

## **NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN MILITARY HISTORY**

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## INTRODUCTION

A. We are gathered here today together to pay homage to Robin Higham and to talk about our intellectual specialization, military history. The first task is likely to be more satisfying and less mystifying than the second, although the latter gives us a marvelous opportunity to talk about ourselves.

B. Although I will be happy to address what you may regard as the important stuff in our discussion -- who is writing what about what -- I will devote my prepared remarks to three related subjects:

1. the public's interest in military history and the opportunities offered all of us if we have the wit to recognize public interest as more than a distraction and annoyance.

2. the scholarly foundation that now provides aspiring military historians with a knowledge base hardly recognizable thirty years ago.

3. the nature and communal values of the military history community and the need to maintain a system of collaborative behavior.

## TEXT

### A. Popularity and Public Consumption of Military History

(1) Television: The History Channel, HBO, the Turner channels, A&E, PBS. We should start "The Old War Movie Channel." Fare is a mix of documentaries (old and new) and fictionalized history. Some examples: Ken Burns, "The Civil War" (1990), had forty million viewers. "Shaka Zulu," one million viewers. The History Channel started five years ago with one million subscribers and now has 54 million with one million new subscribers each month.

We may quibble about topics, accuracy, balance, interpretations, but the silver screen has become the dominant outlet of historical interpretation.

(2) Museums: The Smithsonian Air and Space Museum is the most visited tourist attraction in the United States with the Air Force Museum (Dayton) in second place. And we wonder about our obsession with air power?

(3) Preservationism is on the rise. Example: defeat of Disney's Americana-world in northern Virginia. Site salvation and development as "living history" meccas is a phenomenon in almost every part of the United States. As a trustee of the Council on America's Military Past and a reenactor groupie, I've seen many of them, most east of the Mississippi. *The Civil War Times* just published its first directory of preservationist projects in private hands that are seeking funds: there were seventy-four.

(4) Reenactments: 50,000 Civil War with World War II and Colonial-Early National Period not far behind. Two World War I battles every year at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

(5) Historical novels, e.g., the Shaara family, Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, Herman Wouk on World War II.

(6) The electronic world, 2500-plus Civil War websites. CD-ROM pubs, computerized war games, e-mail correspondents.

(7) Popular journals: The upscale pace-setter has been *Military History Quarterly* circulation of 25,000. Sold two years ago to PRIMEDIA. No change of format anticipated. The other PRIMEDIA popular journals hold the field:

Subscription data (March 1999):

<i>World War II</i>	193,935
<i>Vietnam</i>	93,611
<i>Civil War</i>	139,261
<i>Military History</i>	157,783

(8) Books: Book sales continue to grow, accompanied by audio books-on-tape for commuters and long-haul travelers. Some illustrations are in order:

(a) 4,115 books in print or otherwise available for sale on World War II (March, 1999)

(b) The Easton Press Civil War Library: leatherbound books at \$49.95 each and numbering 30-40 volumes at a minimum. Editorial board of CW worthies with lots of popular history experience. (But will they reprint *Si Klegg and His Pard*, the all-time Civil War best-seller, or the collected works of Ambrose Bierce?)

(c) The Steve Ambrose phenomenon or how to become the "People's Historian." SA became a millionaire on royalties and collects speaking fees in the thousands. *Pegasus Bridge* (1988), then the big money with *D-Day* (1994), *Undaunted Courage* (1996), and *Citizen-Soldiers* (1997). Only challenge is James McPherson as celebrity-historian. Paul Kennedy who?

The Message: public has a voracious appetite for well-written military history, which does not have to be "dumbed down" in interpretation, just in prose style.

Kudos for Robin: Sunflower Press and its publication of World War I and II books, especially memoirs and unit histories.

## B. B as in Bibliography or How to Find Your Way Around the Bookish Battlefield

When I prepared for general examinations in 1964-65, military history was not a recognized field at Ohio State for examination purposes. Would not have made much difference because there was hardly anything to read to introduce the student to the field except for a handful of journal articles (the best by Matloff and Howard), the AHA pamphlet *Military History* (1961) by Walter Millis, an Army pamphlet by Matloff, *et al.*, *The Writing of American Military History* (1956), and some obscure lectures and papers. When I prepared the first such list for my graduate students in 1969 it was all inclusive (I think) and filled one page. The similar list is now four pages long and is "selected."

In 1970 I delivered a paper at the OAH meeting, later published in *The State of American History*, edited by Herbert J. Bass, who didn't know me from Samuel Eliot Morison. This exercise went on in four more such papers, the most recent in a bibliography sponsored by the ICMH (1994). Frank Cooling and I went on to publish a bibliography of doctoral dissertations with four supplements that is now an annual feature in *The Journal of Military History*. Even the *Journal of American History* now lists military history doctoral dissertations.

While we cannot find our way through the literature and issues with quite the precision of GPS navigation, there is no excuse for not knowing the field. Some high points:

Robin Higham, ed, *A Guide to the Sources of United States Military History* (Archon Books, 1975) and then with a co-editor, Don Mrozek, three more supplements (up to 1993) and a wider variety of subjects. It is especially valuable for its attention to science and technology and aviation history. A fourth supplement is on its way.

John E. Jessup, Jr. and Robert W. Coakley, *A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History* (U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1979), a mix of historiography and bibliography -- and comparative, too. However, it reflects the quaint conceit that anything naval is not military or somebody else's problem.

The military historical divisions: subject matter bibliographies by the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Marine Corps History and Museums Division, the Naval Historical Division, and the three-headed historical monster (the Medusa of Military History) that is the Office of the Chief of Air Force History, the history department of the Air Force Academy, and the Air Power Research Institute at the Air University. All profit from electronic data processing. If they do nothing else, computers do bibliographies.

John E. Jessup and Louise B. Ketz, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Military*, 3 vols., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994).

Roger J. Spiller, Joseph G. Dawson III, and T. Harry Williams, *Dictionary of American Military Biography*, 3 vols., (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984).

Scholarly projects, for which I will provide only some examples, drawn from my recent experience in doing books on World War II and the Korean War:

John J. Sbrega, *The War Against Japan, An Annotated Bibliography* (Garland Publishing, 1989).

n.a. (ABC/CLIO), *World War II from an American Perspective* (ABC/CLIO, 1983).

Loyd E. Lee, *World War II in Asia and the Pacific and the War's Aftermath, with General Themes: A Handbook of Literature and Research* (Greenwood Press, 1998).

Korean War: Keith MacFarland, ed., *The Korean War: An Annotated Bibliography* (Garland, 1986); Lester H. Brune, ed., *The Korean War: Handbook of the Literature and Research* (Greenwood Press, 1996); and Paul M. Edwards, ed., *The Korean War: An Annotated Bibliography* (Greenwood Press, 1998). Also encyclopedias: James I. Matray, Stanley Sandler, Harry Summers, and Spencer Tucker (in process).

Only one of these existed when I started serious Korean War research six years ago.

Other signposts:

The annual bibliography of the International Commission of Military History, now up to nineteen volumes and a well-kept secret. International, comparative, and printed in at least English and French. Covers preceding five year blocks and compiled by national bibliography committees.

The publications of Scholarly Resources, Inc., the National Security Archive, and the University Publications of America on microfilm as guides to unpublished histories, oral histories, reports and studies, and documents of the U.S. armed forces.

The translated and annotated Soviet and Chinese documents published by the Cold War International History Project, The Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars.

The U.S. Military Academy's summer workshop, the bootcamp of military history.

### C. The Military History Community

In my other assessments of American military history I provided the predictable evaluations of scholarship and intellectual trends as I observed them. We watched the development of the "new military" history and then a conservative plea for more "more drums and bugles" or "blood and gore," i.e. to put the military back into military history. Less "jaw, jaw" and more "wah, wah." We have watched the growth of military-social history, most memorably

in the writing about Civil War and World War II soldiers or in the growth of oral history so that the soldiers speak for themselves. In addition to McPherson and Ambrose, we have works by Robertson, Hess, Davis, Linderman, Glatthaar, Mitchell, and Barton for the Civil War and Kennett, Bergerud, Perret, Schrivjers, and Linderman again.

My interest, however, upon this occasion is not to discuss the most recent scholarship, but to talk about the intellectual domain of military history

(1) Institutional history or cultural history: the nature and behavior of military organizations and their organic relationship with other elements of the parent society. Would include recruitment/terms of military service (the social contract), organization, training, occupational socialization, arming/materiel culture, economic behavior, civil-military relations at the governmental and societal levels, officership, occupational socialization, and demographic representation.

(2) The study of war: on the horizontal dimension of causes, conduct, and consequences; on the vertical dimension of politics, strategy, operations, and tactics.

Observation: it is harder to write about war than military institutions.

Too often we overlook some of the characteristics of the practitioners of military history. The image of the soldier-scholar or the intellectually inclined officer is strongly rooted in the field and shall remain so, especially with early retirement and second careers in the PME system and (to a lesser degree) academic life and historical services. Emory Upton and Alfred Thayer Mahan to (fill in the blank)

Happily, military service is not a requirement for entry into the military history community. The World War II generation saw military service and was "touched with fire," but it didn't turn them into professional soldiers, e.g. James MacGregor Burns, Lou Morton, Avery Craven, Martin Blumenson, and E.B. Potter. Thucydides was a general, but Forrest Pogue was a Master Sergeant.

My most successful former students in academic life -- measured by tenure and rank held and books written -- have not one day of military service between them. Good company: Ted Ropp and Russ Weigley.

Unlike other academic-historical specializations, there is a military history community, a tradition of cooperation and collaboration that may be rooted in the varied exposure to war and military institutions, e.g. a brotherhood of veterans. The heritage of the World War II generation: the mission is the message, not the egos of the historians. It is more likely that it is rooted in the realization that military historians would never be a welcome part of the military establishment (they had a way of challenging the surety of senior officers and the enthusiasms of the technological determinists), nor would they ever be regarded as "mainstream" by their academic

colleagues. Like the archetypical World War II infantry squad, they had only themselves.

The tradition of assistance should start with the dissertation committee and “significant others.” The Archives: Mrs. Sara Jackson and co-explorers (John Gates, Graham Cosmas, and Tim Nenninger). The Second book: Tom Greiss, Don Smythe, Mac Coffman, Forrest Pogue, and (later) Bob Ferrell and David Trask. *Semper Fidelis*: Ed Simmons, Bud Shaw, Ben Frank. I don’t want to turn this talk into an extended “Acknowledgments,” but only to illustrate my own experience as representative of many others.

The late Coach Woody Hayes, still Ohio State’s most-renowned military historian, used to say that one could never adequately payback those who had helped, but one could always pay forward by helping others. One expects advisors to help graduate students, but the spirit of community in military history extends in true meritocratic fashion to the entire community, even the international community.

Robin Higham has been an exemplar of the helping scholar.

I hope that our intellectual communalism will survive the pressures of the internet and WWW as well as the more traditional competitive elements of intellectual life.

## CONCLUSION

The study of military history is alive and well in North America, even if the academic job market appears anemic -- as it has always been except for a period of about six years in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Public taste for military history seems to be a continuing addiction; the intellectual and documentary battlefield is well-prepared; and the Band of Brothers (and a few Sisters) lives.

As I write this, I am watching “Henry V,” Version II, so I am tempted to wax rhapsodic about “we few, we happy few...who shall dispose the day,” but my theatrical skills do not rival Kenneth Branagh’s. Instead I’ll close by simply challenging our latest generation of knights-aspirant to join our ranks and give us new examples of imagination, industry, and courage.