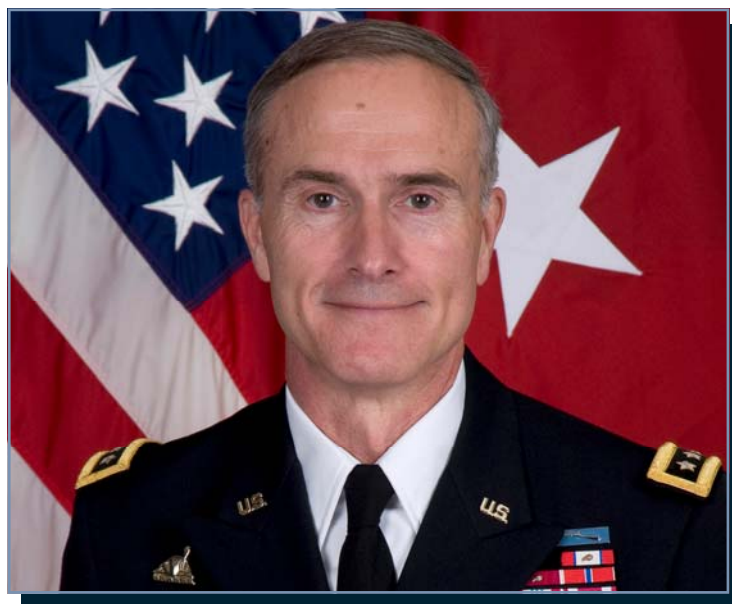


General David Huntoon

Superintendent

U.S. Military Academy



From Street Smarts to Global Intelligence

Lt. Gen. David H. Huntoon, Jr. is the 58th Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He was commissioned in 1973 from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. From 1973-1986, Lt. Gen. Huntoon served as an Infantry Officer in a series of command and staff assignments with the 3rd Infantry Regiment at Fort Myer, Virginia, the 9th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, Washington, the 7th Army Training Command at Vilseck, Germany, and with the 3rd Infantry Division in Aschaffenburg, Germany.

From 1986-1988, Lt. Gen. Huntoon attended the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the School for Advanced Military Studies. He then served in the Directorate of Plans, XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as Senior War Plans Officer (Operation Just Cause), Deputy Director of Plans (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm) and Director of Plans.

From 1992-1994, he commanded 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry (Mechanized) at Camp Casey, Korea, and served as Chief of Plans, CJ3, Combined Forces Command and United Nations Command, Yongsan. In 1994-95, he was the Army's National Security Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. He then took command of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), Fort Myer, Virginia. From 1997-1999, Lt. Gen. Huntoon served as the Executive Officer to the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army. He was the Assistant Division Commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas, 1999-2000, and from 2000-2002, the Deputy Commandant of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. His next assignment was as the Director of Strategy, Plans and Policy, Army G3, the Pentagon. In August 2003, Lt. Gen. Huntoon was assigned as the 46th Commandant, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. In his last assignment he served as the Director of the Army Staff in the Pentagon.



Robert Reiss: What is West Point's role in our society?

David Huntoon: Since 1802, the role has been relatively the same, which is fundamentally to produce leaders of character who serve as officers in the United States Army. Many of them will have a career of service, and many of them will serve a shorter period of time and then continue on to be great citizens and leaders in the private sector, or in some other form of public service. So it is just "serve the nation in a selfless way as leaders".

When you mentioned the word "character", can someone learn character?

We think that there's a great deal of confidence here at West Point that, given the fact that every year we bring in about 1,250 young men and women from every state in the union and from about 33 countries around the world, we have many, many different value systems at work. We very deliberately set out to shake them up from the very first day that they arrive and to establish the army values that will be so important if they become leaders of our young men and women in the Armed Forces, 47 months later.

So we do think there is a deliberate process and systematic means to the development of character, and we work at that every single day.

What are those systematic means to learning character?

West Point has a whole person approach to character development and it focuses on the intellectual domain, the military domain, and the physical domain. Intellectually, of course, this is a four-year, undergraduate college, at the end of which upon graduation, all our cadets will receive a Bachelor of Science degree. They have 45 academic areas in which to major. It is an extraordinary academic experience which has been rated by several prestigious publications in the past several years as one of the top five universities in the nation.

The academic side of West Point is quite astonishing. It begins with an exceptional group of young men and

women who apply here. We have a very, very competitive system for entry into West Point. We require that our candidates be physically fit, to have very high test scores, and to already be moving in the direction of demonstrating leadership capacity when they arrive.

Once they arrive here they are given all of our value systems and we deliberately take each over the four years to mold them in character development. It is the business of their taking on the values of the United States Army, which are easily summarized as loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, and integrity.

Our cadets are your varsity leaders or winners, your captains of athletic team, your student government presidents. They are the youngsters who are already successful in some measures. So they have most of these values in some form already, but we take the time in a very deliberate manner to develop and improve them through the intellectual, physical, and military disciplines to continue to shape them so that when they raise their hands at the end of that 47-month period, they are ready to lead the sons and daughters of the United States who are wearing uniforms. And they are ready to deal with all the extraordinary challenges of this contemporary and chaotic environment with all the attendant ethical dilemmas that our leaders face every day.

What can business learn from the military, and what can the military learn from business?

The US Army at large, not just the United States Military Academy, has been after this for a long time. Clearly, we are in the business of leadership here. That's our central focus. That's what defines pretty much everything we do at West Point. We're developing leaders of character. So the same leadership techniques that we focus on, that we teach, that we cultivate, and we develop in each of these very tough years at West Point are replicated, we hope, in the business community.

Certainly from our reading of everything from The CEO Forum, to the Harvard Business Review, to the

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fundamental lessons learned from conflict over the past several centuries, we see lots of common denominators between our world and the world of the private sector. We have a very different bottom line for sure. Our cadets on graduation are going to command platoons. Some of them within a very short period of time - in some cases just a few months - will be taking those platoons into harm's way in a very, very complex and complicated world where they will be facing tough ethical dilemmas. They have enormous responsibility as young men and women and we have to supply some fundamental leadership traits immediately for them to succeed in a very, very dangerous world.

So the bottom line is it is a little different than out in the private sector. But fundamentally, the leadership traits are about the same. In the business world as in the military, we're interested in the observation of complex problems. We are focused on what we are trying to accomplish. We're making assessments and analysis. We are making decisions about what path we're going to take and then we're going to execute those decisions. It seems to me that those are probably the same fundamental approaches that take place in the business world, too.

In the private sector, one of the great measures of success in a business organization is its capacity to be a benchmark and to be able to share some of its own success. We are very interested here at West Point in sharing the quality of our staff and faculty, too, not just for the Military but for the nation.

How do you teach critical thinking?

We teach it in many ways by establishing tough decision-making environments and leadership laboratories, whether they are in classrooms or in field situations in the summer, and you never provide the right answer. Fundamentally, we teach that there is no one right answer today to the ethical dilemmas that our cadets are going to face. There are maybe two, three, four, or five right answers. It is an overused expression - "thinking outside of the box" - but we really do try to teach our cadets that they have to take a hard look at many, many paths to success. In the simple ways that

we use to just knock down doors, now there are all the second and third consequential effects of warfare that they have to take into consideration, too.

And some of those might not have anything to do with combat. For instance, they might have to have their three cups of tea before they meet and make progress with the tribal counsel in Kandahar or Mosul in Afghanistan. They have might have to understand that an additional hour of electricity may be just as important and beneficial as interrogating the occupants of the third house in this small village.

There are a lot of things that require different thinking skills. So the answer to your question whether this can be taught is, yes, we can train and teach and inculcate critical thinking skills here at West Point. We must! And those are the same skills I suspect that have the same value in private sector organizations.



So what you're really doing is enabling people to think under any situation regardless of the consequence.

That's right. We've been engaged now for almost a decade in two major campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. Now we're getting really to pull out of both of those campaigns which is the right thing to do. Inevitably,

the success of both those nation-states falls to the sovereignty of their governments and their own people.

Then the question is: What is the next battlefield going to be? We don't do very well in our history divining the future, but what we can do is we can prepare for being successful regardless of the conflict. We have to be prepared in the military for success across a spectrum of operations from conventional war to counter-insurgency. That requires a great capacity to think, and to be innovative and adaptive regardless of the conditions that you will face.

How much out of it is strategic and how much of it is tactical?

The answer is at West Point we focus on the tactical skills because that's the condition that most of our Lieutenants will face immediately upon graduation.

Let's talk more about the word "chaos" because you're obviously teaching your cadets to think clearly. What are your thoughts about operating in chaos?

That's a great point. Bringing order out of chaos is central to the responsibilities that our officers have in the United States Army. So, in these four years at West Point, we try in our intellectual domains, the physical domain, and the military domain to stress our cadets on a relentless basis so that they understand how to do just that, to bring order out of chaos.

In the intellectual domain, we have a very tough academic program here, but a lot of focus on critical thinking skills allows us to be successful in any set of conditions, whatever the battlefield, or whatever peace-time crisis we may face as citizen-soldiers in the future.

In our physical domain, we put a tremendous emphasis on a balance that has to be learned. The focus on health and wellness is paramount here at West Point; what Douglas MacArthur, former superintendent, described as "every cadet and athlete". Every cadet every day has to participate in either a team sport or a club sport, or an intramural program to sustain their physical well-being, to focus on the values of teamwork, discipline, and initiative, and to be competitive.

For the military domain, both during the academic year and particularly in the summer, we put our cadets through some very rigorous and tough military training in which we set the conditions for understanding chaos. We require our cadets to lead, to find the best path out, to find the best way to accomplish the mission, the best way to take the hill, and the best way to deal with the tribal leader in a very different world than the one of the 20th and 19th centuries.

On all levels at West Point, we're trying very hard to set the conditions for the success of the cadet who upon graduating will be prepared for the extraordinary complexity of 21st century warfare.

I would bet cultural immersion becomes critical....

Cultural immersion is absolutely critical in this very complex world that Tom Friedman's speak to. When he talks about globalization it takes on a very special

meaning for us in the military. When we think about cultural immersion, we think here at West Point about a process that has increased in the past 10 years where cadets spend a full semester abroad in about 40 countries around the world, and still complete the requirements for their Bachelor of Science degree under a very rigorous academic schedule.

We also send cadets both during the academic year and in the summer to places around the world during their military training. We send our cadets each year now to every continent in the world to spend three to five weeks in a cultural immersion experience.

Let me give you a classic example. A cadet would spend three to five weeks in Russia, if he/she is taking Russian here at the West Point, one of the eight languages that are required for two years. Every cadet would spend two of those weeks in a small Russian village and live in a total immersion experience with a Russian family. They would then spent another week at St. Petersburg getting a grasp of the Russian history from the 16th century on, and then spent the last week in Moscow, exchanging ideas with fellow military cadets in that important world capital.

We also send cadets to Jordan, Santiago, Chile, Beijing, China, and other places, for similar periods of time, all because we want to improve their language skills, but much more importantly, we want them to be cognizant of the extraordinary differences in culture that they will face at some point in their future. We wan them to have the capacity then to be successful in dealing with other cultures. The army sends a clear message at the very beginning of their leadership development about the importance of culture in their lives and their future careers.

One of your first steps as Superintendent was with your team re-evaluating the vision....

I took a hard look at the mission because it made enormous sense to me since it is in large measure a derivative of the call to duty that is given to us by the United States Government. The vision is something we can shape, and craft, and re-look, and reconsider, and I focused on three elements of the vision. The first one,

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of course, is the reaffirmation of the need to create leaders of character for the nation, which is invaluable.

The second one speaks to being a foundation for the United States Military and the study of ethics and ethical leadership.

And the third one speaks to West Point providing a source of intellectual capital for the US Military and for the nation.

Talk about the faculty....

Fifty-five percent of our faculty members at West Point are active duty army officers, who have just come from Afghanistan, Iraq, and other places around the world, and have also just returned from a first year graduate education experience. Also we have many scholars and authors. So they bring both scholarship and the extraordinary experience of having been leaders in the fight.

They are great role models for the way forward for that cadet who will be a leader for some period of time in the US military, and then, just as importantly, a leader of character for the nation throughout his/her life.

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with them into the private sector the same value systems and the same focus on duty, honor, and country.

In education, there's the balance that has to be struck; officers are masters of kinetic warfare, but officers also have the capacity to take the time to embrace new ideas and to learn how to harness change. So in the business of chaos they can see it as an opportunity as opposed to being a crisis.

What can someone do to become a clear thinker in business?

It goes back to this fundamental business of critical thinking skills, of making the right observation analysis, deciding what it is we're trying to accomplish and then most importantly, going after that vision.

Any final thoughts?

Robert E. Lee, a former superintendent at West Point, once said, “*Duty* may be the most beautiful word in the English language.”

It has been a pleasure speaking with you, General Huntoon.



Robert Reiss and General Huntoon
Interview aired 09/01/2011