

PME is Not a Dirty Word!

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BLUF: PME is not just box ticking for promotion—a continuum of air and space power education is required to build professional mastery and maintain professional currency.

Professional Military Education (PME). It's enough to send even the most hardened Warrant Officer ducking for cover, but the reality is that PME is a central tenet in Air Force's ability to generate air and space power effects. As the ADF's 'smart' service (sorry Army and Navy), Air Force fields a plethora of cutting-edge, high-tech capabilities; all of which are sustained and operated by a workforce of exceptionally talented people. It's only smart then that those same people fundamentally understand how their contributions generate air and space power. As a profession of arms, Air Force's business is the delivery of air and space power effects as a component of the joint force, and fostering the creative mindset and intellectual foundations of air and space power is the driver for PME across *all* ranks and specialisations within the service. The key to all of this is the term 'professional;' particularly in the context of 'professional mastery and currency.' Just as you wouldn't trust a brain surgeon who hadn't brushed up on their brain knowledge in twenty years, who is going to trust the Loady, Loggy, or Lawyer who hasn't updated their air and space power knowledge since their last promotion course back in the day? From the Watchy in the Command Post to the JBAC managing HADR rotary operations off HMAS Adelaide, *we all* contribute to the generation of air and space power and, as uniformed professionals in the profession of arms, *we all* have a responsibility to strive for a personal continuum of education in the Air Force family business that underpins our professional mastery and maintains our professional currency.

But isn't completing the old PMET or new Program Wirraway enough PME for me? In a word, no. While Program Wirraway is a fantastic professional development continuum that provides personnel with underpinning profession of arms knowledge and some professional mastery tools for career progression, it's not enough to simply rely on programs as per the Joint PME continuum as the sole source for professional education—after all, PME is not just a box-ticking exercise for promotion now is it... In our own continuum of learning, directed PME should be considered a foundational baseline from which to expand our knowledge

through activities such as perusing an Air/Space blog, flicking through the Air Power Manual, or simply taking the time to chat to another Air Force member about what they bring to the air and space power party. From these humble beginnings, the sky is no longer the limit: there's a plethora of books, blogs, sites, and seminars available to progress your professional mastery and maintain professional currency, and it's up to you to take the leap into career-long learning on all things air and space power.

In saying that however, like most of us my own journey of PME did not start on 27 Jan 89 when I signed on the dotted line: military education in the 90's was the realm of Officers and we troops did *training* to increase our technical mastery, not *education* to broaden our professional mastery. I spent my formative years as an Armament Technician focused on getting weapons loaded to aircraft, and my knowledge of air power was limited to the employment of those weapons in fighter operations. Outside of fighter ops, I was oblivious to the functions of air power; nor did I care to learn much about them. For me, it wasn't until promotion to SGT and two weeks on residential course in the dead of a Wagga winter that a desire to do anything other than tick a PME box started to form. Fast forward to today and I'm now a certified kool-aid consumer who comprehends the importance of PME in my professional mastery and currency, and who understands how air and space power contributes to Joint Force effects. While my interest still leans towards kinetic weapons and the delivery thereof, I'm able to grasp and discuss the importance of the Loggy who uses their knowledge of the supply chain system to magically make appear the critical widget needed to allow a time-sensitive Special Forces tactical air-insertion to occur, and thus achieve a strategic effect. Likewise, I'm able to piece together the links across all contributing ADF specialisations and ranks and how individual technical mastery delivers air and/or space power effects. I can do this because I've taken the time to educate myself in the functions of air and space power as they relate to the joint force, and how we as professional masters in the profession of arms *all* have a part to play in its delivery.

But don't just take my word on the importance of PME in our development as professionals: in his 2017 Chief of Air Force Intent For Learning in a Fifth Generation Air Force, then CAF Leo Davies prioritised effective, career-long learning as the means for "acquiring or developing the skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, values and capabilities that are required of the military profession" and that underpins Air Force professional mastery. Specifically, these priorities were aimed to:

Ensure our people have both the required technical mastery to support and operate our advanced air power systems and professional mastery to ensure that our systems are utilised to best joint effect; and

Fully understand, and be able to cogently explain, as an organisation and individuals, air power and its vital role in national security and the joint team.

These priorities are echoed by Air Marshal Mel Hupfeld in his 2020 CAF Intent, whereby in order to shape Air Force into a networked force capable of delivering air and space power effects for the joint force, “we must continue our evolution into an intelligent and skilled workforce” that emphasises professional mastery and currency in order to “build a force of air and space power professionals capable of conceptualising strategic intention” and delivering it to the Joint Force. If educating an intelligent and skilled workforce is important for CAF, then it’s important for you and I—gone are the days when air and space power knowledge only applied to those directly involved in delivering it! Drilling down into the Air Force Strategy Lines Of Effort (LOE), the permeation of professional mastery as a fundamental tenet of delivering air and space power is perhaps the clearest indicator of the value Air Force sees in PME. Without a clear and current understanding of Air Force strategy—and your place in delivering it—you can’t play your role in the contest of ideas Air Force requires to realise its strategic vision: It’s hard to contest ideas if you don’t have one... The importance of education in our own professional development boils down to the fundamental fact that “air power has become the dominant form of military power projection in the modern world.” With this in mind, our PME journey as air and space power professionals needs to be based in this broader “modern world” reality that drives Air Force’s strategy; not limited to our own Force Element and platform comfort-zones. From grasping the foundational aspects of air and space power as juniors through to understanding the political, social, and economic aspects of strategic air and space power application as seniors, PME is the conduit for professional mastery and currency through which we meld our tactical knowledge with strategic understanding as we progress through our professional careers.

For those still thinking that PME isn’t for me, it’s time to think again. It’s no longer enough to come to work, twirl a few spanners, and take home a bundle of cash every payday. The taxpayers who fund our paycheques want a return on their investment, and they expect that as both individuals and an organisation, we fundamentally understand the business of air and

space power. So, what are you doing today to further your professional military education and maintain your professional currency? “I’m too busy!” I hear you say, and yes; finding the time to do PME is not easy, but it’s also not impossible and we *all* have a responsibility to fully understand and be able to explain air and space power and its vital role in national security and the joint team. When you next pick up your phone to check Facebook, dial up ‘The Central Blue’ and read a post or two. While you’re at it, get on Twitter and follow the Air and Space Power Centre account (@ASPC_Australia). For the time poor, these are a good start in keeping abreast of what’s happening in the air and space world without needing to spend hours digesting an academic monograph (unless that’s your thing). Once your appetite is whet, make a habit of checking the ASPC Air/Space Blog every now and then, along with other online sites such as Air Force’s ‘The Runway’ or the Australian Strategic Policy Institute’s ‘The Strategist.’ From these beginnings, you can tailor your PME continuum as you progress through your career and as your interest in the Air Force business grows. You might even find yourself submitting an entry for the AVM Wrigley Prize!

So there you have it—PME is not the dirty word that many make it out to be. CAF requires Air Force personnel to go beyond directed PME, with this driven by the fundamental requirement for Air Force to produce professional masters of air and space power in order to generate a critical mass of people that have a deeper understanding of air and space power’s strategic utility that directed PME alone can provide. At the end of the day, consuming, contesting, and contributing to air and space power discourse is the key to expanding your professional mastery horizon, and today is as good as any to start the journey!