
Spotlight on History

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2023 is shaping up to be a very exciting year for the history committee with things old and new to offer the Society. In the Spring 2015 issue of *The Military Psychologist*, longtime Division 19 historian and archivist Paul A. Gade established the *Profiles in Military Psychology* section of the Spotlight on History column. Since that time, we have read about Robert Nichols in 2016, Samuel A. Stouffer in 2017, and Arthur S. Otis in 2017. As the current history chair, I would like to revisit Paul's initiative and call on my fellow military psychologists to work alongside the history committee. Some notable past Division 19 presidents we would like to highlight are Phillip DuBois, Jack Dunlop, Robert L. Thorndike, and Lloyd Humphreys. If you would like to write about or collaborate on one or more of these prominent psychologists' profiles, please email me at militaryhistory@militarypsych.org.

Now for something new. It is my great pleasure to announce that the History Committee will be facilitating an essay contest this year! Current students, before you allow imposter syndrome to rear its ugly head, please note that all submissions will be

considered for future publication in *The Military Psychologist*. In this competition, first place will receive \$1,000, second place will receive \$750, and third place will receive \$500 towards travel costs to APA in 2024! What's more, all three top choices will have the opportunity to present their essay to the rest of the Society! The rules are simple:

1. Write a three to five page (approximately 2,000 words) essay on a military psychologist of your choice (uniformed or civilian)
2. Identify their major achievements
3. Capture the historical context of their achievements
4. Identify and highlight why they are important to Military Psychology
5. Submit the essay to militaryhistory@militarypsych.org by 15JAN2024 for consideration

Now, without further ado, let's turn our focus to this edition's profile in military psychology.

Profiles in Military Psychology: John C. Flanagan

Rebecca Hans and Austin D. Hamilton

John C. Flanagan is a name that is synonymous with leadership, aspiration, and accomplishment. He was a prominent figure in our own Division 19 history as he served in 1961 as the Division 19 President. His legacy was such that the division awarded him the inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award in 1994. The award was then named after Dr. Flanagan in 1999 who also presided over other American Psychological Association (APA) Divisions 1, 5, and 15 (Gade, 2021). What's more, he was elected as president of the Psychometric Society and published approximately 339 entries across multiple specialties in psychology (Clemans, 1997). To note a few of his awards, he was the 1982 Professional Practice Award Industrial and Organizational (I-O) recipient, the Raymond F. Longacre Award Aero Medicine Association recipient, the Edward Lee Thorndike Award Division 15 recipient, the 1976 Distinguished Professional Contribution Award APA recipient, the Outstanding Contribution to Evaluation Phi Delta Kappa recipient, and the Educational Testing Service's 1978 Award for Distinguished Service to Measurement. Finally, Dr. Flanagan was admitted to the National Academy of Education in 1979 (Clemans, 1997). Truly,

John C. Flanagan was a leader amongst leaders and revolutionized the world of military psychology as we know it today.

John C. Flanagan was born on January 7, 1906, in South Dakota and raised in Seattle, Washington alongside five siblings and two supportive parents (Clemans, 1997; Cucina & Bowling, 2016). Flanagan was an active teenager as he played football in high school, and at the University of Washington where he was the starting quarterback his senior year (Clemens et al., 1997; Cucina & Bowling, 2016). Alongside his college football career, Flanagan worked under Truman Lee Kelley at Harvard University to study mental measurement (Cucina & Bowling, 2016).

After receiving his Bachelor of Science in 1929, while working at a local high school coaching football and teaching math, Flanagan's interest in measurement grew (Clemens et al., 1996). His interests led him to attend a six-week seminar at Yale University in 1931 that changed the course of his career. He learned from prominent figures such as E.L. Thorndike and Truman L. Kelly (Clemans, 1997; Clemens et al., 1996). In 1932, Flana-

gan was offered an assistantship with Kelley under whom he received his Ph.D. in mental measurement in 1934 (Clemans, 1997; Clemens et al. 1996). After graduating from Harvard, Flanagan began working at the American Council on Education's Cooperative Test Service where he directed a research project that involved interviewing pilots in the U.S. Army Air Corps (Clemans, 1997; Cucina & Bowling, 2016). To cement his impressive career post-graduation, Flanagan was commissioned by the U.S. Air Corps.

In 1941, when the United States was on the verge of entering World War II, the U.S. Army needed to expand the Army Air Corps rapidly, given the increased emphasis of air superiority (Clemans, 1997). Perfect for Flanagan's area of study, the U.S. Army recognized the need for more pilots and other aviation-related specialists. To meet this need, the U.S. Army recruited a team of psychologists to develop an assessment and selection system (Cucina & Bowling, 2016). Importantly, Air Corps personnel already knew Flanagan from his Harvard study involving 1,000 Air Corps officers the year before, so Flanagan was asked to join the U.S. Army Air Corps at the rank of Major. After accepting this position, he was quickly promoted to Colonel (Clemans, 1997).

Flanagan was tasked with forming the U.S. Army Air Corps' Aviation Psychology Program and hired a team of psychologists to create a system to select military recruits for positions as pilots, copilots, navigators, and bombardiers (Clemans, 1997; Cucina & Bowling, 2016). The numbers speak for themselves regarding Flanagan's expansive impact: In 1941, the U.S. Army Air Corps consisted of only 51,000 men and a few thousand planes and by 1945 it had grown to 2,282,000 and 80,000 planes (Clemans, 1997). Having qualified pilots and other aircrew contributed directly to U.S. war efforts and undoubtedly saved lives for years to come.

Flanagan's monumental work started with proposing an assessment strategy to address the need for more highly qualified airmen. His plan was adopted less than a week after Congress declared war and was operational in less than a month (Cucina & Bowling, 2016). Included in this assessment was an initial qualifying test followed by a 20-test placement battery, which included assessments measuring aptitude, proficiency, and temperament (Cucina & Bowling, 2016; Clemans, 1997). Flanagan sought measurable performance success as the ultimate criterion, and for this purpose, he was allowed to fly several missions over Europe with crews of the Eighth Air Force (Clemens et al., 1996). There was substantial evidence for the validation of these assessments as performance on the assessment battery was positively related to successful completion of pilot training and negatively related to involvement in aircraft accidents (Cucina & Bowling, 2016).

To summarize his military success, Launor Carter, a monumental military experimental psychologist in his own right, stated at an APA conference that, "Undoubtedly, it is the largest and most successful applied psychology program ever undertaken" at that time

(Clemans, 1997; p. 1375). Flanagan was awarded the Legion of Merit for his contribution to the war effort (Cucina & Bowling, 2016). Throughout the war, Flanagan's team grew from 36 to 150 psychologists and more than 1,500 psychology assistants (Cucina & Bowling, 2016). Following the war, five members of Flanagan's staff later became presidents of the APA (Clemens et al., 1996).

Within a few months of discharge from the Air Corps, Dr. Flanagan accepted an assistant professor position at the University of Pittsburgh and founded the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in 1946 (Clemans, 1997) where he served as president or chairman until retiring in 1988. The AIR organization was incorporated to "carry out research on problems for government, education and industry" (Flanagan 1984; p.1272) and served as a testament to Flanagan's altruistic values given that he never financially profited from any of the landmark contributions made over the course of 42 years (Clemans, 1997). Flanagan's personal contributions led to the establishment of the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954), Project TALENT (Flanagan, 1979), Project PLAN (Flanagan, 1968), and the Quality of Life Scale (Flanagan, 1982) among other lasting outcomes.

While the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was born of Flanagan's work in the United States Air Force, it was AIR who in 1947 more formally developed and applied the clever technique. After nearly 10 years of refining the technique, Flanagan and his colleagues developed a systematic approach to identify specific observed behaviors which led to success or failure across a wide range of applications (Cucina & Bowling, 2016). CIT was supported by three prominent studies; one designed to determine critical requirements for an Air Force officer, another one highlighting necessary requirements for commercial airline pilots, and a third to identify requirements for research personnel to support the U.S. Navy (Flanagan, 1954). To further demonstrate the technique's versatility, studies were designed to apply CIT in industrial settings, dental schools, life insurance agencies, department stores, and even general psychology courses (Flanagan, 1954). In all, the five-step approach was found to have a far-reaching application across multiple settings and is largely considered to be one of the most impactful personnel and selection developments to date and perhaps the most lasting contribution Flanagan made to I-O psychology (See Cucina & Bowling, 2016).

Never hesitant to take on major projects, Flanagan and his colleagues at AIR set out to determine the best methods for identification and utilization of top talents among high school students called Project TALENT. The national survey captured more than 400,000 students in the United States across all four grades with follow-up surveys completed 1, 5, and 11 years post-graduation (Clemans, 1997). The dataset was massive. Ever committed to altruism and the original intent behind establishing AIR, Flanagan made the dataset available to the academic community, prompting more than 350 published studies and ultimately leading to sweeping academic process reforms, and better understanding of what helped partici-

pants prepare for their careers after high school in addition to focusing on racial disparities, and economic mobility (Clemans, [1997](#); Cucina & Bowling, [2016](#)).

Project PLAN (Program for Learning in Accordance with Needs) was launched in 1967 with the ambitious goal of structuring education curriculum for individual needs of students in grades 1 through 12 (Clemans, [1997](#)). Using placement tests, students were sorted and permitted to continue their academic training at appropriate levels prompting advanced students to be continually challenged while those students who may be struggling to have their needs met. Unfortunately, the project was about 20-years ahead of its time, lacked the necessary computer aided technology, and generated logistical concerns (Clemans, [1997](#); Cucina & Bowling, [2016](#)). These limitations coupled with ever-increasing costs associated with maintaining a dataset dependent upon daily data updates transferred over telephone lines to a mainframe computer were the ultimate demise of the well-intentioned project PLAN. Clemans ([1997](#)) remarked that such a task would easily be supported by today's personal computers.

During 1971, Flanagan and AIR decided to tackle yet another ambitious and altruistic goal; "improving the quality of life of all Americans" (Flanagan, [1978](#) p. 138). Keeping in mind that this project predates the influential positive psychology movement of the 1990s, the AIR team set out to operationally define the quality of life for Americans. They identified more than 6,500 critical incidents from nearly 3,000 individuals across a wide range of age, race, and regional locations, and backgrounds (Flanagan, [1978](#)). As a result, the Quality of Life Scale was developed which contained 15 items representing five overarching conceptual domains including; relationships with other people, physical and material wellbeing, social and civic activities, personal development, and recreation (Flanagan, [1978](#)) In 1981 the scale was adapted to measure the quality of life among those suffering from chronic illness, highlighting important aspects of life unique to those with chronic health concerns such as maintaining independence (Flanagan, [1982](#)). More than 20 years after the adaptation, Burckhardt, Anderson, Achenholtz, and Hägg ([2003](#)) demonstrated that the Flanagan Quality of Life Scale remains a viable option for researchers to measure domains of quality of life important to patients across a wide range of groups and cultures.

Clearly the lifetime achievement award for Division 19 is appropriately named after John C. Flanagan. Indeed, Dr. Flanagan has demonstrated what a lifetime of selfless service might look like for military psychologists who serve both in uniform and as civilian leaders. He established critical assessment and selection criteria which directly led to U.S. war efforts and the safety and welfare of aviators brave enough to embark on such an endeavor. As a

civilian leader, Dr. Flanagan founded AIR and went on to better the lives of countless Americans through school reforms and other ambitious undertakings. Without a doubt, John C. Flanagan was a leader amongst leaders and has revolutionized the world of military psychology as we know it today.

We would like to offer a special thanks to Dr. Cucina and Dr. Bowling for their commitment to preserving the history of APA Division 14 and the memory of John C. Flanagan. Additionally, we would like to thank Dr. Woody for his continued support.

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