

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 30
Number 4 *Parameters Winter 2000*

Article 11

11-17-2000

The Army's Advanced Strategic Art Program

Williamson Murray

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

Recommended Citation

Murray, Williamson. "The Army's Advanced Strategic Art Program." *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 30, 4 (2000). <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol30/iss4/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

The Army's Advanced Strategic Art Program

WILLIAMSON MURRAY

From *Parameters*, Winter 2000-01, pp. 31-39.

In academic year 1999-2000, the Army War College initiated a significant departure in professional military education with the introduction of its Advanced Strategic Art Program. This innovation aims at educating a select group of officers to handle the complexities of strategic planning and thinking at the CINC level in a world increasingly dominated by the joint community. Before looking at this new program in some depth, it may be useful to trace the history of professional military education as a means of setting the stage.

Since the beginning of the 19th century with the creation of the Prussian *Kriegsakademie*, professional military education has represented a crucial part of the preparation of military organizations for war.[1] In a profession where the practitioners cannot realistically practice for much of the time in their careers (in peacetime) what they are paid to do (wage war), education has provided a crucial bridge to clarify the emerging concepts, doctrine, and military thinking--in other words to prepare the minds of future wartime military leaders and planners for the terrifying and uncertain world in which their decisions will directly affect the lives of their soldiers and may determine the fate of their nation.[2] It took much of the 19th century to persuade military institutions that professional military education represented the best means to create a true profession of arms.[3]

In the 1920s and 1930s professional military education represented the means by which the Germans separated the exceptional officers from the average.[4] On the basis of a deep intellectual effort to learn from World War I, the Germans built an army that came all too close to winning the next conflict.[5] Similarly, American military institutions placed great emphasis on professional military education in the interwar years.

The US Army's Command and Staff College kept its students for a full two-year course of instruction, while George C. Marshall turned the infantry school at Fort Benning into a preparatory course, from whose teachers and students the generals and planners would emerge to lead the US Army to victory in World War II. It was not only career-enhancing to attend school, but it was career-enhancing to be on the faculty of the schools of professional military education. The schools themselves would play a direct part not only in the educational processes, but in the development of the doctrine and concepts that made US military forces such formidable instruments of military power.[6]

Admiral Raymond Spruance, one of the great admirals of the war in the Pacific, served not just one but two tours on the faculty of the Naval War College. The Army placed similar emphasis on its educational system in this period. The Army War College numbered among its seven-member faculty for the 1939-1940 academic year W. H. Simpson and J. Lawton Collins; the former would command Ninth Army in 1944 in Europe, while the latter would become a successful corps commander in World War II and eventually Chief of Staff of the Army in the early 1950s. Significantly, Collins had also served as an instructor at Leavenworth.

In a real sense America's military leaders prepared themselves intellectually and professionally at their service's institutions of professional military education for the trials that were to confront them in America's greatest war. As Admiral Nimitz suggested upon his return from the Pacific in 1946, the Naval War College had prepared a whole generation of naval leaders for the war they had to fight.[7]

In the period immediately after the US victory in World War II, returning senior officers like Dwight Eisenhower continued to believe that professional military education was of the greatest importance. Eisenhower established the National War College as a means to further joint cooperation, with a faculty which would contain, among others, George Kennan. Similarly, on his return from the Pacific, Spruance assumed the presidency of the Naval War College--by choice.

By the mid 1950s, however, professional military education had begun to decline in importance as a means to prepare senior officers for high command. By that point, for most Army officers it represented a ticket to be punched on the way up the career ladder. For most naval officers, selection was what mattered. In the Navy of the Cold War, one certainly did not want to waste time attending school. The Air Force established a war college at Maxwell Air Force Base after it gained its independence from the Army, but there is no evidence that it ever took the education of its officers as deserving the highest priority.

There are several explanations for this major change in attitudes toward professional military education.[8] On one hand, the Soviet Union represented a direct threat to the very survival of the United States. Thus, operational concerns largely overshadowed the importance of educating future senior commanders in the conduct of war. Moreover, the Soviet Union represented a stable and unimaginative threat about which the American military did not have to think particularly deeply. The Soviets were what they were, period, and little changed in the nature of the threat from year to year.

On the other hand, a generation of officers--too junior to have attended staff college or war college by 1941--returned from the war as colonels or captains, and in some cases brigadier generals or rear admirals. Their attitude was clearly, "What do we have to learn in the schoolhouse that we have not already learned graphically on the field of battle?" To a certain extent they had a point, although it was this generation of officers that was largely responsible for the conduct of the Vietnam War--which again suggests that professional military education is of some importance.[9]

The result was that by the mid-1980s the American military's institutions of professional education, both at the command and staff and at the war college levels, had largely turned themselves into institutions where golf, softball, and getting close to the family counted for more than the challenge of mastering the profession of arms--a profession which the great British military historian Sir Michael Howard has suggested is not only the most demanding physically, but intellectually as well.[10] The one instance in which this was not the case, the Naval War College, was an anomaly in that the Navy simply refused to send its best officers to the institution.[11]

Congressman Ike Skelton, alarmed at what he perceived as a less-than-impressive system of professional military education and with an informed historical view of its importance, launched a major series of hearings in the late 1980s. Those hearings underlined that the services were paying lip service at best to serious education and at worst were presenting golf and softball as being of greater importance than military studies. In most cases the hearings were an embarrassment to the institutions they investigated. In the period after the hearings, the services responded with the help of congressional legislation by making considerable improvements to those educational institutions. Are we today where we should be in professional military education? Probably not.[12] Improvements generally have been institutional in nature rather than new departures in methods of professional military education. Changes in the law allowed the hiring of new professors with academic credentials; curricula were upgraded.

Nevertheless, there also have been some radical departures in US professional military education over the past three decades. The first was the creation of a graduate-level program in strategy and the processes of national security at the Naval War College. The second was the creation of the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) at Leavenworth in the mid 1980s, a program soon followed by the Air Force with its School of Advanced Airpower Studies at Maxwell, and by the Marine Corps with its School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW) at Quantico.

The Advanced Strategic Art Program

In an effort to further define the emphasis on advanced military education, the US Army War College created the Advanced Strategic Art Program (ASAP). Its first students graduated in June 2000. Students in the regular resident program at the Army War College volunteered early in the 1999-2000 academic year for the ASAP program. They were then nominated by their faculty advisers and selected. Students were chosen on the basis of interest, intellectual acuity, career field, and career patterns. The program also recruited a broad spectrum of the Army's career fields and, not surprisingly since the course is joint, also included among its members officers from the sister services. One of the selection criteria was that the officers chosen should, in most cases, be prime candidates for joint duty.

Those chosen for the ASAP program underwent a vigorous selection process. After an initial set of interviews, they were then vetted and approved by the War College's Commandant. After completion of the third course of study at the

college (approximately mid-November), they were pulled out of the regular curriculum and began an intensive six-month program of study that culminated with their graduation with their class in June. During the six-month ASAP program they underwent an intensive, sometimes grueling, course of study to prepare them to be strategic planners for the specified and unified commanders, the warfighting CINCs. In many respects the program is similar in its intensity to the second-year programs at Leavenworth, Quantico, and Maxwell. But the aim is to produce officers capable of planning--and eventually commanding--at the very highest levels.

Thirteen officers were recruited for the course. Nine were regular Army officers; one was an Army Reserve officer, and three were officers of other services, with one each from the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. Of the officers chosen, four were SAMS graduates and one was a SAW graduate. In addition, one had served as a division intelligence officer (G-2), while two had served as division operations officers (G-3s). In terms of branches, armor, aviation, infantry, field artillery, engineer, civil affairs, special operations, military intelligence, and logistics were all represented.

The ASAP program explicitly aims to educate, develop, and nurture future joint warfighters at the theater-strategic level. Upon completion of the course, the graduates of the program are to be skilled planners, effective theater strategists, and knowledgeable in their area of responsibility, both in historical and current terms. The basic philosophy of the course is to instill a deep understanding of strategic planning and the joint world that CINCs need in order to plan theater-level campaigns.

The hope is that the service personnel branches, as well as the CINCs, will help in assigning ASAP graduates to positions where they can work directly for both warfighting and functional CINCs in their plans divisions. Some graduates of the program obviously will go directly from the War College to command assignments. But with an additional skill identifier as a 6Z-strategist, they are prepared to receive follow-on assignments as planners on a CINC staff.

The faculty for the course comes from a wide variety of sources. The two main seminar instructors are regular members of the Army War College faculty. A substantial number of other faculty members from teaching departments throughout the college also assisted by providing instruction in their areas of expertise.

From the first the aim has been to provide a wider perspective to the ASAP students than that provided through the War College's regular academic program. Thus the Commandant of the college taught ASAP seminars on a regular basis. A number of individuals who have been practitioners of strategic planning at the CINC level--including General Donn Starry, USA ret. (former TRADOC commander), General Paul Gorman, USA ret. (former SOUTHCOM commander), General Carl Steiner, USA ret. (former commander of Special Operations Command), and Lieutenant General John Yeosock, USA ret. (Third Army commander during Operation Desert Storm)--have participated in the active teaching of ASAP seminars. In addition, the students in the first ASAP cohort also had the opportunity to participate in seminars with the former CENTCOM commander, General Anthony Zinni, with General Richard Myers, then commander of SPACECOM and presently the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, and with General Peter Schoomaker, the present commander of Special Operations Command. The students also have been exposed to individuals from the planning staffs of CENTCOM, Combined Forces Command, AFSOUTH, and Joint Forces Command. Finally, representatives of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Foreign Service Institute have provided substantial augmentation to the program of instruction.

The course includes emphasis on intensive reading assignments to expand the students' understanding of the factors that go into campaign and strategic planning at the CINC level. There are also papers and exams that force the students to come to grips with the wider issues. The purpose of the examinations and papers is to develop and hone the analytical skills of the students, rather than to just grade them.

While the ASAP course presents considerable material in areas such as joint doctrine, regional issues, and current CINC concerns, the students also receive a healthy dose of history and theory to provide them with greater perspective on strategic and operational issues. The technological face of war may undergo "revolutions" from time to time, but the fundamental nature of war does not change.[13] Thus, the students confront hefty assignments in theory and history as well as current issues and concerns in coming to grips with the issues involved in joint planning at the strategic

level.

The five specific areas of study for the ASAP program are theory, strategic analysis, joint operations, campaign analysis, and participation in two major wargames, the Joint Land, Aerospace, and Sea Simulation (JLASS) and the Army War College's Strategic Crisis Exercise (SCE). But beyond seminars, reading assignments, and simulations, ASAP aims to broaden the students' understanding of the larger issues of strategy through a series of campaign rides and direct exposure to CINC staffs. In the latter case, visits to headquarters and extensive discussions with planners and, where available, with the CINCs themselves provide the students with a grasp of how complex and intractable planning at the strategic level continues to be.

The campaign staff rides represent an effort to inspire the imagination and analytical abilities of the students in understanding the issues that have confronted commanders and their staffs in the past. The ASAP program was initiated in November with a four-day staff ride to Vicksburg to study Ulysses S. Grant's campaign there from late 1862 to July 1863. The aim is to *use* history --not just learn it--to understand the larger issues involved in campaign planning and the influence of political considerations on strategy.

The school year culminated with two extensive staff rides: the first covering the Civil War fighting from the Wilderness through to Petersburg; and the second covering the Allied conduct of theater operations against Axis forces in the Sicilian campaign of 1943. That latter battlefield staff ride also allowed the students to cover the catastrophic campaign of Athenian amphibious forces against those of Syracuse during the Peloponnesian War--a campaign described brilliantly by the great Athenian historian and general Thucydides.

The purpose of these last two staff rides was to synthesize the lessons of the course into a coherent understanding of the complexities and ambiguities that have confronted commanders and planners in the past and which, human nature being what it is, will undoubtedly confront commanders and their staffs in the future.[14] The emphasis on staff rides reflects a belief that a close study of the documentary and historical evidence in combination with walking the ground allows student officers to understand the issues that will confront them in the future, just as those issues have confronted their predecessors. Thus, the students not only read a number of secondary sources, but where possible are exposed to original source documents.[15] The staff ride approach is an integral portion of the curriculum, as important as the readings and seminars.

This approach to using theory and history is quite similar to that developed by the Naval War College during Admiral Stansfield Turner's reforms of that institution in the early 1970s. Turner explicitly stated that the purpose of professional military education and the heavy emphasis that his reforms had given to the use of historical case studies were to:

. . . educate the senior officer corps in the large military and strategic issues that confront America in the late twentieth century. They should educate these officers by a demanding intellectual curriculum to think in wider terms than their busy operational careers have thus far demanded. Above all the war colleges should broaden the intellectual and military horizons of the officers who attend, so that they have a conception of the larger strategic and operational issues that confront our military and our nation.[16]

The ASAP course, then, is sequential. It progresses from theory (with an emphasis on Thucydides and Clausewitz), to an examination of historical case studies expanding the student's understanding of joint operations, and to a detailed study of joint doctrine with its implications for the strategic planner. The study of history is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Through exercises, staff rides, and examinations the students refine their analytical and planning skills. The emphasis throughout is not on the operational level of war, but rather on the strategic/political interface with operational planning. The bottom line is to provide the CINCs with the "best war planners in the world." [17]

Conclusion

In an article published in the late 1980s, the editors of a major multivolume study on the effectiveness of military institutions in World War I, the interwar period, and World War II commented:

No amount of operational virtuosity or strategic wisdom redeemed fundamental flaws in political [and

strategic] judgment. Whether policy shaped strategy, or strategic imperatives drove policy, was irrelevant. Miscalculations in both led to defeat, and any combination of political-strategic error had disastrous results, even for some nations that ended the war as members of the victorious coalition. Even the effective mobilization of national will, manpower, industrial might, national wealth, and technological know-how did not save the belligerents from reaping the bitter fruit of severe mistakes [at the strategic level]. This is because it is more important to make correct decisions at the political and strategic level than it is at the operational and tactical levels. Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected, but political and strategic mistakes live forever.[18]

The United States has experienced in full measure that statement. In World War II the skillful political and strategic guidance and vision of Franklin Roosevelt and his chief military advisers, George C. Marshall and Ernest J. King, provided the United States with the leadership which turned the extraordinarily dangerous situation of 1940 into the awesome victory of 1945.[19] That success was followed by the judicious, careful, and in the end correct decisionmaking of President Harry S. Truman and his "wise men" who articulated a strategy that eventually, 40 years later, brought victory in the Cold War.[20]

In comparison, the Germans fought World War I as if strategic and military issues did not matter.[21] The brilliant tactical innovations that they made in the period from 1916 through summer 1918--in effect inventing modern war--in the end only prolonged the outcome, an outcome made inevitable by disastrous strategic decisions.[22] The Germans did learn the larger tactical and operational lessons of World War I in a fashion that goes far toward explaining their effectiveness on the military battlefields of the next conflict.[23] But at the same time they failed to learn the strategic and political lessons of the last war and managed to repeat virtually every mistake they had made in the Great War.[24] Thus, the Third Reich--and not just Hitler but the entire German military structure as well--consistently misevaluated the strategic environment throughout the course of World War II.[25] The result was the catastrophic destruction of Nazi Germany, a defeat that took much of Europe down to destruction with it.

In looking at the failures of the Germans in the first half of the 20th century, Americans should not take too much comfort. If the United States managed to achieve victory in the Cold War, it almost lost it all in Vietnam. In that era strategic and political miscalculation of the worst sort came close to destroying the US military and ripped the American society apart. Cultural arrogance and strategic myopia were not just characteristics of the political leaders and their civilian advisers, the so-called "best and the brightest," but of America's military leaders as well.[26] Even in the 1990s the record has not been entirely unblemished: Somalia was hardly a strategic success, while America's adventures in the Balkans have hardly begun, and the political and strategic fallout will not be entirely clear for a number of years.

In the decades ahead the United States and its civilian and military leaders will confront strategic challenges as daunting as those of the past 60 years. The graduates of the ASAP program will be in the lead of efforts to provide sage political and strategic advice and planning to the CINCs and to the National Command Authorities. They will have learned the lessons of the past and of the present as a guide to the future. They will have been given the tools. Two questions remain: Will they have the moral courage to stand up for what is strategically right, and will they be able to influence a new generation of politicians increasingly divorced from the military? The answer to the first, I believe, is yes. For the answer to the second, time will tell.

NOTES

1. For the roots of the Prussian approach to professional military education, see the superb study by Charles Edward White, *The Enlightened Soldier--Scharnhorst and the Militrische Gesellschaft in Berlin, 1801-1805* (New York: Praeger, 1989).
2. For the difficulties the military profession confronts in preparing in peacetime for war, see Michael Howard, "The Uses and Abuses of Military History," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* (1962).
3. See particularly Brian Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972).

4. For the German system of professional military education in the 1920s and early 1930s, see David N. Spires, *Image and Reality, The Making of the German Officer, 1921-1933* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984).
5. See James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg, Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1992).
6. This was particularly true for the development of carrier tactics and naval air power at the Naval War College and in the development of amphibious doctrine at the Marine Corps schools in Quantico. See Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).
7. The one exception was that Newport did not prepare the United States Navy for the war against U-boats in the Atlantic, which proved such a dismal failure over the first six months of America's participation in World War II.
8. See Williamson Murray, "Clausewitz Out, Computer In, Military Culture and Technological Hubris," *The National Interest*, No. 48 (Summer 1997), pp. 57-64..
9. See Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984).
10. For the state of professional military education in the mid-1980s see Williamson Murray, "Grading the War Colleges," *The National Interest*, No. 6 (Winter 1986/1987), pp. 12-19.
11. The fact that nearly 50 percent of the admirals on active duty in 1997 had not attended the war college (an improvement over the state of affairs in the 1980s) suggests the Navy's attitude toward professional military education.
12. For how much still remains to be done to improve the state of professional military education, see Leonard D. Holder, Jr., and Williamson Murray, "Prospects for Military Education," *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 18 (Spring 1998), pp. 81-90.
13. See in particular Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper and Major General Robert H. Scales, Jr., "Preparing for War in the 21st Century," *Strategic Review*, 25 (Summer 1997), 14-20.
14. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (London: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 48.
15. Such as Eisenhower's report on the conduct of the Sicilian campaign as the joint and combined commander and the British War Cabinet's after-action report on the Sicilian campaign.
16. Quoted in Murray, "Grading the War Colleges," p. 13.
17. Briefing, US Army War College, Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations, Advanced Strategic Art Program, Pilot Program AY 2000.
18. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, "Lessons of War," *The National Interest*, No. 14 (Winter 1988/1989), pp. 83-95.
19. For a discussion of that leadership see Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to Be Won, Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2000).
20. See John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know, Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1997).
21. For the conduct of German strategy in World War I, see particularly Holger Herwig, *The First World War, Germany and Austria Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1997).
22. See Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: USACGSC, Combat Studies Institute, 1981).
23. See Williamson Murray, "Armored Warfare," in Murray and Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*.

24. See Holger Herwig, "Clio Deceived, Patriotic Self-Censorship in Germany after the Great War," *International Security*, 12 (Fall 1987), 5-44.

25. On the failures of German strategy-making writ large, see Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *Calculations: Net Assessment and the Coming of World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1992), ch. 2; and Williamson Murray, *German Military Effectiveness* (Baltimore: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1992), ch. 1.

26. For a masterful discussion of the lack of strategic vision on the part of America's military leaders, see H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

Dr. Williamson Murray is a senior fellow at the Institute for Defense Analyses in Arlington, Va. Educated at Yale, after service in the US Air Force he taught at Ohio State University. In 1998-99 he was the Harold K. Johnson Professor of Military History at the Army War College. His most recent book with Allan R. Millett is *A War to Be Won, Fighting the Second World War* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

Reviewed 17 November 2000. Please send comments or corrections to carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil