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# MILITARY HISTORY FOR THE MILITARY PROFESSIONAL

by

DOCTOR BENJAMIN F. COOLING III

*(Can the study of military history be useful for the military professional? What would be the nature of a program designed to prepare the military professional to face the challenges of the future by studying the record of the past?)*



Two decades ago, at the height of the Korean conflict, a renowned military historian claimed that military history as a specialty had largely lost its function. "If military history is to have more than antiquarian interest, it must, it would seem, turn away from the study of past wars to the study of war itself in its broadest, possible terms," declared Walter Millis.<sup>1</sup> Since that time professional historians who devote their careers to analysis of military affairs have worked to refute Millis' contention. At the same time they have tried to overcome the aversion of their colleagues to military

history. Lately, antagonism toward war in general, and to the war in Viet Nam in particular, have further blurred any signs of progress.

Some blame for the rejection of military history rests with military historians themselves. Often they have reflected Millis' impression that his compatriots were adrift, unsure of their destination and uncertain as to whether they were even carrying the correct cargo. Millis thought that military history should become less military and more civilian. It would have to make better use of the resources of political philosophy, economics, and sociology as well as the applied sciences. He felt that its success as a useful discipline would depend upon its return to the general study of man and his society. Twenty years after Millis' stricture it seems that the guild of military historians continues to suffer from the old malaise. The eminent scholar Peter Paret recently concluded:

Far too much military history is being written in America. In this respect, at least, its condition does not differ from that of other fields of history. But with few exceptions, the character of the work produced is extremely conventional—descriptive history, centering on leading figures, campaigns, and climatic battles, often with a strong antiquarian bent. Few enterprising minds are interested in war and in military institutions for their own sake.<sup>2</sup>

If civilian professionals have moved slowly to reshape one of the more "relevant" subdisciplines of history in the post-Korea period, many military professionals have been equally reluctant to study past experience in order to apply the knowledge gained to the practice of their own craft. In a way, they have reflected the reluctance of so many

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PHOTOGRAPH BY J. J. COOLING III

Americans to think about the past. Facing backward, it would seem, would impede progress in our future-oriented nation. But this does not mean that military men have failed to show great interest in certain facets of military history. They are among the most ardent devotees of Civil War and Second World War battles and campaigns. They rally to societies like the American Military Institute, the Company of Military Historians, and the Council on Abandoned Military Posts. The very abundance of military museums (fifty-nine for the Army alone at last count) attests to the interest in the heritage of the military profession.<sup>3</sup>

This so-called "drum and trumpet" history is frequently scoffed at by civilian academicians. But experience has shown that maintaining a link with the past yields rich dividends in the present by helping young and old soldiers alike to identify with unit lineages and to learn many technical lessons that are useful for the future.<sup>4</sup> Disciples of Clio, the muse of history, can muster many reasons why senior armed services professionals need to take another look at the experiences of their forefathers. Indeed, the extensive locations and variety of US military commitments around the world, and the increasing scope of Army educational programs in recent years supports the need for emphasis on historical perspective. Concern with command and management, strategy, national security policies, economics and politics, international and domestic conflicts and tensions, the composition of the Army, and the impact of technology only reinforces the need for a new and innovative approach to military history by the military leader—"Military History for the Military Professional" let us call it.

Such military history may be studied either in the classroom or independently. This paper will suggest ten areas that might be included in such a program. There are others, but a program that incorporates the elements of these ten areas can do much to prepare the military professional to face the challenges of the future.

First, a military leader must comprehend *The Nature and Scope of Military History*. If



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*The typical Confederate of 1862. How well did he reflect a Southern society composed of planter aristocracy, yeoman farmer, and Negro slave?*



U S A R M Y

*The US Army as nation-builder—administration of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression.*

past remains prologue, then there must be an understanding of the endless, complex, and perplexing contrasts and inconsistencies of the past and their applicability to the future. The relationship of military history to other disciplines, i.e., economics, sociology, political science, the physical sciences, and even other areas of history must be highlighted. Such an introduction can come from the reading of sound military historiographical work.<sup>5</sup> Specific questions might be posed on the role of the military in the study of war and conflict, the use and abuse of military history by the military profession, historical methodology, and the facilities and agencies for the study of the craft. At this stage the professional soldier should concern himself with understanding

history as a means for clarifying man's proclivity for conflict.

Next, the military professional might proceed to a historical analysis of the relationship between *Armed Forces and Society*. A premise may be made here that a successful military institution must be a viable part of and reflect the culture of which it forms the sword and shield. In view of this premise it seems important that there be an examination of the fabric of societies and their military establishments throughout history. A wide variety of societies suggest themselves for study. For instance, the Ancient World, which should include not only Greece and Rome (that have interested Western scholars for so long due to their influence on the spawning of modern



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*U. S. infantry in the Philippines participated in a popular "war for empire" which lost support of American citizens when it became a prolonged suppression of Philippine insurrectionists.*

institutions), but also China, a society that has contributed so much to civilization. Similarly, attention should be given to a study of the cultural-military ancestry of those nations which operate under the socio-political system of Islam. Finally, the impact of the tribal societies of the great Zulu and Botswana should be compared with the influence exerted by European colonialism. Such study can illuminate shadowy areas of civil-military relations and the interaction of military affairs and society in those polyglot African political entities emerging in the wake of disimperialism.

American military professionals may feel that they understand fully the subtle relationships between military and civilian sectors of Western European nations and the

United States. But they might benefit additionally from a periodic review of how the American military profession reflects Anglo-American civilization and its development.<sup>6</sup> Such inquiry can help to reinforce a sense of pride on the one hand, while serving as a timely reminder that the Anglo-American tradition places the soldier's roots in an essentially civilian society. Failure to keep this basic fact in mind at all times could lead to the disasters that have occurred in various European, Asian, and other nations which have made the military a caste apart from civilian society.<sup>7</sup>

A third area for possible scrutiny encompasses *Command and Control Through the Centuries*. There are recognizable aspects of high command and management as we

examine the past thirty centuries. The biographical approach to military history is hardly new. "Great Captains" have been studied many times in the past. Today, this concept can include more than an analysis of leadership styles and the way in which the so-called principles of war were practiced. Such a study can clarify varying nationalistic terminologies and interpretations of command, staff concepts, and participatory leadership. Special attention must be paid to the evolution of Napoleonic, Suvarovian, German, and Anglo-American leadership modes and styles.<sup>8</sup> However, today's military professional can utilize both ancient and modern examples of leadership, and eastern as well as western. If Mao and Giap are currently in vogue, their forebears are legion, and there appears to be no dearth of material for more conventional "Great Captains," from Scipio Africanus and Saladin to Zhukov and Montgomery.

The conglomerate, multi-social makeup of contemporary American society as reflected in our military forces points to a fourth area, *The Historical Human Composition of Military Forces*. The wide ethnic and nationalistic variations in armies might explain the success and failure of employing non-white or alien military units and individuals in American and western European forces. The Roman use of Gauls, Iberians, and Franks as *Auxilia*; the Turkish employment of Janissaries, a foreign military elite; the French utilization of Senegalese and Tonkinese Tirailleurs; the British experience with Indian sepoy; the American practice of all-black units, Indian "scouts," and Philippine Constabulary; the Russian integration of a Cossack minority group; and the International Brigade's participation in the Spanish Civil War, are subject areas which could offer some lessons in this regard.<sup>9</sup> VOLAR planners may discover some very useful information if they investigate why and how these alien units found employment—their advantages and disadvantages in terms of discipline, morale, efficiency—as well as the question of their social position within the military institution itself and the chance of their being assimilated and being advanced in society.

The continued high priority of national security policy formulation by senior planners dictates a fifth need: an understanding of the common and unique elements of *National Security Policies Through the Ages*. An analysis of the issues of vital national interest over the centuries can be richly rewarding for the continued evolution of American programs. There are numerous strands of continuity between the concerns of the modern world and the historic interests of Republican and Imperial Roman expansion and defense, Byzantine concern with survival, the counter-thrust of Russia against invasions and "enemies on all sides," German Reich-building, French mesmerization with nationalism and prestige, British home island defense and protection of the trade routes for survival, and interaction between insular Japan and China, the continental giant. In addition, military planners of the present and future should be aware of the passage of the United States through three distinct stages of security concern. These include America's transition from emerging nation, through her continental expansion, to participation as a major nation-state in the world power struggle with relationships to the national security concerns of other nations.<sup>10</sup> Nowhere have such developments taken place in isolation. Indeed, to appreciate modern security requirements throughout the world it would seem fundamental for American military officials to appreciate certain traditional elements and causative factors in these requirements.

*The Interaction of Military, Political, and Diplomatic Affairs* provides still another area for serious investigation by military professionals. Throughout history the military man has been more than simply the servant to diplomats and civil authority. Rather, armed forces personnel have also been diplomatic representatives in their own right, involved in activities ranging from daily relations with foreign citizenry to higher roles as makers of policy and alliances. The phenomenon is not new and it continues to comprise a major phase of military activity. The soldier-as-diplomat can be studied in the experiences of counselors like Max Bauer, Chiang Kai-Shek's first German military

adviser; missions such as Perry's naval expedition to Japan in 1854; participants in postwar peace negotiations such as Panmunjom; or disarmament negotiations in London and Washington after World War I. Expeditionary operations like the Allied maneuvers in northern Russia; occupation activities which pinned down Federal troops in the Reconstructed South; pacification programs of European powers in Africa; and formulation of military alliances such as the Imperial Defence Agreement of 1887 between Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, all displayed the military man in a quasi-diplomatic role.<sup>11</sup> Simply put, the modern senior officer should be aware of the role of the military as it interacted with political and diplomatic affairs from *Pax Romana* to *Pax Americana*. Might not the study of such experiences as American pacification of the Philippines after the Spanish War have enabled our policy makers to avoid the frustration accompanying recent efforts of this nature in Southeast Asia?

Likewise, the modern officer should find useful the historical perspective of *Internal Crisis and Military Force*. Domestic disturbances are far from unique to the present generation or even to the American scene. Military organizations throughout history have been charged with the promotion and protection of domestic tranquility as well as defense against external threat. Rebellion took place in Republican Rome, and domestic unrest has long been endemic to the Far East in China and India. The French Revolution, English experiences in North America as well as their home islands during the Industrial Revolution, and twentieth century manifestations of internal disturbances in Mexico, Ireland, and Russia can all contribute to any discussion of the role of the military in domestic crises from ancient to modern times. Certainly the role of American airborne units patrolling the streets of Washington in 1968 fits the pattern of our experience from the Whiskey Rebellion to modern labor and racial unrest.<sup>12</sup> It should prove enlightening to examine the actions of the French line army during the early stages of the French Revolution, or the Petrograd garrison in the

outbreak of the February 1917 revolution in Russia. Perhaps the conduct of the Roman legions, thwarted for years by Palestinian revolt, will not seem so strange when in 70 A.D. they levelled Jerusalem, sparing neither buildings nor inhabitants.

Balancing this portrayal of the military as guardians of internal order, sometimes at the expense of personal freedom, would be the eighth area of concentration, *Nationbuilding Activities of the Military*. Indeed, the man in uniform has often contributed to society in ways other than with a rifle at the ready. Military institutions have been called upon frequently to participate in nonwar-related endeavors and national projects because of critically needed skills. High levels of organization, discipline, concentration of available aptitudes, and administrative abilities have led the military into historic roles in engineering, technology, medicine, education, and social involvement. From Roman road building to American flood control projects; from the introduction of the stirrup by the Mongols to US Army supervision of the Manhattan Project; from Napoleonic medicine to American cure of yellow fever; from West Point and St. Cyr as the early collegiate institutions oriented toward scientific training to the democratizing element of military service for immigrants to American shores, the uniformed services have built as well as destroyed in the name of civilization.<sup>13</sup> The man on horseback has not always been a threat to the state; witness the contributions of Kemal Ataturk, George Washington, or Oliver Cromwell. Senior officers might very well find knowledge of such phenomena very useful when countering the derogatory image of their profession held by so many civilians today.

We should be particularly curious about a ninth area in our new approach to military history: *Unpopular Wars and Military Operations*. Certain military episodes in history have produced sharp divisions between governmental policy and public support. Citizen approval in periods of conflict remains directly related to achievement of military goals and

performance. It is important for the modern officer to examine historically the viewpoints of man as he went about fulfilling his obligations vis-a-vis the nation, especially in wartime. The nature of governmental involvement in a specific unpopular war or operation can shed light upon public relations, the goals of popular opposition, and the impact on state policy. Analysis of specific wars may include the War of 1812, which nearly tore apart the youthful, struggling American republic, and produced cases of militia refusal to invade foreign soil during major operations. Similarly, the Mexican War, the Philippine Insurrection, and British participation in the Boer War and Suez operation of 1956 produced deep cleavages in the body politic.<sup>14</sup> French involvement in Indochina toppled one government at home in the late nineteenth century, and we are all aware of the impact of that same area, together with Algeria, upon the stability of modern France. One may suspect that this topic will continue to interest present and future generations of American military planners, especially as increasing numbers of informed citizenry wonder why we remembered nothing and forgot nothing from the experiences of Frenchmen on the Asian mainland.

Just as military affairs have been affected by social and technical change, military affairs have had a continuous effect upon the shaping of technology and society. Thus, *Technology, Culture, and Warfare* provides an appropriate capstone to this one approach to military history for the military professional. The interaction has been continuous and accelerating, with long historical roots and antecedents. The modern officer need not be held captive by specifics of the screw propeller, the machine gun, or the atomic bomb. Instead, he should be more concerned with the full scope of technology and society since the Industrial Revolution. He might consider the constructive versus non-constructive aspects of the interaction of war and technology without subverting his professional integrity. In fact, all segments of society need to become more aware of the "case for war" school of thought whose

disciples like Warner Sombart, Lewis Mumford, F. W. Nietzsche and Stanislaw Andreski have stressed the positive force of war in societal and technological progress. Their antagonists, including Arnold Toynbee, John U. Nef and others have countered that war and its concomitant military burdens have always been the "proximate cause" of the breakdown of every civilization in the past.<sup>15</sup>

If this exercise appears too ephemeral or esoteric to the average professional soldier he need only remember that the place of conflict in society remains central to the continuing issues of our times. Questions of modern economics, organization and administration, labor, product standardization, conflict limitation, civil government, democracy, nationalism, and culture and the arts—as they relate to military affairs—must be considered and understood by all military professionals.

The United States Army stands at another critical juncture in its history. Officers should be encouraged to look at the past in order to make the present and future more meaningful. This does not imply that they should be preoccupied solely with the Army's past and with lineage rosters or with glorious deeds of valor and sacrifice, however praiseworthy this approach. Instead they should examine the way in which the American military profession fits into the broader stream of the history of military affairs. Military professionals need not be tied uncritically to the past with its mistakes or successes. They should not accept facts on face value. They should be acutely aware that the study of military history can offer guidelines that can prevent their "reinventing the wheel." General George Patton said, "To be a successful soldier you must know history." We think he was right.

## NOTES

1. Walter Millis, *Military History* (American Historical Association Teachers Service Pamphlet 39), Washington, 1961, pp. 17-18.
2. Peter Paret, "The History of War," *Daedalus*, Spring 1971, p. 381.
3. U.S. Department of the Army, Office of the



Chief of Military History, *Directory U.S. Army Museums*, Washington, 1968, lists fifty-nine Army museums, ten National Guard and at least seventeen non-Army military, Naval, and Air museums.

4. Recent encouraging signs along this vein include increased instruction in military history at the U.S. Military Academy, at various ROTC institutions, and the Command and General Staff College as well as the deliberations of the Department of the Army Ad Hoc Committee for the Study of Military History in the Army. The author wishes to acknowledge that many of the ideas expressed in this paper evolved while developing a military history elective for the US Army War College with Dr. Don Rickey, Jr., Assistant Director for Research, US Army Military History Research Collection.

5. In addition to the works of Millis and Paret, cited above, the following are also useful in this regard: Michael Howard, "The Demand for Military History," *The Times Literary Supplement* (London), 13 November 1969; John K. Mahon, "Teaching and Research on Military History in the United States," *The Historian*, February 1965, pp. 170-184; and Allan R. Millett, "American Military History: Over the Top," in Herbert J. Bass, ed., *The State of American History*, Cleveland, Quadrangle, 1970, pp. 157-182.

6. See for example Russell F. Weigley, ed., *The American Military: Readings in the History of the Military in American Society*, Addison Wesley, Reading, Mass., 1969.

7. Credit for stimulating the author's memory on this point belongs to Ambassador Hermann Fr. Eilts, Diplomatic Adviser to the Commandant, US Army War College.

8. Few boundaries exist for the biographical approach to military history, and a useful example of reinterpretation is James Marshall-Cornwall, *Grant as Military Commander*, New York, Van Nostrand, 1970. LTC James B. Agnew's "Coalition Warfare: A Successful Experiment in Combined Command, 1914-1918," *Parameters*, Spring, 1971, pp. 50-64, illustrates a useful approach to historical evaluation of command and staff work.

9. This relatively new field of investigation includes such works as William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative History of the Negro*

*Cavalry in the West*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1967; and George H. Dodenhoff, "A Historical Perspective of Mercenaries," *Naval War College Review*, March 1969, pp. 91-110.

10. National Security policies may be viewed from historical perspective in Vern L. Bullough, "The Roman Empire vs. Persia, 363-502: A Study of Successful Deterrence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, March 1963, pp. 54-75, or Fred Greene, "The Military View of American National Policy; 1904-1940," *The American Historical Review*, January 1961, pp. 354-377.

11. See for instance, Alfred Vagts, *The Military Attache*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967; John Gimbel, *The American Occupation of Germany: Politics and the Military, 1945-1949*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1968; or Henry F. Graff, ed., *American Imperialism and the Philippine Insurrection*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1969.

12. Historical appreciation of this continuing problem may be gleaned from Carlton Younger, *Ireland's Civil War*, New York, Taplinger, 1968; and Robin Higham, ed., *Bayonets in the Streets: The Use of Troops in Civil Disturbances*, Lawrence, Kan., University Press of Kansas, 1969.

13. Studies of non-combat activities of the military include: William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959; Edgar Hume, *Victories of Army Medicine . . .*, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott, 1943; or Dankart A. Rustow, "The Army and the Founding of the Turkish Republic," *World Politics*, July 1959, pp. 513-552.

14. See for instance Samuel Eliot Morison, Frederick Merk, and Frank Freidel, *Dissent in Three Wars*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1970, or E. B. Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970.

15. This broad topical area can be approached through I. B. Holley, *Ideas and Weapons*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1953; Stanislaw Andrezejewski, *Military Organization and Society*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1954; and John U. Nef, *War and Human Progress, An Essay on the Rise of Industrial Civilization*, New York, W. W. Norton and Co., 1968 edition.