

The Biography of Jack Wintle

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In 1940, Lieutenant Jack Wintle received an assignment to the city of New Orleans to teach young midshipman in an NROTC program.¹ It had been challenging for him to reach that moment. Before becoming an officer in the Navy he overcame social stigma and poverty to become an exceptional individual in a position of leadership. He devoted his life to serving his country, instructed young men in their pursuit of the same, and left a long-lasting legacy. Jack Wintle's military education gave him the chance to have an impact on younger generations. The expansion of the military's influence in colleges and universities created the same opportunity to other young men like him. Yet that expansion was not revolutionary. Nearly eighty years prior, the United States military and higher educational institutions entered into a partnership that served as a means to achieve the goals of the state. A notable precursor to a pivotal stage in that partnership is Jack Wintle's experience. He embodied the deeply ingrained American ideals of education and hard work, ideals that were necessary incorporations into the first GI Bill and thus allowed for continuation of military involvement in higher education.

The timing of Jack's assignment to New Orleans in 1940 was not a coincidence. As the second world war loomed young men clamored to enlist, but others chose to remain in college to continue their education.² Realizing the impending war would soon require more enlisted men with technical skills, branches of the military coordinated with colleges to develop programs which combined military training with education. These programs provided all the benefits of military enlistment while allowing for men to receive higher education instruction. Notably the NROTC, the program in which Jack taught, became integrated as an essential part of the Navy's

¹ "Jack W. Wintle, LCDR, USN," USNA Virtual Memorial Hall, last modified December 21, 2018, https://usnamemorialhall.org/index.php/JACK_W._WINTLE,_LCDR,_USN.

² John P. Monks, "College Men at War," *Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 24, no. 3 (1957): 25.

college training program.³ As the United States assumed its role as a world power, decision makers utilized the relationship between the military and higher education institutions to further the nation's strength in the war and the world. Not a new concept, the federal government's use of colleges traced all way back to the Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862. Part of the law championed by Congressman Justin Morrill required land grant colleges to include provisions for military training opportunities within their institutions.⁴ With civil war absorbing the nation's consciousness, clearly young men trained in military tactics would be advantageous in the conflict. The law also aligned with American values of the era. By training young men attending college in military tactics, the idea of citizens trained as soldiers could remain a legitimate option. Moreover, the necessity of a standing army could continue to be curtailed.⁵ As the nation's leaders realized the practicality and usefulness higher education institutions had to furthering national objectives, they clearly understood the incorporation of widely held American values helped justify this partnership.

Following the era of the Land Grant Act, the relationship between the military and higher education remained largely untapped. Even after World War I gave rise to the implementation of ROTC programs in colleges, the partnership experienced little growth. Much of this could be attributed to the fact that most Americans focused on pursuing economic, business, or personal financial growth to which military expansion and training, within or outside of the education

³ Malcom M. Wiley, "The College Training Programs of the Armed Services," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 231 (January 1944): 15-20.

⁴ Richard M. Abrams, "The U.S. Military and Higher Education: A Brief History," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 502 (1989): 16.

⁵ Richard M. Abrams, "The U.S. Military and Higher Education: A Brief History," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 502 (1989): 17.

system, did little to advance.⁶ Additionally, the United States' use of financial strategies to pursue their goals abroad, as opposed to overt military force, along with popular favor toward isolationism likely did little to foster public or political support for military programs in higher education.⁷ This period of relative dormancy further demonstrated that the priorities of American society directly affected how the military-education relationship developed.

However, Jack Wintle's military education shows that while the military and higher education had a quiet and confined relationship prior to World War Two, it did, in fact, have one. Jack's military education changed the trajectory of his life, a life which did not have an easy start. Hannah Jane Lewis gave birth to her son, Jack, in Pittsburg, Kansas in 1908. Not married to the father of her child, Ms. Lewis likely never even told Jack's father about the existence of his son. A difficult way to start any life, the social stigma of the time which surrounded a child born out of wedlock worsened Jack's situation. Despite the adversity, Jack showed promise as a young man.⁸ He attended Pittsburg Senior High School and his yearbook biography details a student heavily involved in extracurricular activities. As a national honor society member, an actor in school drama productions, a basketball player, and the junior class vice president, "[Jack] grew up to be an outstanding individual who was looked up to by many in spite of the hard knocks (and gossip) he had to overcome."⁹

⁶ Richard M. Abrams, "The U.S. Military and Higher Education: A Brief History," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 502 (1989): 20.

⁷ Bear F. Braumoeller, "The Myth of American Isolationism," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 4 (2010), 356.

⁸ Jackie Wintle, email message to the author, April 4-8, 2019.

⁹ *The Purple and White* (Pittsburg, Kansas: Pittsburg Senior High School, 1925), 43; Jackie Wintle, email message to the author, April 4-8, 2019.

Jack graduated in 1926 and began attending Kansas State Teacher's College of Pittsburg, now known as Pittsburg State University. He continued to be an involved and high achieving student as an active member in the Kappa Delta Kappa fraternity, president of the student council, and a member of the Y.M.C.A.¹⁰ Jack's time in college, however, was precarious. Without financial support from his mother and stepfather, he worked as a night clerk at the railroad station and a soda jerk to simply earn enough money to continue with school.¹¹

During the spring of 1928, Jack's plans drastically changed upon his admittance as a midshipman in the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland.¹² Attending the Academy meant he would receive an exclusive, top-quality education at no financial cost, and the potential of a high-ranking Naval career. Few young men ever had this opportunity. As his college's newspaper, *The Collegio*, reported, "... [Jack] was thrilled beyond words about his future and [could] hardly wait...."¹³

Jack began attending the United States Naval Academy in June 1928. Known by the nickname of "Winty" he continued to be substantially active in his education. His yearbook paints picture of an outgoing, friendly, and popular young man with "...all the qualifications of a good Naval officer."¹⁴

¹⁰ "Social Events," *Collegio*, December 23, 1927; and ¹⁰ "Killed in Action," *Pittsburg Sun*, November 17, 1942; and "Wintle Will Enter Training: Passes Naval Exam: Goes to Annapolis in June," *Collegio*, March 16, 1928.

¹¹ Jackie Wintle, email message to the author, April 4-8, 2019.

¹² "Wintle Will Enter Training: Passes Naval Exam: Goes to Annapolis in June," *Collegio*, March 16, 1928.

¹³ "Wintle Will Enter Training: Passes Naval Exam: Goes to Annapolis in June," *Collegio*, March 16, 1928.

¹⁴ *The Lucky Bag* (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Academy, 1932): 10.

For the first eight years of his military career, Junior Lieutenant Wintle served tours of duty on four different vessels including the battleship *USS California*, a submarine tender, the *USS Perkins* destroyer, and the destroyer DU PONT.¹⁵ In 1942, Lieutenant Wintle received a promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Commander and received orders to serve on the *San Francisco* in the Pacific near the island of Guadalcanal. There in mid-November Japan made an intense attempt to reinvade the island which resulted in a three-day battle. During this battle, on November 13th, the *San Francisco* took a direct hit on its bridge where Lieutenant Commander Wintle stood. Both he and his commanding officer died in the attack.

Lieutenant Commander Jack Wintle received a sea burial. After his death he was awarded the Naval Cross for his bravery and significant contribution to the Allies' defeat of Japanese forces in the battle.¹⁶ A few months later, the launch of the *USS Wintle* occurred. The vessel would become involved in the lend-lease program and soon went to the United Kingdom for use in the Royal Navy. A second ship, bearing the same name, was almost immediately commissioned and went on to operate in the Pacific during the rest of World War II.¹⁷ Additionally, the Tulane University ROTC established an award in his honor and the *Jack William Wintle and Mary Clyde Newman Wintle Scholarship* was established in 1997 at Pittsburg State University.¹⁸

¹⁵ "Jack W. Wintle, LCDR, USN," USNA Virtual Memorial Hall, last modified December 21, 2018, https://usnamemorialhall.org/index.php/JACK_W._WINTLE,_LCDR,_USN.

¹⁶ Jackie Wintle, email message to the author, April 4-8, 2019.

¹⁷ "Wintle (DE-25)," Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, Naval History and Heritage Command, April 28, 2004, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/w/wintle-i.html>.

¹⁸ Jack W. Wintle, LCDR, USN," USNA Virtual Memorial Hall, last modified December 21, 2018, https://usnamemorialhall.org/index.php/JACK_W._WINTLE,_LCDR,_USN; and Jackie Wintle, email message to the author, April 4-8, 2019.

Lieutenant Commander Wintle lived up to his yearbook's predictions of success in a way that embodied the ideals of hard work, dedication, and success and even sacrifice with his death in service to his country. A young man from humble beginnings he worked exceptionally hard to advance his lot in life and took every opportunity to better himself. His story exemplified the narrative and ideals integral to the of the first G.I. Bill. Adopted in 1944, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act included provisions for medical benefits, housing, and business loans to returning veterans. Perhaps most notably the law provided veterans to chance to attain a degree of higher education in colleges, universities or vocational schools.¹⁹

The motivations, justifications, and debated which fueled the passage of the bill reveal the deep influence of the American ideal of hard work which was harnessed to integrate higher education in such a way as to benefit the state. Opponents to an early version of the bill, which did not include provisions for education, objected on the grounds the proposed programs would encourage returning veterans to be unambitious and overly reliant on the government for their wellbeing. Such sentiments reflected the nearly constant underlying belief possessed by a portion of the American populace who remained wary of legislation containing any semblance of "hand-outs" or hinted at "socialism."²⁰ Opposing these critics, numerous people worked within and outside of Congress to promote the bill, including a fellow Kansan, Harry Colmery who worked with Senator Ernest McFarland to draft the bill and push it through Congress. McFarland especially harbored concern about the employment and general prosperity of veterans following the conclusion of the war. Worried about the potential political and social upheaval which

¹⁹ James E. McMillian, "Father of the GI Bill: Ernest W. McFarland," *Journal of Arizona History* 35, no. 4 (1994): 369; and "How the GI Bill Widened the Racial Higher Education Gap," *Journal of Black in Higher Education*, no. 41 (2003): 36.

²⁰ James E. McMillian, "Father of the GI Bill: Ernest W. McFarland," *Journal of Arizona History* 35, no. 4 (1994): 366.

destitute veterans could bring about, he intended to provide opportunities for recently returned soldiers to be occupied, employed, and productive members of their communities.²¹

On January 28th, 1944 McFarland proposed an amendment which would include funding for veterans' education.²² This element of the bill improved the sense that the legislation served as more than a hand-out. While the government would cover tuition and a monthly stipend, it was up to the individuals themselves to work through school and earn a certificate or degree that could lead to financial and social security as well as professional and personal advancement. The GI Bill provided the opportunity for veterans to receive an education, just as Jack Wintle's acceptance to the Naval Academy provided an opportunity. Similarly, just as it was up to Jack to make use of his chance and put in the effort to graduate and work to achieve the rank of Lieutenant Commander, the GI bill ultimately left it up to veterans to apply themselves to the opportunities the education provisions presented.

With the education portion appealing to the American value of hard work, the bill also effectively utilized the military-education relationship to benefit the state by diverting energy to prevent potential social and political upheaval that could have been dangerous in the post-war stage. Furthermore, leaders of the American Legion applauded McFarland, and noted that he, "rendered a distinct service to our nation... because through this legislation with its educational provisions and other features [he] ensured America against national loss of skills and potential leadership."²³ The United States benefited from having educated military veterans who could

²¹ James E. McMillian, "Father of the GI Bill: Ernest W. McFarland," *Journal of Arizona History* 35, no. 4 (1994): 358, 360, 376.

²² James E. McMillian, "Father of the GI Bill: Ernest W. McFarland," *Journal of Arizona History* 35, no. 4 (1994): 366.

²³ Bennet "Champ" Clark III, "Statement Before the Finance Committee, "File 4, Box 47, *Prescott Courier*, March 14, 1944, quoted in James E. McMillian, "Father of the GI Bill: Ernest W. McFarland," *Journal of Arizona History* 35, no. 4 (1994): 368.

make commercial, scientific, and political contributions to American society. Thus a precedent was set for following decades during which the federal government contracted higher education institutions to work with the Department of Defense to educate citizens, especially in math and science, in the interest of meeting national security needs and advancing the nation's international standing as the United States competed in the Cold War.²⁴

Despite all the honors presented posthumously to Lieutenant Commander Wintle, his family never received closure about his death. In 1992 his daughter and wife took part in a National Geographic Documentary that explored both the location of the naval battle where their husband and father died. The documentary filmed Mary Wintle reading a letter her husband wrote shortly before his death in which he had written to her, "One thing that has impressed me so terribly much is the extremely small value of material things compared with the greater things, such as a chance to live."²⁵ Jack's education allowed him a chance to live a better life, to serve, lead, teach, and inspire. As such, his story exemplified American social values of education, hard work, and opportunity that were instrumental to the adoption of the GI Bill which allowed for expansion of the military-higher education partnership and served as an tool through which the United States sought to achieve its aims.

²⁴ Richard M. Abrams, "The U.S. Military and Higher Education: A Brief History," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 502 (1989): 21-24.

²⁵ *The Lost Fleet of Guadalcanal*, produced by Robert Kenner (National Geographic Video, 1993), 1:31:20-1:33:26, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU3osN3UJaw>.

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