

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 41
Number 2 *Parameters Summer 2011*

Article 2

5-1-2011

From the Archives: On Military Critics

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Recommended Citation

Parameters Editors, "From the Archives: On Military Critics," *Parameters* 41, no. 2 (2011), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2580.

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From the Archives

On Military Critics

Lucius Amelius Paulus, a Roman Consul who had been selected to conduct war with the Macedonian, B.C. 168, went out from the Senate-house into assembly of the people and addressed them as follows:

In every circle, and, truly, at every table, there are people who lead armies into Macedonia; who know where the camp ought to be placed; what posts ought to be occupied by troops; when and through what pass that territory should be entered; where magazines should be formed; how provisions should be conveyed by land and sea; and when it is proper to engage the enemy, when to lie quiet. And they not only determine what is best to be done, but if anything is done in any other manner than what they have pointed out, they arraign the consuls, as if he were on trial before them. These are great impediments to those who have the management of affairs; for every one cannot encounter injurious reports with the same constancy and firmness of mind as Fabius did, who chose to let his own ability be questioned through the folly of the people, rather than to mismanage the public business with a high reputation. I am not one of those who think that commanders ought at no time to receive advice; on the contrary, I should deem that man more proud than wise, who regulated every proceeding by the standard of his own single judgement. What then is my opinion? That commanders should be counselled, chiefly, by persons of known talent; by those who have made the art of war their particular study, and whose knowledge is derived from experience; from those who are present at the scene of action, who see the country, who see the enemy; who see the advantages that occasions offer, and who, like people embarked in the same ship, are sharers of the danger. If, therefore, any one thinks himself qualified to give advice respecting the war which I am to conduct, which may prove advantageous to the public, let him not refuse his assistance to the state, but let him come with me into Macedonia. He shall be furnished with a ship, a horse, a tent; even his travelling charge shall be defrayed. But if he thinks this too much trouble, and prefers the repose of a city life to the toils of war, let him not, on land, assume the office of a pilot. The city, in itself, furnishes abundance of topics for conversation; let it confine its passion for talking within its own precincts, and rest assured that we shall pay no attention to any council but such as shall be framed within our camp.