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Maxwell Taylor

"Mr. Attack" Comes Back

LAST FALL, Pentagon shops did a rush business in two items: one, food for dieting, and the other, food for thought.

The latter was a book, "The Uncertain Trumpet," once a U.S. military dust collector; the former, a liquid dietary supplement for portly senior officers. The omens were unmistakable: "Mr. Attack" was coming back. General Maxwell Davenport Taylor, who likes his staff at "fighting weight" and his cold-war defenses "flexible," had quit the Pentagon as Army Chief of Staff in 1959 with some bitter words, but now he was returning—and as head man, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Why Taylor quit the U.S. military after 41 years of service, including thrilling cloak-and-dagger assignments and parachuting into Normandy on D-Day, makes quite a story. So does his comeback, and the man himself.

It begins around 1910 on a farm near Keyesville, Mo., with a boy from Kansas City visiting his grandfather, a Confederate veteran. "You're too small for pitchin' hay" said Milton Davenport, viewing the nine-year-old, "so I'd better tell you some stories." He then began telling about soldiering in the West during the Civil War. The youngster was awed. When he returned to school, he was asked to fill out an information form, including his name and life's ambition.

"Maxwell D. Taylor," he wrote, "Major General, United States Army."

That ambition never waned, though it encountered some disapproval from the boy's father, John Earle Taylor, an attorney. When the U.S. entered World War I, 17-year-old Maxwell decided it was time for action.

"I came home one evening," he recalled recently, "and announced: 'I've just registered for the draft. I lied about my age. I'm going to be a soldier.' When my father came around to believing it, he offered only one alternative.

"If you *must* go into service," he told me, "at least try for Annapolis or West Point." That's what I wanted in the first place, so I agreed."

How the Navy Lost an Admiral

Annapolis tests came up shortly afterward. Taylor had no chance to study, and he failed the geography part of the exam. "I didn't know where the Strait of Malacca was," he says. (It's between Sumatra and Malaya, of course.) "Since then, I have flown over it many times, and I always look down and think: 'If I'd known you were there, I might have been an admiral today.'"

Taylor took the West Point exams at the same time, passed them readily, as they included no geography, and was graduated fourth in the class of 1922 and described as "most learned" in the yearbook.

It was at West Point that he met Lydia Gardner Happer, daughter of an El Paso, Texan transplanted to Virginia. Lydia Happer was soft-spoken, petite, and retiring, but at a West Point dance she stood out glaringly—an Annapolis midshipman escorted her. Cadet Taylor resolved

