

# The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

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Volume 31  
Number 3 *Parameters Autumn 2001*

Article 11

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8-17-2001

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### Recommended Citation

Samuel L. Newland, "A Centennial History of the US Army War College," *Parameters* 31, no. 3 (2001), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2054.

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# A Centennial History of the US Army War College

SAMUEL J. NEWLAND

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From *Parameters*, Autumn 2001, pp. 34-42.

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Since the Cold War ended in the late 1980s, change has been in the air at the Army's preeminent educational institution, the US Army War College. The most significant change affecting the Army and the nation it serves has been the rapid disappearance of the bipolar world and the return of a multipolar focus. To address this monumental change and how the Army should defend the nation and its interests in the future, the War College's curriculum has been expanded to encompass topics such as the Revolution in Military Affairs, the Army After Next, Force XXI, and Army Transformation. These topics and others relating to the future of the force have become the focus of the seminar learning model at the Army War College. The possibilities and implications of such changes, whether in doctrine, technology, or both have been repeatedly examined by their apostles and detractors, often passionately. It is fitting that such discussions related to the transformation of military forces are occurring at this institution, founded one hundred years ago as a product of another era of revolutionary and evolutionary changes in military affairs.[1]

The origins of the US Army War College are found in the period of reevaluation of the US military following the Spanish-American War. While the United States, an emerging industrial giant, had easily defeated the Spanish, some elements of the war's conduct brought criticism of the war and the military that was often bitter.[2] In particular, the operations of the commissary department in supplying troops, the inadequate rations provided to American soldiers, and the casualties from illnesses caused President William McKinley to order a broad inquiry--the Dodge Commission--into the conduct of the war. When the results of this commission were deemed inadequate at best, President McKinley appointed a prominent attorney, Elihu Root--a man without any military connections--to be Secretary of War.

Secretary Root initially faced the problem of concluding military actions in America's newly acquired territories and providing governance for them. It soon became apparent to him that the nation's military forces would require a significant reorganization to prepare them for the demands of the 20th century. Among the reforms he proposed was the creation of an Army General Staff, led by a Chief of Staff, and an Army War College, which could advise the President, devise plans, acquire information, and direct the "intellectual exercise" of the Army. Before the actual establishment of such an institution, Root appointed a board of officers, led by Brigadier General William Ludlow, to explore the concept and make recommendations. Following the board's study, on 27 November 1901 Secretary Root established a War College Board by General Order 155.[3] Major General Samuel B. M. Young was appointed to lead the board. Although the War College was yet to begin operations, this board was responsible for overseeing the system of progressive officer education established by the general order. Thus, General Young receives the distinction of being the first War College President.

## The "First" Army War College

The War College actually began to function with the passage of the General Staff Act of 1903, which in essence made the institution an adjunct to the War Department General Staff, a key concept in Root's military reforms. Under the provisions of the 1903 act, General Young became the Army's first Chief of Staff and Brigadier General Tasker Bliss assumed the position of President of the Army War College. At this early stage of the college's development, the initial functions of the General Staff and the War College were closely linked by the primary mission of preparing for the creation of a General Staff Corps for the Army. With this mission in mind, on 1 November 1904 the first War College class, consisting of six captains and three majors, began their studies at a temporary "campus" located at Jackson Place in Washington, D.C., across from the White House. As one ascends the steps leading to today's Root Hall, the names of those original students, the faculty, and the War College Board are listed on a bronze plaque affixed to the first pillar on the right.

The college would not get a real campus befitting such an institution until June 1907, when it moved to Theodore Roosevelt Hall at Washington Barracks, located on the Army facility now called Fort McNair. When the cornerstone of this resplendent structure was laid in February 1903, Elihu Root's comments provided clearly and succinctly the guiding principles of the institution. The purpose of the War College, according to the founder, was "not to promote war, but to preserve peace by the intelligent and adequate preparation to repel aggression." Furthermore, he went on to state that in order to achieve this goal, the college and its students should be required to "study and confer on the great problems of national defense, of military science, and of responsible command." These goals, though now 100 years old, remain relevant and appropriate for today's students and continue to provide direction for studies at the Army War College.

Two prominent histories of the Army War College, penned by Colonel Harry Ball (USA Ret.) and then-Major General Richard Chilcoat, refer to the years from 1901 to 1917 as the "first" Army War College.[4] This was the period in which the institution functioned as conceived by its founders, as an adjunct to the General Staff. During those formative years, formal academic instruction was not used to construct the pedagogical model. Rather, students worked military issues of the day that were of interest to the General Staff, while at the same time being mentored by the faculty. This educational philosophy was instituted by Tasker Bliss, who believed that the "applicatory method" of instruction was in keeping with the college's nature as an adjunct to the General Staff. This on-the-job education was augmented by staff rides to places like Gettysburg and Antietam, along with map and command post exercises. In many respects the instructional methodology used in these formative years was reminiscent of the Prussian system of training general staff officers.[5]

The General Staff's relationship with the War College remained in place until 1916, when it was terminated by the provisions of the National Defense Act. Again, there are commemorative plaques near the entrance to today's Root Hall reflecting a student body of predominantly Army officers and a sprinkling of Marines. There is little doubt that the War College, as it evolved in this era of major reform, along with the Army it supported, was successful in accomplishing the tasks with which it was charged. However, as an educational institution, the War College was still in its formative stage, searching for an educational methodology that was yet to be defined.

Institutional development was postponed in 1917 when the nation entered the "war to end all wars." The War College was closed as students and faculty joined in planning and fighting in America's greatest overseas military operation to date.

### **The "Second" Army War College**

America's participation in the war was brief and decisive, yet the war's conclusion brought another call for the reform and restructuring of America's Army. Granted, the United States had assisted prominently in bringing the war to a successful conclusion. But despite all the military reforms passed by Congress in the period from 1903 to 1916, the War Department's General Staff--a key part of Root's turn-of-the-century reforms--had performed poorly in planning and executing the nation's mobilization. Furthermore, the education provided by the first War College had not adequately prepared officers for the demands of a "world" war.

The Army's need for reforms was partially met through the National Defense Act of 1920, which not only reformed the War Department General Staff but specified educational requirements for General Staff officers. It was in this atmosphere of change that the Army War College reopened in the fall of 1919 with a focus on formal academic instruction, in lieu of learning while doing. This resulted in the development of what military authors and historians have termed the "second" Army War College.[6] Rather than focusing on staff requirements and actions, the institution transitioned to an organization focused on educating and preparing senior officers for the challenges of war. When the institution reopened, the instruction emphasized the staff skills required to create and manage armies capable of waging total war. As this era continued to evolve into what would be known as the interwar years, the college began to emphasize instruction in the practice of war, actually teaching and exercising higher-level tactics on the battlefield.

To teach these skills, the new postwar curriculum included historical studies, the importance of responsible command, and the effects of political, social, and economic factors on the defense of the nation. Another component of the formal instruction instituted during this period was the introduction of guest speakers, lecturing on both military and

nonmilitary subjects. Although staff rides and map exercises had been a part of the old curriculum, they were reorganized and focused on specific requirements and "lessons learned," being used much as they are today. In the second War College students also still performed tasks that contributed directly to the Army Staff's production of significant planning documents. Much of this effort resulted in the "Rainbow Plans" for World War II.[7] The focus of instruction, however, had clearly shifted--the college was now more academic in nature, addressing the higher levels of leadership and command. The institution had finally defined a curriculum designed for the senior education of Army officers. The success of the pedagogy and educational philosophy, while difficult to document, can best be seen through the subsequent actions of many of the interwar graduates. The skills and abilities of officers like Dwight D. Eisenhower, George S. Patton, Omar Bradley, and William F. Halsey certainly were nurtured and developed during their studies at the Army War College.

With the clouds of war forming in both Europe and Asia, the War College again closed its doors in 1940. The rapid expansion of all the military services resulting from the institution of a peacetime draft in 1940, combined with the mobilization of the National Guard and the Army Reserve, required every available officer. Well-trained and experienced officers simply could not be spared for lengthy educational programs. Neither was the closure of the War College unique. In 1940 the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth also closed. Throughout the war years the War College remained closed, but histories of World War II show that its graduates served with distinction in every theater.

### **The "Third" Army War College**

Unlike the period following World War I, the conclusion of World War II did not occasion the immediate reopening of the Army War College. Instead, in 1946, on the former campus of the Army War College, the National War College was opened, an institution which by design was not service-specific. It was joined by another joint service school, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. The emergence of these two joint institutions was in keeping with the wishes of Chief of Staff of the Army George C. Marshall. In correspondence with Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Marshall outlined his belief that if a joint Army and Navy war college could be created, a separate Army War College would not be necessary; Eisenhower agreed.[8]

In part the concept advanced by Marshall and Eisenhower had its precedent in an institution founded during the war years. Recognizing that coordination between ground and naval operations was sometimes difficult, in 1943 the Army-Navy Staff College was established to train officers of the Army for duties in unified and coordinated Army and Navy commands. This concept proved to be successful and demonstrated the need for joint educational experiences, influencing the Army's postwar plans for educating officers.

Even though key leaders like Marshall and Eisenhower were promoting joint education, planning for postwar education still tended to proceed unilaterally among the services. The Navy had its own studies and plans for postwar education, and leading Army aviators were developing a plan for a school system for the Army Air Forces, proceeding toward 1947 and a separate service. These service-specific planning efforts were complicated by studies initiated in the spring of 1944 by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, calling for joint education at all levels of military schooling.[9] With the recommendations of these study groups and the experiences of Marshall and Eisenhower related to the failure of interservice coordination during the war, it is not surprising that for the remainder of the decade the doors of the Army War College remained closed.

The rush to joint education, a concept which all of the services clearly needed, did not in the final analysis serve the needs of Army education well.[10] There existed the separate need for Army education at a level above that offered at Fort Leavenworth. The need was for a senior Army institution that would prepare students in the areas of political science, international relations, and economics, as well as in land warfare at the strategic level and the relationship of the Army to the other elements of national power. There was another, more practical reason why the Army needed its own college. In the late 1940s the Army was unable to obtain sufficient seats for all the students it needed to educate at the senior service college level. As early as 1947, reports submitted to Chief of Staff of the Army Dwight Eisenhower recommended the reestablishment of an Army War College. Eisenhower failed to act on such recommendations, as did his successor, Omar Bradley. It remained for J. Lawton Collins, who became the Chief of Staff in 1950, to assess the recommendations of several postwar studies and conclude what now appears only too obvious, that the reopening of

the Army War College was a necessity.[11]

However, reestablishment after a ten-year hiatus could not take place overnight. Faculty would have to be recruited and, of equal importance, a campus had to be located. The facility at Fort McNair now housed the National War College, so the Army War College's traditional home was no longer available. Locating a new campus was initially contentious. Each of the several proposed locations had its own champion.[12] The institution was indeed a prize, since it was to be the apex of the Army's postwar educational system. Initially, a home was secured at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; classes began in October 1950 on the top floor of Grant Hall, with 96 students in attendance. Despite the advocates for its permanent location there, Leavenworth would be only a temporary home for the War College. Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, was closer to Washington and provided the capability of being a sole-mission post dedicated only to the Army War College; it was selected to be the permanent campus. The college moved to Carlisle Barracks in October 1951. This move signaled the birth of the "third" Army War College.

In the third War College the curriculum focused on digesting the lessons learned from World War II and countering the effects of the emerging Cold War with the Soviet Union and its surrogates. Instruction was aimed at the strategic level of war and attempted to fill the deficiencies in Army education noted in the studies prepared during the last half of the 1940s. Consequently, curriculum designers attempted to broaden the students' knowledge of politics and international relations, grand strategy, and national military strategy. During the period that followed the end of World War II, and continuing until the end of the Cold War, the availability of lessons seemed endless. The college was reborn during the Korean War, and thus had to expand its instruction on limited war. Its curriculum would address the development of nuclear strategy as it proceeded from its infancy to mutual assured destruction in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. The college addressed the impact of alliance warfare as practiced in World War II and as developed through new alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). As military instructors prepared students for potential global warfare with the Soviet bloc, curriculum designers were having to respond to the lessons of contingency warfare in places like Vietnam, Panama, and Grenada. These contingencies presented the antithesis of the large-scale war against the Soviets that had served as the basis for the majority of postwar planning.

In the third War College the institution adopted an instructional device that has continued as the critical underpinning of its instructional methodology, the seminar. Given the experience and maturity of the student body, it was determined that a seminar, composed of some 16 students and led by a faculty team, would be the most appropriate and effective teaching methodology. Each seminar would comprise a mix of students from the various branches of the Army, other services, other nations, and other governmental agencies. With this heterogeneous mix of students, incorporating introspective discussions facilitated by capable and experienced faculty members, and employing a variety of readings, guest lectures, and written assignments, the seminar method would provide a rich learning environment.

The methodology and focus of the curriculum following the Korean War proved to be appropriate, but in the mid-1960s additional changes were recommended to the institution's educational structure. In 1966 the Haines Board, which was commissioned to review officer education, published its report. Among its findings was the recognition that the existing Army War College was not producing enough graduates to meet the needs of the Army. It recommended the creation of a nonresident course so that more officers could be educated. As a result of this report, a new teaching department was formed, and the following year witnessed the development of nonresident courses, with the first students enrolled in 1968. The result of the Haines Board's recommendation was that the number of students attending the Army War College essentially doubled.

While Carlisle Barracks was valued as a sole-purpose facility for the Army War College, within the time span referred to as the third War College additional assets were added to this historic post, providing new educational opportunities for the college's students. In 1954 the Advanced Studies Group was organized at Carlisle Barracks. Designed to consider land power and strategy, this organization evolved into the Strategic Studies Institute. Positioning the institute at Carlisle Barracks added a cadre of talented civilian and military analysts; they supply additional teaching, research, and publishing expertise. In 1967 the Military History Research Collection was organized in Upton Hall. Renamed the US Army Military History Institute in 1977, it has established an outstanding military history library, photo collection, and an expansive collection of official and unofficial documents relating to America's wars. The addition of such an

outstanding military history organization to the assets of the Army War College has been instrumental in making the college one of the most respected and comprehensive military research facilities in the world.

Two additional elements of the college have been established at Carlisle Barracks in recent years, further expanding the college's educational assets. The Center for Strategic Leadership, which serves as a high-technology laboratory for the senior Army leadership and combat commanders, also provides world-class educational gaming facilities in support of the War College and houses the US Army Peacekeeping Institute. Another valuable organization, the Army Physical Fitness Research Institute, provides health research and education to the Army at large and the students of the Army War College in particular.

As the War College continued its growth and development in the 1980s, it was shaped by a congressional mandate to expand its emphasis on joint education. Parochial attitudes among the services were a major concern of two political leaders, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater and Missouri Representative "Ike" Skelton. In two separate but related initiatives, Senator Goldwater, through the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act, and Representative Skelton, with his Professional Military Education (PME) Study, infused a strong joint flavor into the curricula at all US military schools, including the senior service colleges. The reforms instituted through the efforts of these two elected officials were not merely philosophical; they were designed to be enforced, since PME institutions had to be accredited by the Joint Staff. This infusion of mandated joint instruction imposed a series of requirements on all PME institutions that has significantly expanded and improved the overall focus of learning at these institutions.

### **The "Fourth" Army War College**

At the same time jointness was emerging as a watchword in Professional Military Education, two changes of earth-shaking importance were occurring that would also affect instruction at the War College. The first was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union. With the end of the Cold War and the bipolar world, the American security picture was abruptly changed and planning considerations used for decades went out the window. Of comparable or perhaps even greater significance, the information age, touted and prophesied by writers in the preceding decade, came fully into being. The age of information and the accompanying technologies affected business, education, and in fact virtually every element of our lives. This information revolution also served as the genesis for the "fourth" Army War College.

As a result of these monumental changes, the Army War College finds itself facing a period of transition on a scale not unlike that of 100 years ago when the institution was established. When we consider the history and development of the Army War College and its evolution to meet the needs of the nation over the last century, we can see the still-developing characteristics that will define the fourth War College in the decades ahead.

Lieutenant General Richard Chilcoat (USA Ret.) addressed this question in an article on the fourth Army War College published in the winter of 1995, while he was serving as the college's Commandant. In his opinion, the fourth War College would be in many respects a college of the future. It would be a college where the basic tool is the computer, the War College of the microprocessor, digitization, and the information age. While he referred to other competencies that student-officers of the future must have, his vision was clearly an institution of the information age.[13]

While technology continues to affect every part of the educational process, at Carlisle Barracks and elsewhere, recent developments at the Army War College may provide an even fresher view of its direction. For the last 100 years there has been a steady progression of the War College from an Army "school" to a serious academic institution of higher learning. The college has evolved from a school preparing officers to work on the Army staff to a genuine graduate-level college, recognized by the US Department of Education and the Congress as an accredited, master's-degree-granting institution. To further develop its faculty it now provides sabbatical leaves for research significant to the Army, the War College, and the nation. It also sends talented Army officers to resident study at prominent universities to complete doctoral degrees prior to returning to the faculty as Army educators. In all of these endeavors, the goal is to enable the War College to better prepare its students for a broad range of strategic responsibilities at the highest levels of military and government service.

Perhaps the current and future War College, the "fourth" Army War College, is in reality the institution its faculty, staff, and supporters have all planned for and built toward over the past century. The Army War College today is an

institution that is truly preeminent, not only in teaching future Army leaders, but in producing scholarly and well-reasoned written works and studies on national and military strategy. Its services and faculty are in demand both within and outside the military. It provides a first-class educational program with solid academic standards, held in high regard in the military, government, and academia. This is how far the institution has come, and this evolution speaks to its future direction.

The world of 2001 is a place where technology and constant change require ever-higher standards of education in all disciplines. The Army War College is developing in step with that demand. Its progression to an academic institution of excellence is in keeping with the vision established for it 100 years ago, enabling it to continue to serve the Army and the nation in their transformation to the future.

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## NOTES

1. In an article of this size, space does not permit a full discussion of the multitude of changes that occurred in the US Army from the turn of the century through 1916. In addition to the acts specifically relating to the War College, of particular note were the 1903 Dick Act, what some call the second Dick Act in 1908, and the National Defense Act of 1916. Through these three acts the active-duty Army and the National Guard were transformed into stronger military forces and, in addition, in 1908 the first elements of the Army Reserve were created.
2. The criticism of the Army centered on two particular problems. First was the issue of unacceptable rations, tinned beef which was too often unfit for human consumption. Second was the poor medical care given to soldiers who were ill with tropical diseases.
3. This order actually goes beyond the creation of the Army War College. It is significant because it established a progressive system of professional education including the creation of the War College. See Harry Ball, *Of Responsible Command: A History of the U.S. Army War College* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Alumni Association, US Army War College, 1994), pp. 68-69.
4. Ibid., pp. 137, 492; and Richard Chilcoat, "The Fourth Army War College: Preparing Strategic Leaders for the Next Century," *Parameters*, 25 (Winter 1995-96), 3-17.
5. An excellent overview of the General Staff System is provided by then Oberst i.G. Christian O. E. Millotat in his monograph, *Understanding the Prussian-German General Staff System* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1992).
6. Ball, pp. 493-94; Chilcoat, p. 4.
7. The war planning and war-gaming work of the college contributed heavily to the Rainbow Plans used as the United States entered World War II. It should be noted, however, that the War College planning done between 1919 and 1940 was deficient in considering coalition warfare, something now included in depth in the curriculum.
8. Ball (p. 258) makes this point clearly, as does Colonel Robert Brace in his entry in William E. Simons, ed., *Professional Military Education in the United States: A Historical Dictionary* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 64.
9. Several studies on the subject of military education were initiated in this period. There was the 1944 Richardson Committee that in part addressed military education, the Gerow Board of 1945, and the Eddy Board, which submitted its report in 1947. The Eddy Board clearly recommended the reopening of an Army War College.
10. In reality it did not seem to serve the Navy or the newly established Air Force any better. The Navy had not closed its war college during the war, and in the postwar era it established a course for captains and commanders. The Air Force, the newest service, developed its war college with a clear focus on the higher levels of warfare.
11. Collins was a 1938 graduate of the War College and had also served on the faculty from 1938 to 1940. From the

onset of his tenure as Chief of Staff of the Army, he energetically supported the reestablishment of the US Army War College.

12. Among the sites proposed were Fort Leavenworth, Fort Monroe, Fort Riley, Fort Myer, Fort McClellan, and several other sites.

13. Chilcoat, pp. 7-19.

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Reviewed 15 August 2001. Please send comments or corrections to [carl\\_Parameters@conus.army.mil](mailto:carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil)