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History and Military Education: The U.S. Army

by Brooks E. Kleber
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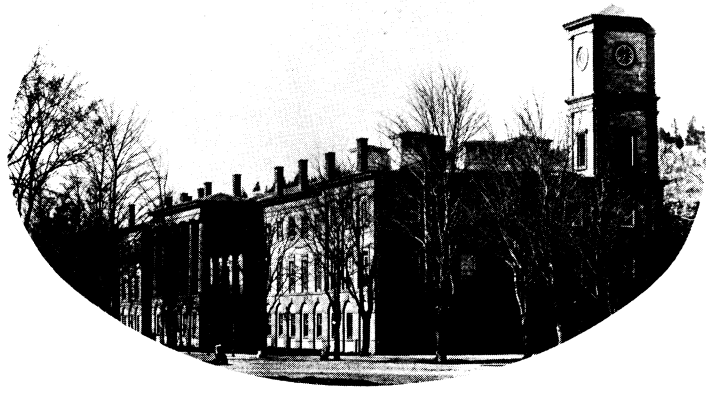
HISTORY, the discipline, has been a sometime elusive element of military education within the United States Army. Certainly it has had its vicissitudes, both with regard to what has been taught and how much it has been emphasized. What follows is a survey of the role of history within the Army's officer education system, with emphasis on the last 75 years.

Officer education can be divided conveniently into two phases—precommission and post-commission. The former includes the Reserve Officer Training Corps, which provides the bulk of the officers, and the United States Military Academy. The officer candidate school system is not included because its short, practical training program precludes coverage of military history. The post-commission phase of officer training includes the service schools, most of which are related to particular branches; the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College; and the U.S. Army War College.

Before portraying history's role in the Army's educational system, it will be useful to examine why history, particularly military history, was taught in the first place. Such a determination is not always easy. I suspect custom and tradition accounted for much of the history included in the curricula. But threre were practical reasons as well. Military history taught in the 19th and early 20th centuries demonstrated the principles of war, explained the construction of fortifications, and provided an understanding of tactics. For example, at West Point, until the mid-1960s, accounts of battles and campaigns were used to examine the principles of war. Military history at the Infantry School underlined "the real problems of decision amid the confusion of battle,"[1] and at the Command and General Staff College, it illustrated military principles.

One of the most comprehensive evaluations of the value of military history was undertaken in 1971 by a committee with the unfelicitous name of Department of the Army Ad Hoc Committee on the Army Need for the Study of Military History, which met at West Point to "determine the extent of that need, particularly in relation to the study of military history by commissioned officers and key civilian personnel, and develop recommendations on how any unfulfilled needs can be met."[2] Because the findings of this committee crop up throughout this paper, it will be useful to know how it came about. Impetus for its formation was a letter from Brigadier General Hal C. Pattison to Army Chief of Staff, General William Westmoreland, wherein the retiring Chief of Military History decried what he perceived to be the Army's tendency to deemphasize the value and use of military history, or, as he expressed it, "neglect the lessons of the past."

Agreeing with General Pattison, the committee outlined remedial measures, a major portion of which dealt with the Army school system. In the process, the committee arrived at the following appraisal of the worth of military history: its study sharpens judgment, improves perception, and broadens perspectives; it provides valuable, albeit vicarious, experience otherwise not available; it makes an officer not only more proficient, but also more professional. These benefits, while important and



United States Military Academy, Old Academic Building 1870-1891. U.S. Military Academy photograph.

valid, defy precise measurement. Concrete examples of history's usefulness can be found in the area of training and in the development of doctrine. What better way to instruct in river crossings than by describing successful and unsuccessful crossings in recent conflicts? What better method to arrive at proper tank doctrine than by evaluating the use of armor in the tank-dominated Arab-Israeli conflicts? And history and its examples are essential for the quantification processes that are the life blood of operations researchers and systems analyzers.

But we must be careful of how history is used and the emphasis we place upon it. Russell Weigley recently commented about the meticulous studies on military history compiled by the Prussian and German General Staffs for the benefit of future commanders. "Thus steeped in military history, the German high command went on to lead its forces to disastrous defeats in two world wars."[3] Weigley went on to modify his aphorism by saying that, while military history broadened the perspective of the German high command, it made them overreach their (and Germany's) capacity, thus ensuring defeat.

We are on much firmer ground if we see the real value of military history, not as a precise guide for future actions, but as a method of developing a sort of "historical mindedness" among the officer corps. And what is historical mindedness? Colonel Thomas Griess, history department head at West Point, has described the person with it best:

> He will develop the habit of searching for broad themes .. over lengthy periods; he will avoid convenient generalizations and single causation; he will learn to weigh evidence

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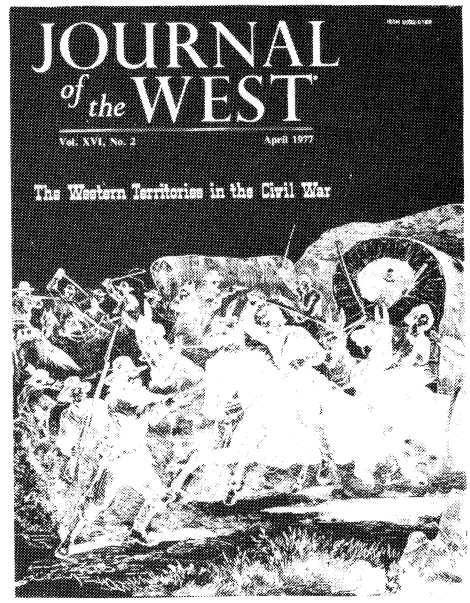

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and infer logical conclusions .. As he becomes more historical minded, man learns to come to terms with his fellow man and to think about the aspects of human nature which so often govern individual actions.[4]

Sometimes a communion with history is exaggerated. The retired general officers responding to a questionnaire distributed by the 1971 Ad Hoc Committee were unanimous as to the part that history played in their successful careers. Yet people rise to the top largely because of superior intelligence, diligence, and wisdom. Naturally, they take advantage of all opportunities to prepare themselves for excellence at the next level. So one could say that the study of military history didn't make these generals any smarter; they were smarter, so they studied military history.

Military history also can be misused. It is easy to attribute more to the discipline than the facts justify. And all of us have seen examples culled selectively from the historical record in support of a particular thesis.

United States Military Academy

Jefferson believed that the United States needed an army and that this army should have intelligent, well-educated officers. The United States Military Academy opened its doors in 1802 to provide the later. From the time of its founding, military history has been taught at West Point in one form or another. For most of this time, or until the mid-1960s, military history primarily was operational history featuring battle accounts and the overall principles that influenced the waging of war.

A major figure of the United States Military Academy was Dennis Hart Mahan, who headed the Department of Engineering for forty years (1832-1871). Mahan exerted great influence in many ways, one of which was his basic assumption that an officer could be properly trained only if he had acquired "a broad historical knowledge of war." In commenting on Mahan's philosophy Russell Weigley adds, "to say that officership must be based upon a broad historical knowledge was to say that officership must become a profession." To state the premise more specifically (and to go to the source, Mahan), "It is in military history that we are to look for the source of all military science. In it we shall find those exemplifications of failure and success by which alone the truth and value of the rules of strategy can be tested."[5]

Significant changes in the West Point curriculum with regard to history took place rapidly from World War I onward. Unlike the experience of the first World War, course adjustments brought about by the second global conflict, aimed at meeting the Army's immediate needs, did not include the elimination of military history. By the 1960s, major changes had taken place including increased coverage of military history and improvement of reference material. And yet the teaching of military history continued to be operationally oriented, as it had been since the Military Academy was opened.

In 1969, military history was removed from the Department of Military Art and Engineering and placed in the newly formed Department of History. A year later, the American and European history courses taught by the Department of Social Sciences to Third Classmen also were transferred to the new department. A course in military history was established that covered the evolution of the art of war in a manner that went beyond operational history, yet retained the flavor of the battlefield.

During the academic year 1977-1978, the West Point Department of History offered 42 courses in history and military history, some in the core curriculum, others as electives. Unlike the Naval Academy, but like the Air Force Academy, the West Point history instructors are all officers—officers carefully chosen, coming to the academy with a master's degree in history and a Command and General Staff College diploma.

Reserve Officers Training Corps

The Reserve Officers Training Program (ROTC) was created by the National Defense Act of 1916. Military history instruction for cadets was included from the start. The 1916 War Department general order that established the program directed that the ROTC senior division include, among other things, instruction in general military policy (freshmen), lectures on recent military history (sophomores), military history (juniors), and lectures on military history and policy (seniors). ROTC instruction was supported by privately printed manuals which initially (1922, for example) concentrated on policy rather than battlefield accounts. By 1932, the approach had changed from policy to operations. The ROTC program closed down during World War II as the Army turned to Officer Candidate Schools for large quantities of quickly needed officers. The ROTC was reinstituted after the war, and committees searched for improved curricula and the flexibility required to adjust to the varying needs of its many host institutions. A major curriculum change in 1952 saw the introduction of a thirty-hour freshman military history course which, according to a civilian member of the curriculum committee, stressed "the history of the Army and leadership as inspirational and integrating factors to add meaning to the large amount of detailed factual information presented in the course."[6]

Another major change took place in September 1960, one in which the Army, reacting in part to academic pressure, allowed

United States Military Academy, "The Plain," 1857. U.S. Military Academy photograph.

U.S. Army Infantry School Bulding, Fort Benning, Georgia, 1935-1964, rear view.

for the substitution of academic courses for certain militwry subjects. Pure military science instruction was to be reduced on the campus and saved for summer camp. The United States Continental Army Command, supervisor of the ROTC program, objected unsuccessfully to the idea of academic substitution. Thirty hours of American military history were retained in the curriculum.

In 1964 and 1965, various committees again scrutinized the ROTC curriculum. Their findings had a significant impact on the Army Advisory Panel for ROTC which submitted a new curriculum to the Secretary of the Army in July 1965, a feature of which was the inclusion of sixty hours of World Military History. As was the case with the thirty hours of American Military History, no fixed program of instruction was included, a measure which provided for necessary flexibility.

The flexibility of these ROTC programs reflected the diversity of academic institutions which they supported. It also reflected the accommodation to Academia during the painful Vietnam period. A survey conducted in the Spring of 1977 revealed that 215 ROTC units taught the thirty-hour block of military history, while only 17 offered the sixty hours of world history. Interestingly, 56 units provided for no military history instruction at all, and 39 units utilized the academic faculty to teach military history, some of which was taught by a team from the military and academic staffs.

Branch Service Schools

Most Army branches, e.g., Infantry, Armor, Quartermaster, are represented by service schools which through a series of courses prepare officers and enlisted men for duties within that branch. Although these branch shools date from 1824, when an artillery school was established at Fort Monroe, Virginia, the system that we know today took shape in the early 1920s. During this period, the service schools emphasized the general educational background of officers. The formal study of military history was part of this. History taught in some schools pertained to the particular branch; for example, there were "lectures on selected campaigns with particular reference to Field Artillery." World War II saw the end of "educational" subjects, as the schools stressed the practical training of a large number of officers.

After World War II, efforts to introduce military history into branch school curricula were thwarted by more pressing requirements. A 1954 survey of fourteen branch schools found that only the Chemical Officer Advanced Course contained formal instruction in military history, a sub-course, by the way, which the present writer helped establish. In recent years, branch basic courses have been relatively short and have been attended by young officers usually entering active duty. The short length and practical nature of the basic course limited instruction in history to brief periods of branch history, if, indeed, it was included at all.

The longer advanced courses were designed for officers with from four to six years of service. These courses were a prime target of the 1971 Ad Hoc Committee on the Army Need for the Study of Military History. When the committee met, there were few required courses in military history, although the use of historical examples in instruction was not uncommon. But the Ad Hoc Committee did not advocate core curriculum—that is, required—military history courses for the advanced courses; it preferred electives.

The Department of the Army approved the committee's military history elective recommendation and directed that the United States Continental Army Command, among other things, see that its branch schools have two military history electives of "diverse sophistication."[7] CONARC, in turn, instructed the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College to develop these electives. Military history electives flourished in the branch advanced classes. Some of the smaller schools used the canned scopes and lesson outlines. Others, principally the combat arms schools, acquired competent officer instructors who developed sophisticated courses.

Just as these military history programs were getting underway, restrictions in people and money forced the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command to shorten the length of its advanced courses, and in the process, all electives were eliminated from the program of instruction. With the exception of one branch school that included military history in its core curriculum, formal history instruction terminated in the advanced courses of the Army's schools.

U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas is the keystone of the Army's school system. Officer students average about 35 years in age and have had roughly fourteen years of military service. They are preparing for duty as field grade commanders and principal staff officers at brigade and higher echelons.

The college traces its origins to the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry established in 1881. From the beginning, the study of military history has played an important role in the curriculum. Strong, effective officers—for example, Arthur Wagner and John Morrison—influenced the curriculum. Wagner's innovations in the 1890s were derived from the detailed study and use of military history on the part of both instructors and students. A decade later, Morrison ensured that the study of military history was the "foundation" of the second year of the School of the Line, as the institution at Fort Leavenworth was designated in 1906.

The curriculum devised in the 1920s was to remain substantially the same until World War II. Military history continued to play a prominent role. "In time of peace, Military History must be relied upon for information as to the actual conditions of war," the school's 1922 annual report observed. Despite good intentions with regard to broadening the scope of military history, its coverage during these years continued to stress operations.

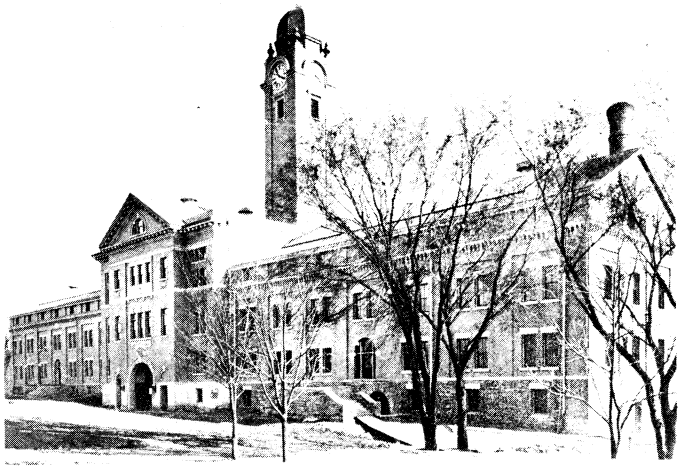
World War II saw the Leavenworth course dramatically curtailed. Formal instruction in military history understandably was discarded. Less clear is the reason why historical illustrations also were eliminated. For several years after the war, the

course of instruction represented an expansion of the wartime model. Not until 1952 did military history reappear in formal instruction. By 1960, the move toward increased military history instruction had subsided. That year only three hours were presented, the purpose of which was the encouragement of individual study. More extensive military history instruction was introduced five years later, a trend which the recommendation of the Haines Board on Army officer education reinforced.

In 1971, the year that the Ad Hoc Committee on the Army Need to Study Military History met, the core curriculum of the CGSC had no formal instruction in military history, although historical examples and case studies were used. Three military history electives were taught by resident faculty, while ten other history electives were offered by the three universities in the area. As was the case with ROTC and the branch schools, qualified officer instructors were a problem at CGSC.

Ad Hoc Committee recommendations, the large majority of which were adopted, concerned the quality and number of in-house electives, the qualification of instructors, and the increased use of the history facilities of nearby colleges. For the academic year 1976-77, seventeen military history electives were taught by the faculty, while six more were presented at nearby colleges. Eight officer instructors had master's degrees in history, with several others nearing their Ph.D. In addition, two civilian historians with doctorates taught military history at the college. And as at USMA and the Army War College, a visiting professor of military history added a valuable dimension. A newly formed military history committee presided over this program. The academic year 1977-78 was to see fewer offerings (seven) in military history, as well as a curtailment of courses taught by professors from civilian universities.

Interestingly, people at the college considered the reduced program to be superior to the one it had superseded. It was germane and responsive to the needs of the students, and consequently, it would play a larger role in the professional development of the students. Historians in the academic year 1977-78 were teaching 29 hours of the common curriculum, including an 18-hour block on the U.S. Army in the twentieth century. Equally important, they were introducing the theater operations exercise and the two major corps tactical exercises. As the college saw it, "In a sense, the College history program has history on its side. A full year's contact with the CGSC class by historians as an identifiable component of the College cannot help but affect future classes."[8]



Grant Hall and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, home of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1906-1959. Picture circa 1908.

The Army War College

The Army War College, established in 1901 by Secretary of War Root, initially functioned more as a General Staff than as an educational institution. Although this emphasis changed with the advent of a proper General Staff organization, vestiges of this initial experience persisted until World War I.

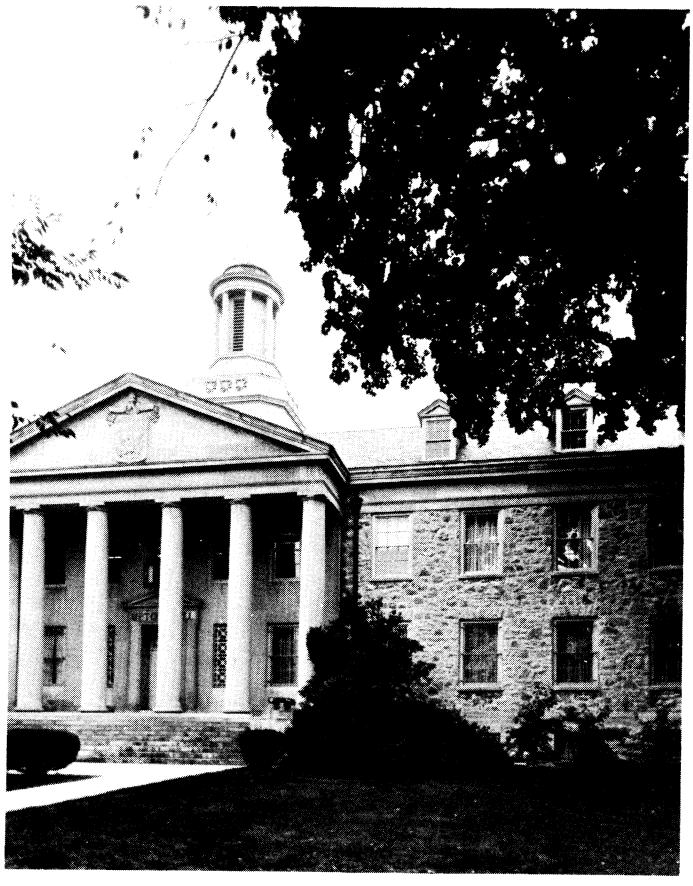
Military history has been included in Army War College instruction from its beginning, although emphasis on the discipline was to see its peaks and valleys. Before World War I, lectures were given by a member of Harvard's history department. Although attempts by faculty and students at preparing a history of Civil War campaigns proved unsuccessful, the War College must have been doing something right because the general excellence of its historical program received the recognition of the American Historical Association, which devoted a session to the subject of military history at its December 1912 meeting. Participants included A. B. Hart of Harvard and Major James W. McAndrew of the War College.

By the eve of United States entry into the World War, historical studies at the Army War College gradually had been increased. Military history was not merely a recapitulation of battles and heroic leaders, but attempted to relate past events to the current situation. The years immediately following the World War reflected an even greater Army War College interest in military history. Military speakers ranged from Major George C. Marshall to Marshal Ferdinand Foch. Classes visited Civil War battlefields in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

As was the case in World War I, the Army War College closed its doors during World War II. It reopened at Fort Leavenworth in 1950, moving to Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania during the following year. The curriculum reflected the changing nature of war—"Formation of strategic policy, management, doctrine, and national military programs provided the direction while political science, international relations, economics, and psychology provided the tools."[9] History, the discipline, suffered in the process. In 1957, two academic observers of military education stated that none of the senior service colleges, with the exception of the Air War College, provided the student "with a sense of historical perspective."[10]

In 1971, the time of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Army Need to Study Military History, none of the individual War College courses dealt with history *per se*, but actual military history content of the several electives was estimated at from 2 to 80 percent. It was not just coincidence that an elective in military history was formulated at the time the Ad Hoc Committee was in session.

At the Army War College today, military history normally appears as part of Strategic Military Studies. Obviously, in the development of such subjects as Scope and Theories of Military Strategy, Military Strategy in Total War: World War I, German Strategy, 1939-1943, Military Strategy in Vietnam, and Military Strategy in the Mideast, 1968-1973, "history" was represented. Reading lists and expert lecturers, both military and academic, ensure the adequacy of historical coverage. Clio is being well served at Carlisle.



Upton Hall, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, home of the Army War College, 1951-1967.

The Situation Today

Where does the discipline, history, stand today with respect to the Army's educational system? It is flourishing at the United States Military Academy. But within the diverse Army ROTC units it is barely holding its own, with efforts to provide advanced degrees for officer instructors thwarted by overriding requirements of the Officer Personnel Management System.

The advanced courses of the branch schools have been stripped of formal military history instruction, a situation that has caused the Training and Doctrine Command and the Center of Military History to seek methods of whetting appetites for individual study. The Command and General Staff College has a sound military history program, well-trained instructors, and a command element that appreciates the value of the discipline. The Army War College, the apex of the Army educational system, uses military history in the development of most of its electives, has a strong faculty, and has a splendid research center in the form of the U.S. Army Military History Institute.

Mention must be made that there never has been coordination among these major components of the Army officer education system. The five principal areas are directed by three different commands or agencies. The impact of this diversity of control in the achievement of a coordinated and progressive military history instruction program was a major finding of the 1971 Committee on the Army Need to Study Military History. This problem was again brought up at the May 1976 Military History Workshop hosted by the Command and General Staff College and attended by representatives of most of the Army institutions and commands involved in the educational process. The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command hosted conferences in 1977 and 1978 also aimed at achieving progressive, coordinated military history instruction within the officer education system.

Conclusions

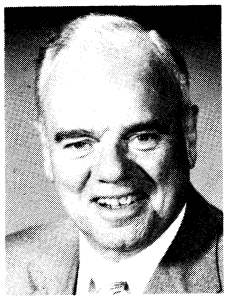
What conclusions can be derived from this recapitulation of the history of history in the Army's educational institutions? The first conclusion in an essay such as this is whether or not the study of history is a worthwhile endeavor for members of the Army officer corps. The answer is yes, but there are qualifications. Theodore Ropp recently wrote, "One uses history for mind expanding, not puzzle solving. ."[11] Hence, one must not expect too much from history. Its study does not provide blueprints or precise formulas for future actions. Rather, its understanding brings about a state of historical mindedness, a part of the overall professionalism desired in the officer corps. This is reason enough for the study of military history.

History flourishes where there is a stable, identifiable organizational entity to look after its welfare. For this reason, history is alive and well at West Point with its capably run, stable history department. And for this reason, I can be optimistic about the discipline's future at the Command and General Staff College if the recently formed Military History Committee becomes institutionalized. The teaching of history is much less secure at institutions or in military organizations where no one serves as its sponsor. Service schools are prime examples of this. If the commandant has a special appreciation of history, it will flourish. If his successor is less enthusiastic, its role will diminish because there is no organizational structure to help it weather shifting biases and enthusiasms.

Just as history thrives in an institution with an organizational sponsor, there should be someone at the apex of the Army educational system looking after the development of a progressive, integrated military history instructional program. (For that matter, there must be areas other than history that would benefit from single supervisory control.) Until that time arrives, ad hoc committees and workshops must periodically look at the problems of military history instruction.

The matter of priorities has had a major impact on history. The Army now is in a period of curtailed resources—men, money, and time. The previous commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, for a series of germane reasons unnecessary to recapitulate in this paper, cut back the length of formal Army courses. He looked upon training in units and individual study as ways of filling the resulting instructional gap. In addition, the new Officer Personnel Management System, which precisely tailors instruction to fit officer specialties, has added to the deemphasis of history instruction. In order to help overcome this deemphasis, we must kindle the spark of interest in history within the officer student, to inspire his reliance upon history as a basic tool for developing individual expertise and, even more important, for enhancing his overall professionalism.

This survey of the past 75 years of history's role in the Army's educational sysatem has revealed clearly the pendulum syndrome of acceptance. The peaks and valleys are clearly delineated. I suspect that the future will see the same phenomenon. In his splendid survey of European history William McNeil has written, "unless historians find it possible to think seriously about the overall shape and proportion of their subject, they will have less and less to say to the general public that is worth attending to; and the profession will slowly assimilate itself to the posture and role currently enjoyed by professors and teachers of classics."[12] It very well may be that teachers of history, at least in some areas of the Army's educational system, already are in the role "currently enjoyed" by the teachers of classics. Army practitioners of history, and their academic allies, cannot placidly depend upon the return swing of the pendulum.



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