institution itself. First, when air power was restrained by exterior influences, as he argued it had been prior to 1972, it was less possible to raise the cost of war to a level unacceptably high to the enemy.¹⁰ The reference "prior to 1972" of course refers to Linebacker II, when Momyer contends air power was no longer constrained by exterior influences. Second, for efficient command and control, a component commander must be in charge of his portion of the war. This was his version of the modern JFACC concept. Third, the tactical air control system was a great success in supporting ground forces.¹¹ Finally, in light of the restrictions Momyer felt had constrained air power, future commanders must be able to articulate the consequences of such restraints to their political leaders.

Momyer seemed to advance the notion that even in the face of a limited war with limited objectives, air power could still be the cure-all, especially if advanced technology was used. The bottom line to Momyer: a choice must be made as to whether air power is to win battles or win wars. "Airpower can be strategically decisive if its application is intense, continuous, and focused on the enemy's vital systems."¹² Momyer's view of air power continues to dominate Air Force PME, and is arguably the warfighting view of the entire Air Force today, regardless of the type of conflict being waged.

Another visible and vocal officer after the war was Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp. After the war, Admiral Sharp, the former Commander in Chief of Pacific Command, wrote a

scathing book condemning America's role in Vietnam. The views he expressed on air power's role in the war were in concert with those of General Momyer. He saw the war as a flagrant misuse of air power. He said, "Our air power did not fail us; it was the decisionmakers [who failed]." He explained that air power could have done its job in the war had it been used properly.¹³ In fact, he wrote that the military was never allowed to use its vast naval and air power decisively.¹⁴ Sharp's lessons from the war were: (1) air power is a viable tool for international power diplomacy, (2) the American people lost the feeling of responsibility that goes along with a leadership role, (3) although the aims might be limited, we must not be limited in our use of force, and (4) we did not learn the lessons of the Korean War when it came to dealing with communists.¹⁵ Sharp's ideas helped contribute to the prevailing military view of the war, that "our hands were tied."

There were also lessons produced by an Army think-tank. The Army contracted BDM Corporation to specifically determine the lessons of the war. BDM Corporation produced an eight-volume study that included specific lessons learned, some of which addressed air power. The volumes covered topics such as US foreign policy, planning the war, conduct of the war, and results of the war. Specific lessons regarding air power can be summarized as: (1) Air Power is used most effectively when the theater of operations is assigned to a single unified commander who is provided with a clear-cut mission and the tri-Departmental assets needed to carry out his mission. (2) Rules of Engagement are essential. They set necessary limits on commanders and keep fighting within prescribed limits. To prevent them from becoming too restrictive, the military must present compelling arguments to their civilian chiefs and therefore must thoroughly understand the political-military, socio-economic and cultural environment. (3) Local interdiction is

effective. However, interdiction for the entire theater is ineffective unless it strikes at external sources of support.¹⁶

BDM Corporation's ideas were a bit broader than those offered by senior military officers and provided something the Air Force PME system could cling to. Their report addressed political restrictions on the use of force, but in a less emotional manner. One of the major themes the study pointed out was that there was no single air commander in charge of all air operations in theater. Also, the study provided real-world justification for educating officers in the areas of the strategic environment and policy formulation process, thus allowing them to educate the political leadership on the perils of too many restrictions.

There were a large number of lessons the USAF could have learned from the Vietnam War.¹⁷ Even during the war, there were airmen and others looking at the way the Air Force employed its forces. There were even some airmen that believed the service did not meet the expectations of the country's leadership or the American people. Consequently, the post-war Air Force had important opportunities to examine air power's role in the war and learn from that examination. One vehicle to process and disperse that learning was through the curricula of its intermediate and senior level PME schools. Unfortunately Air University did not vigorously pursue the opportunities it had to critically analyze the war and capitalize on the lessons these men offered. In the end, the only lesson the USAF learned and taught was the idea that air power, unfettered by political constraints, could be just as decisive as it had been in World War II.

Notes

¹ Marvin Gurtov and Konrad Kellen, *Vietnam: Lessons and Mislessons* (RAND Corporation, June 1969), 15.

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² Ibid., 20.

³ Ibid., 15.

⁴ Richard A. Yudkin, *Airpower in Vietnam in Lessons of Vietnam: Three Interpretive Essays* (New York: American-Asian Educational Exchange, 1971), 35.

⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁶ See Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1989)

⁷ Scott W. Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell, eds., *The Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Crane, Russak & Co., 1977), 130.

⁸ Ibid., 133.

⁹ General Momyer was not in charge of B-52 operations over Vietnam since Strategic Air Command retained control of the bombers.

¹⁰ William W. Momyer, *Airpower in Three Wars (WWII, Korea, Vietnam)* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Air Force, 1978), 337.

¹¹ Ibid., 338.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ U.S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1978), xvii.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵ Ibid., 268-271.

¹⁶ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam, Omnibus Executive Summary* (McLean, Va.: The BDM Corporation, April 28, 1980), VI-15.

¹⁷ Most of the lessons referred to in this paper are present in current USAF PME curricula. The idea of a single airman in charge of air operations is heavily emphasized. Also, today's airmen are taught that there will nearly always be some sort of restraint on the use of air power and that clear objectives are key to air power's effectiveness. Finally, officers study many aspects of America's role in Vietnam including both successes and failures.

Chapter 4

The Curricula: What Effect did the War Have?

In his book *The US Air Force After Vietnam: Postwar Challenges and Potential for Responses*, Donald J. Mrozek, a senior research fellow at the Airpower Research Institute, briefly examined some of the service schools and what they did after the Vietnam War ended. He said, “an important vehicle through which the Air Force and other services express their view of the world around them and their sense of the future is a system of professional military education.” The curriculum of the schools does not necessarily indicate what a service thinks, but what it thinks is worth thinking about. He added, “in this sense, how a curriculum is structured indicates what ‘really matters’ to a service – what is supposed to be crucial to the officers at a level of rank targeted by the given school.”¹ Major Earl H. Tilford, Jr., examined the Air Force’s effort at post-war analysis of the war by contrasting it with the Army’s. He noted that the US Army began its analysis of the war in the early 1970s, while the Air Force made little effort to learn from its experience.²

The Air Force and Air University effort at teaching the lessons of the Vietnam War can be evaluated by closely examining curricula in the years immediately following the war. Both Air War College and Air Command and Staff College used similar teaching methods during this period. Some course material was presented by an expert in a lecture

format. Lectures ensured all students received the same material. After the lectures, students were divided into small group seminars either to discuss the material from previous lectures or to begin exploring new material. In both schools, lectures and seminars were supplemented by electives of the students' choosing. The final opportunity for student learning was independent research. This gave students an opportunity to select a topic in which they were interested, research it, and produce a paper on the subject.³

Air Command and Staff College

In the first year after America's withdrawal from Vietnam, academic year (AY) 1973-74, the objectives of Air Command and Staff College were:

1. Increase the student's understanding of the international environment, the institutions and instruments of national policy—political, economic, psychological, and military—which have an effect on national security and his role as a military officer.
2. Improve his managerial skills and cultivate attitudes and habits appropriate for military officers of his grade and experience level.
3. Expand his knowledge of military forces, their capabilities and alternative strategies, and to improve his ability in the employment of his own military forces.
4. Develop a stimulated, imaginative attitude toward his future and that of the Air Force.⁴

There was room within both objective 1 and objective 2 to teach lessons from the Vietnam War. To meet these objectives, ACSC's curriculum was divided into four areas: Communication Skills (21 hours), Military Environment (174 hours), Command and Management (281 hours), and Military Employment (305 hours). To supplement these course areas, each student was required to take two electives, one during each semester.⁵

Although there was certainly room in the Military Environment portion of the curriculum to discuss the lessons of the Vietnam War, the most likely area to teach lessons from the war would have been in the Military Employment area. Military

Employment was designed to help students gain “an understanding of how and why military forces are used in the full conflict spectrum from peacetime operations, through special operations and limited war, to thermonuclear war....This study concentrates on the basic concepts of aerospace power and how this power can be employed in varying stages of warfare to achieve national objectives.”⁶

However, in examining the actual curriculum materials for AY 1973-74, one finds virtually no mention of the Vietnam War. None of the lecture or seminar objectives, nor any of the actual student readings address the military role in Vietnam. Examining the Military Environment area, which would have addressed the national security formulation process, there was nothing at all related to Vietnam. As for Military Employment, there was plenty on the Triad, Single Integrated Operating Plan (SIOP), and the concept of Realistic Deterrence. A single one-page reading in the Military Employment area book entitled “Protracted War” discussed general military failures in the war, but did not address the Vietnam War specifically.⁷

Of the 32 available electives, only one was devoted to Vietnam. It was titled, “Strategic and Tactical Aspects of the War in Vietnam,” and its objective was to “Know some of the significant decisions and key elements of US strategy related to the war in Southeast Asia and understand some of the underlying considerations facing our decision-makers.”⁸ This course would have been offered to only a very small portion of the student body each semester so it can not be considered an effort on the part of the school to teach the lessons of the war. Additionally, the objective of the course hardly inspires confidence that students would critically examine the subject area.

If ACSC was going to help its student learn from Vietnam, it did not get off to a good start. The curriculum for AY 1973-74 contained virtually no mention of the conflict. Also, as mentioned earlier, the faculty was being discouraged from pursuing its own research interests. Combine that with the fact that the only civilian Ph.D. on the entire faculty or staff was the academic advisor to the commandant, and the result is an environment that did not encourage critical thinking about the war or the passing of its lessons to ACSC's students.

Changes made to the ACSC curriculum the following year, AY 1974-75, moved even further away from teaching warfighting, much less any lessons on the Vietnam War. The number of course hours in the Military Environment area was reduced from 174 to 161. Military Employment course hours were reduced from 305 to 286. This reflected a change in the objectives of the entire ACSC course. The objectives were adjusted to add emphasis on improving the officers' command and staff skills. The number of electives was increased from 32 to 35, but there was still just the one devoted to Vietnam.⁹

When the curriculum material for 1974-1975 was examined more closely, the beginnings of a pattern emerged that would form the basis for AU teaching of Vietnam for the next five years. The one-page reading in the Military Employment course materials dealing with protracted war was removed. The only other article dealing with Vietnam was a reading in the same course area entitled "The Evolution of Air Warfare." This article devoted less than one page to the question of whether air power was used effectively in Vietnam. The author answered that air power was effective but had been restricted in its application.¹⁰ This theme would become the cornerstone of AU thinking and teaching about the Vietnam War.

Academic year 1975-76 saw the virtual elimination of Vietnam from the ACSC curriculum. The previous year, the AU Board of Visitors recommended adoption of a proposed curriculum change that would clearly distinguish ACSC from AWC. The focus for AY 1975-76 would be on staff responsibilities encountered by majors and lieutenant colonels, particularly communication skills. The board recognized this change in focus would take away from the broad education in international relations and national policy formulation.¹¹ As a result, the school's mission changed. The new mission read, "The mission of Air Command and Staff College is to prepare selected officers for the command and staff duties of majors and lieutenant colonels." There was also a major change in the focus of the curriculum. The school's list of objectives changed to include: "Know selected command and staff procedures and techniques"; "Be able to write and speak clearly, concisely, and correctly"; and "Be able to read comprehensively and rapidly." The objectives also contained references to air power by asking the student to "apply fundamental aerospace doctrine," and "understand the history of air power and views of aerospace proponents."¹² There was however, another reduction in the number of hours devoted to Military Employment from 286 to 275, and the only Vietnam elective was dropped from the curriculum.¹³ There were no lecture or seminars that referred to the war in their objectives and there was no reading in any of the course materials that referred to the war. ACSC had apparently closed the book on Vietnam, opting for a return to the focus on contemporary Europe, the Soviet Union, and the future. There were evidently no lessons to be learned from America's long struggle in Vietnam.

Only one minor change was made at ACSC for the 1976-1977 academic year. One reading was added to the Military Environment area entitled "Korea and Vietnam:

Limited War and the American Political System.” The thesis of the article was that limited war could not be conducted effectively by the US because of constraints in its political system. Other than offering an interesting view of the American political system, the article did not draw any lessons from which the military officer could benefit.¹⁴ No other material for the year dealt with Vietnam specifically.

Finally, the 1977-1978 academic year saw some major changes in the ACSC curriculum, but these changes did not necessarily bode well for teaching lessons from Vietnam. The school’s overall objectives changed again. The objectives from the previous year requiring the student to apply aerospace doctrine and understand the history of air power were dropped. There was more emphasis on “specialized staff skills.” During this academic year, ACSC instituted the “specialty track.” Instead of providing each student with a broad education, each student would be allowed to choose a special track that corresponded to his or her next assignment. Tracks were 100 hours and included “Command,” “Plans and Operations (Tactical and Strategic Courses),” “Systems and Logistics,” and “Logistics: Research and Development.”¹⁵ While lessons might have been embedded in any of these tracks, only one of the Plans and Operations specialty tracks contained material on the Vietnam War.

Imbedded in the Strategic Plans and Operation specialty track was a lesson entitled “Linebacker II.”¹⁶ The Linebacker II lesson contained a case study book that included dozens of articles written about Linebacker II, only one of which was critical of the operation. It also contained the testimony of Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who testified before Congress on January 9, 1973. Echoing the popular belief then permeating AU, Admiral Moorer drew a distinct difference between

air power's effectiveness on North Vietnamese targets with and without political restrictions.¹⁷

Overall, the case study deemed Linebacker II a success. The lesson it taught was that Linebacker II ended the war. The one critical article, by Dana Drenkowski, entitled "Operation LINEBACKER II" was taken from the July 1977 issue of *Armed Forces Journal International*. The article discussed the tactics used by the B-52s and the "mutiny"¹⁸ of the crews during the operation. It was extremely critical of the SAC staff for its inflexibility. It is interesting that the curriculum developers who created the case study book could not let the Drenkowski article stand on its own. They made a point of including a copy of an emotional and acerbic response to the Drenkowski article by Admiral Moorer, by then retired. Instead of challenging Drenkowski on the facts, Moorer resorted to sarcasm and name-calling. The school was not about to let the students read criticism of Linebacker without putting it in the "proper perspective."¹⁹

All in all, ACSC dealt with the Vietnam War by virtually ignoring it. What little coverage there was of the topic taught only one lesson: Air power was so effective that it ended the war. It could have been even more effective had the civilian leadership not limited it. Although the more senior of AU's PME schools provided slightly more coverage of the Vietnam War in the five years following its conclusion, the lessons were the same.

Air War College

Air War College entered the post-Vietnam years with an endorsement of its curriculum by the Board of Visitors. The board was satisfied that Air War College curriculum planners had reviewed their curriculum in light of such changes as the end of

the Vietnam War and the re-emphasis on Europe as an area of concern.²⁰ The mission of Air War College had always been more specific in its treatment of air power. In AY 1973-74, its mission statement contained specific reference to employing aerospace power. Its mission was “To prepare senior officers for high command and staff duty by developing in them a sound understanding of military strategy in support of national security policy to ensure an intelligent contribution towards the most effective development and employment of aerospace power.”²¹ As a result, the school was much more devoted to teaching national security policy and military employment than ACSC. The school’s mission also remained much more stable over the next five years, resulting in fewer changes to curriculum.

The curriculum was broken into four major areas: National and World Environment (220 hours), Command and Management (180 hours), Military Capabilities and Strategy (239 hours), National Security Issues (211 hours). Like ACSC, students were required to take two electives, one each semester. Of the 39 electives available, none were devoted to Vietnam.²²

In the 1973-74 core curriculum, treatment of the Vietnam War and its lessons were sparse. There was one reading entitled “Post-Vietnam Issues,” which would be dropped the following year.²³ The main effort was a case study that would remain in the curriculum for the next five years, part of a short series called, appropriately, “Airpower Case Studies.” Two students in a seminar were assigned to present one of six case studies. The presentation consisted of a 15-minute oral presentation followed by a 15-minute discussion. Two of the case studies were drawn from Vietnam: one on Khe Sanh, the other on Linebacker II. The lesson plans directed the presenter to *consider* discussing

lessons learned and “how lessons learned could be exploited in future applications of airpower.” The Khe Sanh case study was subtitled “Single Management of Air Power” and the Linebacker case study’s focus was on “Nonnuclear Strategic Bombing.”²⁴

The case study books remain available through the AU library for the 1974-1975 academic year and it is interesting to examine their content. The Linebacker case study is important in two ways. First, it was the same case study booklet used by ACSC in the Strategic Plans and Operations Specialty Track, instituted in AY 1977-1978. As the only lesson on Vietnam taught by either school after the war, it contains the only real lessons AU taught about the war.

The readings for the Linebacker case study consisted of Admiral Moorer’s Congressional testimony and various magazine articles from late 1972 to early 1973. All the articles were favorable; in fact, some were laudatory. There was even an article from *Air Force Times* quoting General George J. Eade, the USAF’s former Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations. General Eade remarked that “airpower was constrained from attacking the real sources of the enemy’s supplies, such as marshalling points; instead, tactical air was asked to search out individual vehicles and boats as they infiltrated under a triple canopy of jungle, to do so under all weather conditions, and to attack and destroy them.” The article’s author asserted that the Air Force must learn to articulate the limitations of its *equipment* to decision-makers. The lesson of Linebacker according to the author was, “the dramatic proof of the ability of the Air Force to get through to even the most heavily defended targets to a greater degree than we ourselves had anticipated.” This author also said, “The assessment of air operations during 1972 also leads to definite conclusions about the soundness of USAF’s basic tactics.” General

Eade went on to comment, “our tactics, the product of an evolution that took years, were proved out in North Vietnam over an extended, painful period of time. It is, of course true that, as a result, we became even more effective, but the point is that what we went in with was already effective and sound.” The article concluded that the Air Force’s basic penetration doctrine was “effective, enduring, and applicable.”²⁵

Herein lies the best summation of the lessons of Vietnam as taught by Air University at the time. It was in perfect harmony with the spirit of General Momyer and Admiral Sharp. There were only a few conclusions students could draw from these lessons: (1) Political restrictions kept the Air Force from accomplishing its mission earlier in the war. (2) Sometimes the USAF’s equipment may not have kept up with its doctrine, but USAF tactics and doctrine were sound. In fact, they were probably more effective than the Air Force even realized.

The AWC curriculum was very stable between 1973 and 1978, with only a few changes. In AY 1976-1977, the major course areas changed to Leadership and Management (210 hours), Factors Affecting National Security Policy (167 hours), Military Strategy and Capabilities (159.5 hours) Military Capabilities and Employment (298 hours).²⁶ The next year, the number of hours for Military Capabilities and Employment was cut by nearly one-third to 204. Of the 30 electives offered, one was added that year entitled “Lessons of Vietnam,”²⁷ however, the contents of that elective are no longer available.²⁸

What is most interesting about the curriculum in 1977-1978 is how similar it is to 1973-1974, at least as it relates to lessons on Vietnam. The air power case studies remained part of the curriculum, although the student instructions had changed. Students

presenting the Linebacker II case study in AY 1977-78 were asked to evaluate the campaign with respect to “restrictions in the employment of air power which was available to accomplish the mission.”²⁹ More interesting are the contents of the case study books. They remained basically unchanged over the 5 year period with a few minor exceptions. All the articles in the 1973-74 case study book appeared in the 1977-78 book, though four new ones were added. One was the Drenkowski article which criticized the operation (referred to earlier in the discussion of ACSC materials for the same year). Another was a one-page excerpt from the 15 January 1975 version of AFM 1-1 on functions and missions of aerospace forces. The other two were rebuttals to the Drenkowski article, the letter from General Moorer, and an article entitled “A POW View of Linebacker II.” So, of the 26 articles assigned for the case study, 22 were repeated from AY 74 materials, one was a page from a doctrine manual, one was critical of the operation, and two rebutted the critical article.³⁰ It is safe to say, very little reflection and analysis of air power occurred during those five years.

After examining the actual curriculum for both ACSC and AWC in the five years after the war, two conclusions can be drawn. First, the war was virtually ignored as a part of core curriculum. What classes ACSC taught about the war were either electives or part of a “specialty track,” neither guaranteeing exposure to more than a fraction of the student population. There was not a single lecture, seminar, or case study to which the entire class was exposed. AWC offered only slightly more exposure. Out of the 1600 hours of curriculum, the entire class was exposed to only one hour on the subject of the Vietnam War during the year’s formal curriculum. In 1977-78, some students had the option of taking the “Lessons of Vietnam” elective, although, since it was only one of 30

electives, this material would have reached very few students. The second conclusion is that in the very limited coverage the war received, the lessons taught to the students were few. In fact, the only real lesson was that air power, freed of political constraints, had been successful in the war. USAF doctrine was validated.

In fairness to both schools, there were many hours of seminar time when students were free to discuss what they were learning. There can be no doubt that many students brought Vietnam experiences with them and discussed the war during these small-group discussions. Unfortunately, if a school wants to ensure a topic is taught, it cannot rely on what students will discuss in their small-group seminars. The school can only assure that students are exposed to material by either assigning it as reading or having the faculty teach it. Formal education on the lessons of Vietnam appears to have been of little importance to either school. AU taught very few lessons that were learned from the Vietnam War.

Chapter 5

Why Did AU Place So Little Emphasis on the Lessons of Vietnam?

Why would the PME system of the Air Force place so little emphasis on analyzing Vietnam and attempting to learn lessons from the war? It would be easy to contend that the Air Force and Air University wanted to further the interests of the Air Force by downplaying lessons that detracted from air power's decisiveness. However, there is no evidence this was done intentionally. The Vietnam War was simply and curiously absent. In fact, one prominent lesson that would have been enormously beneficial to teach to field grade officers, also missing from the curriculum, was the idea of a single airman controlling all air forces within a theater. Of all lessons that could further the goals of the Air Force, that was an important one because it was a missed opportunity to illustrate what happens when air power is not under the control of a single airman. But that lesson of the war was also missing from the readings and curriculum material available. So, there must be other reasons the Air Force PME system failed to analyze and teach the war.

One of the reasons the Air Force PME system placed so little emphasis on the lessons of the Vietnam War can be found in the attitude the Air Force had toward PME. Never having had a firm philosophy regarding the purpose of PME, it was difficult to make the schools responsive to learning lessons from a war that occurred just a few years

in the past. Although the Air Force put its PME philosophy in writing in the mid-1960s with an emphasis on teaching warfighting, the Air Force was still more concerned with PME as a career progression instrument than as a school for teaching the employment of air power.

Shortly after the war, in 1975, the Department of Defense (DOD) Committee on Excellence in Education, or Clements Committee, tried to evaluate and set the stage for post-war PME. The committee's conclusions were directive in nature and addressed both the intermediate and senior schools. It directed all war colleges to have a common core curriculum, which included study of the DOD decision-making process, national security policy formulation, management skills, and the national and international environment. The intermediate schools were to focus on the doctrine, staff, and operations of their service. All of these core curriculum areas provided opportunities for discussion of the lessons of Vietnam.³¹

Complicating the business of PME at this time was the serious consideration by the DOD of reducing all the staff colleges to 22 weeks. This idea was scrapped because it was believed officers would leave the courses with only technical staff skills and without a broad understanding of doctrine or the strategic application of the forces associated with their parent service.³²

During the same period the services were advocating the 10-month PME course to advance broad knowledge, ACSC instituted a 100-hour "specialty track" course. This course was tailored to the students' next assignment and designed to ease the transition into their next job. It is interesting that at the very time study groups like the Clements committee and the Air Force deputy chief of staff for personnel were directing an

emphasis on air power and its application, the AU leadership was increasing the emphasis on staff skills in its ACSC curriculum.

Part of the problem with AU and its attitude toward PME might be found in its leadership. Lieutenant General F. Michael Rogers, AU commander from 1974 to 1975 admitted in an *Air University Review* article that when he received orders to command AU, he had no opinion of PME. He had not attended any USAF PME, only a “sabbatical” at the National War College. He says he wrote the article because after 18 months as AU Commander, he finally realized why officer PME was important. He laid out some basic tenets regarding why he thought PME was important. One states that PME “permits the Air Force officer corps to develop expertise in aerospace concepts, doctrine, and strategy from a progressively higher level of experience and maturity.”³³ Even while stating this philosophy, both AWC and ACSC were reducing the amount of time they spent teaching employment of military forces.

The lack of direction in its PME philosophy was of course only part of the problem. The main reason for not teaching the lessons of the Vietnam War may simply have been an institutional desire to avoid it. Vietnam air power historian, Major Earl Tilford, asserted that there was the desire to “put Vietnam behind us” so the USAF could prepare for the next war, which would presumably be more like the strategic air warfare of World War II.³⁴ An examination of articles Air University published during the five years after the war supports Tilford’s thoughts. *Air University Review*, the Air Force’s primary avenue for publishing emerging thought on air power application, contains very little material on the topic of the Vietnam War. Between the 1974 and 1978 academic years, there were only 12 articles published on air power in Vietnam.³⁵ Only one of the 12 had

anything to do with the lessons of the war and, coincidentally, General George J. Eade, then Deputy Commander in Chief of European Command wrote it. General Eade is the same officer whose views were so prominent in the Linebacker case studies at AWC and ACSC. His lessons in this article were the same: do not restrict air power, political restraint is bad, and Linebacker II proves air power can win wars.³⁶

Linebacker II appears to be the event that set the Air Force and Air University on the educational path it followed the first few years after the war. In that 11-day operation, the Air Force saw its beliefs validated. Although several people were thinking about other lessons on the limits of air power during and immediately following the war, Linebacker gave the institution the excuse it needed to ignore them. Had Linebacker not been seen as the success that it was, the institution might have been forced to re-examine its role and doctrine.

Notes

¹ Mrozek, 37.

² Earl H. Tilford, Jr., “Air Power in Vietnam: Hubris of Power” in Lawrence E. Grinter and Peter M. Dunn *The American War in Vietnam: Lessons, Legacies, and Implications for Future Conflicts* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 69.

³ This overview of how AWC and ACSC administered their curriculum is taken from a summary of the Curriculum Catalogs of the years covered in this paper. The methodology did not change during the course of the years covered in this paper and in fact, has not changed to the present day, except that students now take either an elective or perform independent research.

⁴ Curriculum Catalog, Class ACSC-74 (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 20 August 1973), 2.

⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁷ ACSC Curriculum Material, *Military Employment Vol 3, 1973-1974*. Note: The Air University Library contains curriculum materials from both AWC and ACSC. The material available included Curriculum Circulars, Seminar Booklets, Curriculum Guidance, and the readings for the courses. For ACSC, readings were available for every year. Seminar Booklets and Curriculum Guidance was available for some years and not others. The materials for 76-77 contained “Discussion Papers,” prepared for General Furlong, the AU commander. For AWC, there is much less available. There was not a

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complete set of material for any year, however, there was a cross-section of area books containing course readings, Instruction Circulars, course schedules, and student Curriculum Guides. From this point forward, this material will be cited as “Curriculum Material” and will include the volume, school, and academic year.

⁸ Curriculum Catalog, Class ACSC-74, 63.

⁹ Curriculum Catalog, Class ACSC-75, 66.

¹⁰ ACSC Curriculum Material, *Military Employment Vol 1*, 1974-1975.

¹¹ *Report of AU Board of Visitors 31st Meeting*, (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 18 March 1975), 12.

¹² Air University Catalog, 1975-1976, 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ ACSC Curriculum Material, *Military Employment Vol 1*, 347.

¹⁵ Air University Catalog, 1977-1978, 16-17.

¹⁶ ACSC Curriculum Material, *ACSC Curriculum Plan, Part II*, 24 Jan 1978-9 Jun 1978, 56.

¹⁷ ACSC Curriculum Material, *Case Study: Linebacker*, 1977-1978.

¹⁸ The term “mutiny” refers to the protests by B-52 crews regarding the rigid tactics in use during the first three days of Linebacker II where nine B-52s were lost. See Earl H. Tilford’s *Setup*, pp. 254-262, for a short discussion of B-52 tactics during the operation.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Report of Air University Board of Visitors 29th Meeting*, (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 22 March 1973), 3.

²¹ Air University Catalog, 1973-1974, 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 10-14.

²³ AWC Course Material, *Course of Study, Vol IV*, 1973-1974, 16.

²⁴ AWC Course Material, *Instruction Circular: Military Capabilities and Strategy*, 1973-74, 159-160.

²⁵ AWC Course Material, *Air Power Case Study: Linebacker II*, 1974-1975, 95-96. Article quoted was reprinted from *Air Force Magazine*, Vol. 56, June 1973, 34-40.

²⁶ Air University Catalog, 1976-1977, 7.

²⁷ Air University Catalog, 1977-1978, 7.

²⁸ The available curriculum for AWC did not contain any study material or reading lists for electives.

²⁹ AWC Curriculum Material, *Guide for Airpower Case Study: Linebacker II*, 1977-1978, 3.

³⁰ AWC Curriculum Material, *Guide for Airpower Case Study: Linebacker II*, 1977-1978.

³¹ Davis and Donnini, 9

³² *Ibid.*, 24.

³³ Lt Gen Michael F. Rogers. “Why Professional Military Education?,” *Air University Review* 26, no. 5 (July-August 1975): 2-9.

³⁴ Tilford, 69.

³⁵ Maj Michael A. Kirtland, ed., *Air University Review Index*, (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, October 1990), 422.

Notes

³⁶ Gen George J. Eade, "Reflections on Air Power in Vietnam," *Air University Review* 25, no.1 (Nov-Dec 1973): 2-9.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The lessons put forth by military men like Momyer and Sharp were just the sort of lessons an air force would want to learn after a major conflict. Any organization would delight in the idea that a war that was lost could have been won if it had simply been allowed to do its job without restrictions. It bred the idea that, had the US had simply used more air power, the war could have been won. It made the organization's post-war analysis easy. The organization needed only say, "Our doctrine worked, we just weren't allowed to implement it." In essence, the Air University supported this belief by not requiring its students to critically examine air power's role in the Vietnam War.

Looking back at the war in 1989, Mark Clodfelter sheds light on why the Air Force and by default, AU ignored Vietnam. He said the air chiefs believed political constraints prevented victory in Vietnam. They also believed their doctrine was right throughout Vietnam, and that it was right for the future. In their eyes, Vietnam had been an anomaly.¹ But Vietnam's political controls were not anomalies. For the Air Force, the war itself was not an anomaly either and a similar conflict may well reappear in the Air Force's future. Vietnam had little impact on USAF bombing doctrine. The Air Force continued in its belief that, freed from political constraints, its strategic bombing doctrine would still work, just as it had in 1944-1945, and just as it would continue to work

against the enemies of the future. Yet Clodfelter disagreed. He said air commanders and civilians alike must realize that air power is unlikely to bring a swift and cheap victory in a guerilla war.² The Air Force should not have had to wait 15 years for Mark Clodfelter to come along to begin thinking about air power's limits. Those lessons were available in the mid-1970s and ignored.

The AU motto in the mid-1970s, "We go forward unhampered by tradition," was drawn from the words of General Muir Fairchild, its first commander. It is perhaps a motto that served the organization poorly. Those words imply that the Air Force does not look back. After any war, it is worth the effort to look back and analyze what occurred to prevent costly mistakes in the future. It is worth the effort to learn some lessons, unlearn others, and sometimes simply recognize that there are no lessons. Air University and its intermediate and senior schools have the responsibility to participate in this process.

Notes

¹ Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 208.

² *Ibid.*, 210.

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