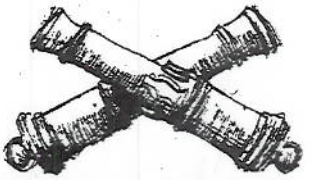
Chapter 2

A Perspective on Military History



Col. Thomas E. Griess

NOT infrequently critics charge that history is of marginal value because it has little relevance to the present. They argue that the living present, not the dead past, is important and demands attention. This claim is usually based upon a dangerously narrow and unbalanced view of the present and ignores the everyday use people make of the past. We cannot escape history because the present is an extension of historical events that in some instances are still running their course. Most current problems originated in the past, and the forces working upon contemporary society are better understood by knowing something of the historical roots of those forces. People cannot avoid making judgments or taking sides on controversial issues indefinitely; neither bland, uninformed compromise nor allegedly sophisticated skepticism are suitable substitutes for a knowledge of the past which will assist them in criticizing and reevaluating their assumptions and judgments. Convictions, values, and standards accumulate over time; one generation modifies those passed on by a previous generation, but it also builds upon the earlier standards and passes on to the next generation a changed but still historically growing body of conclusions. Not a few presidents have placed high value on reading and knowing history, and the shelves in bookstores and libraries continue to grow with new works on all types of history. The public demand, at least, does not seem to sustain the pessimistic claim about irrelevance.

Like the general discipline, military history also has its critics and its advocates, as well as a substantial appeal to both civilian and military audiences. The fraternity of scholars has traditionally shown some skepticism toward military history, despite rejoinders from distinguished advocates. That attitude has stemmed from at least two causes. First, hating the futility of

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war, historians have dwelt largely on cause and effect and have shown minimal concern for how war has historically become institutionalized. Second, they have rebelled against the utilitarian aspects of operational military history. Until very recently in America, these two considerations have influenced most writers of general history against incorporating, or at least recognizing, military history as an important element in the broader narratives. Charles Francis Adams recognized this feeling when he advocated higher esteem for military history at the 1899 meeting of the American Historical Association and urged general historians to encourage the writing of factual military history and to rely upon, even incorporate, it in their works.

Indeed, the aggressive, combative nature of man and the historical resort to force by nations has made the study of war inevitable. Sir Charles Oman argued that "one may dislike war just as one dislikes disease; but to decry the necessity for studying it . . . is no less absurd than it would be to minimize the need for medical investigation because one disliked cancer or tuberculosis." Similarly, Cyril Falls later took up the cudgel for studying military history as opposed to studying primarily the laborer, the peasant, or the ruler:[1]

> What I want to urge is that all men, common and uncommon, great and small . . . have been profoundly and unceasingly influenced by war. Our literature, our art and our architecture are stamped with the vestiges of war. Our very language has a thousand bellicose words and phrases woven into its fabric. And our material destinies, our social life and habits, our industry and trade, have assumed their present forms and characteristics largely as the result of war. . . . We are, all of us, indeed, the heirs of many wars.

Thus it has been throughout most of history. Men, sometimes participants, have always written about war in one form or another. The thoughtful professional soldier is well advised to consider what military history encompasses, to appreciate how it properly must remain part of the overall discipline of history, and to understand how study of the subject can be personally meaningful. Frank Craven made the point clearly in 1959:

> Let it be admitted that the modern technological revolution has confronted us with military problems of unprecedented complexity, problems made all the more difficult because of the social and political turbulence of the age in which we live. But precisely because of these

1. Sir Charles Oman, *Studies in the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Meuthen, 1930), p. 24. Cyril Falls, *The Place of War in History* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 7.

revolutionary developments, let me suggest that you had better study military history, indeed all history, as no generation of military men have studied it before.[2]

The Scope of Military History

Not until the early 1800s did military history become a special field apart from general history. Jomini, the nineteenth century Swiss theorist, recognized three kinds of military history. The first he categorized as the pure version—the recounting in minute and pedantic terms of all aspects of a given battle, including such details as hourly locations of small units. This recounting was done without much concern for useful analysis. The second form, he said, used a campaign or battle to examine the principles of waging war; it analyzed the relationship between events and principles, and, applied in broad context, could reveal something of the evolution of the art of war. Jomini's third category was political-military history—the examination of war in its broadest spectrum through association of military with political, social, and economic factors.

While Jomini was thinking and writing essentially about military strategy, the great Prussian military thinker, Karl von Clausewitz, was studying the entire problem of war. Seeking to develop a theory of war, Clausewitz considered and wrote (*On War*) about the basic aspects of conflict between nations. In so doing, he was producing military history which can properly be classified under Jomini's third category. At the same time, he devoted considerable coverage to an examination of principles and generalship through the device of rigorous analysis and criticism. (See Chapter 4.)

Although the study of military history in terms of Jomini's second category (analysis of principles) can benefit the soldier, this approach also has its shortcomings, particularly in more modern times. In the first place, considered from the larger view of war as organized international violence, such analysis is most meaningful if the contest on the battlefield is decisive and overriding in the conflict. For a time in history this was often the case. But once industrialization and war were linked, the battlefield leader found it difficult to bring about the overwhelmingly decisive engagement.[3] Second, this analytically

2. W. Frank Craven, *Why Military History?* Harmon Memorial Lecture no. 1 (USAFA, Colorado, 1959), p. 11.

3. Michael Howard, "The Demand for Military History," *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 Nov. 1969, p. 1294.

operational view of military history slights the important institutional developments that take place within an army and the important roles they play during times of peace or prolonged periods of international tension.

Probably for this second reason, about the turn of the twentieth century a few individuals in some European countries expressed interest in a broader view of military history. In a laborious dialectical examination of the term in a 1914 lecture at Cambridge, Sir John W. Fortescue finally concluded that military history "is the history of the external police of communities and nations."[4] Across the North Sea in Germany, Hans Delbrück was questioning the approach of the General Staff which prized and exploited military history as operational history, useful for its examinations of principles and strategy. Delbrück was interested in operations, but his interest was more in general ideas and tendencies than in minute detail or practical principles. He wanted his history of the art of war to analyze the subject within the broader framework of political history. In France during this period, Jean Jaurès, the prominent socialist political leader and theoretician, was articulating the theory that military endeavors could be successful only when military institution's accurately reflected the composition and aspirations of the entire nation.

After World War I, the Russian military theorist, M. V. Frunze, following Marx and Lenin in their acceptance of Clausewitz's dictum that war was an extension of politics, reflected on his nation's experiences and accepted Jaurès's theories as the foundation of a much broader definition of military history. Frunze noted that the actions of persons actually under arms could not be understood without considering the entire social context within which those actions took place. In a number of writings, Lenin denied the purely military character of the First World War, stating in one instance that "appearance is not reality. The more dominated by military factors a war may seem to be, the more political is its actual nature, and this applies equally in reverse."[5] While Stalin attempted to refute Clausewitz in the anti-German atmosphere in the Soviet Union at the end of World War II, he did so only to the extent of abandoning the outdated technical aspects of Clausewitz's theses. To this day, the theory of the interrelationship of military activity and national activity is woven into the fabric of the Soviet approach to military history.

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4. J. W. Fortescue, *Military History* (Cambridge, 1914), p. 9.

5. V. I. Lenin, quoted in Werner Hahlweg, "Clausewitz, Lenin, and Communist Military Attitudes Today," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 105 (1960):224.

Until World War II most U.S. Army officers thought of military history as being the systematic analysis of how the military forces of a country waged war. As late as the 1940s, for example, Matthew Steele's *American Campaigns*, written expressly for the purpose of analyzing campaigns and battles, was used in Army schools. And in 1937 a Fort Benning reference text termed military history "the professional analysis of events and operations" and envisioned it as being the "laboratory phase of military science." In short, the Infantry School considered military history of most value when it was used to provide historical documentation to support military doctrine. This application of military history bore a striking similarity to ideas advanced in England a decade earlier by J.F.C. Fuller in a seminal work that advocated developing a science of war in order to understand and apply better the art of war.[6]

By the turn of the century, nonetheless, some slight interest in turning military history to broader themes of national policy and strategy had developed in America. This current, somewhat akin to the work of Clausewitz, was characterized by Walter Millis as "the literature of popular education for publics and politicians in strategy, in military policy and in the theory of war."[7] It is best exemplified by Emory Upton's *The Military Policy of the United States Since 1775* (1904) and Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power on History, 1660-1773* (1890). Both authors used military history in an attempt to influence national military policy; at the same time, in other works, both men also wrote military history of the technical variety in an attempt to analyze principles or professional institutions.

Following World War II and the Korean War, a note of despondency concerning the relevance of military history began to be heard. This discouragement, largely voiced by civilian critics, was rooted in the belief that military history, though broadened somewhat, was still too technical and utilitarian in purpose and that if it was to be of more than antiquarian interest it had to become a broad study of war itself. J.F.C. Fuller, the outspoken, earlier advocate of considering war and peace as related phenomena in an inevitable cycle, claimed that since war had become policy itself it had to be studied to "regulate human affairs." Walter Millis went further and argued that nuclear

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6. *Military History: Methods of Research*, Infantry School Reference Text no. 25 (Fort Benning, Ga. [1937]), pp. 3-4. J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (London: Hutchison, 1926), pp. 19-24.

7. Walter Millis, *Military History* (Washington: Service Center for Teachers of History, 1961), p. 9. Millis identified three main streams of American military literature historically. The other two were "the literature of recall" and "the literature of technical education for the soldier."

weapons made most of the traditional materials of operational military history inapplicable. Concluding that a nation's use of war as an instrument, now, more then ever, encompassed every aspect of its social, political, and economic order, as well as the purely military factor, he questioned whether a modern commander might not find the study of past generalship actually deleterious. In his view, only if one studied war in its broadest terms—that is, made it less military and more civilian—would the exercise prove useful. Although agreeing that the relationship of war to society was important, Cyril Falls took issue with Millis and perspicaciously observed that "small wars without nuclear weapons have not been avoided and remain a possibility."[8] Falls might have added that from another viewpoint nuclear weapons required formulation of a new doctrine which could only be illuminated, not retarded, by the experience of earlier thinkers who had also grappled with revolutionary weapons. Or, if awesome new weapons now exist, the human being has not changed much and the basic requirements for thoughtful leadership remain and are intensified.

Discussion over the nature of military history has been influenced to some degree by contemporary interpretations of the war in Vietnam. In a thoughtful critique of 1971 on the state of military history, Peter Paret noted that much work was being devoted to civilian rather than military aspects and that too few historians were "interested in war and in military institutions for their own sake."[9] Despite the assumed irrelevance of the subject, the continuing discussion has stimulated an apparently greater interest among civilian scholars in teaching military history in the universities. Paradoxically, the rising civilian interest came at a time when the trend within the Army was toward minimizing military history in its own school system, a trend only partially reversed as a result of an ad hoc committee study in 1971. (See Chapters 17 and 23.) Revived interest has generally involved studying war and its institutions in a broad context, although more meaningful and sophisticated approaches to operational military history are being devised as well. As war has become more industrialized and all-consuming, military historians are broadening their approach to studying and writing about it. The Army's present concept of what comprises military history reflects these shifting tides of opinion.

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8. J. F. C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1954) 1:xi; Fuller, *Decisive Battles of the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper, 1953), p. viii. Millis, *Military History*, pp. 15-18. Cyril Falls, *The Art of War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 5-6.

9. Peter Paret, "The History of War," *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (Spring 1971):381-86.

The Army has officially defined military history as an objective, accurate, descriptive, and interpretive record of all activities of the Armed Forces in peace and war. Expressed another way, military history is concerned with how nations prepare for war, how they wage and terminate wars, how preparing for and fighting wars influences society, and how nations assign and regulate the peacetime functions of armed forces. Because historians and readers alike often refer to types of military history, one might offer the following useful categories:

Operational: combat or military aspects; encompasses logistics, tactics, military strategy and leadership; includes campaign studies and operationally oriented biography.

Administrative and Technical: generally functional and professional activities of armed forces; includes studies of doctrine and organizational structure, procurement and training of manpower, and weapons developments; involves both peacetime and wartime developments.

The Military and Society: in an historical sense, considers the entire spectrum of military affairs throughout the cycle of war and peace; deals with national strategy and encompasses the relationship among the military, social, political, economic, and psychological elements at the national level; deals with institutional problems, solutions, and developments; explores the relationship between civil and military authority.

These categories are not mutually exclusive, and they are conceptual in nature rather than exact definitions. Because they are intentionally broad, a given work on military history usually will deal in some degree with each category, although it may emphasize one.

The Value of Military History

Soldiers have traditionally attached utilitarian value to the study of military history while scholars have been more attracted by the educational value of the subject. It actually contributes in both ways to the development of the professional officer, and the discussion that follows deals with both of them. If sharpened judgment, improved perception, and a broadened perspective are valuable to anyone, they are crucially important to soldiers who may be vitally concerned with problems of national importance and who, throughout their lives, deal with the capabilities and limitations of men and women.

Studying military history can also help compensate for deficiencies in individual experience. Soldiers may serve only two or three years in a combat zone during their professional careers. Somehow, they must prepare themselves for waging war without the benefit of much practice. It is almost as if a doctor faced a crucial operation after nothing but medical school observation and practice on animals. Although what one learns from military history will not displace what one has already learned from experience, it will illuminate what is important in that experience. Careful and critical reading of military history permits analyses of operations conducted under varying conditions and broadens and deepens understanding. Moreover, as one continues reading over a period of years, he or she will develop a critical faculty in assimilating material and integrating it with experience. Ultimately, the soldier will sift out those ideas, conceptions, or principles that have gradually come to be most valuable in a personal sense. It is not an exaggeration to claim that individuals who know what was attempted in the past, the conditions under which it was attempted, and what results followed, are less likely to grope haltingly when faced with their own immediate problems. As Ardant du Picq concluded from his studies of battlefield conduct, "whoever has seen, turns to a method based on his own knowledge, his personal experience as a soldier. But experience is long and life is short. The experiences of each cannot therefore be completed except by those of others."[10]

Military history offers soldiers an opportunity to improve their professional qualifications. Indeed, in a world growing ever more complex and in a society which increasingly questions old methods and values, soldiers must study their profession continuously if they expect to meet the challenges which the unlimited liability clause in battle may pose at any time. No one field of study will guarantee success on the battlefield, but lacking actual experience in combat the thoughtful soldier will do well to turn to the study of past wars. And even combat experience unaccompanied by professional study and reflection may not stimulate professional growth. (Frederick the Great characterized some men as having little more imagination than the mule which campaigned with Prince Eugene in the eighteenth century.) Among 4,000 Army officers of all grades surveyed in 1971, two out of three indicated that the study of military history had been professionally beneficial. According to these officers,

10. Ardant du Picq, *Battle Studies*, trans. John N. Greely and Robert C. Cotton (Harrisburg: Military Service Publishing Company, 1947), p. 8.

whose appreciation increased with military rank, the principal benefits are insight gained from studying problems which illuminate contemporary difficulties and perception gained from studying military success and failure.[11]

A caveat is necessary, however. History provides no clear cut lessons for the reader. Situations in history may resemble contemporary ones, but they are never exactly alike, and it is a foolish person who tries blindly to apply a purely historical solution to a contemporary problem. Wars resemble each other more than they resemble other human activities, but similarities between wars can be exaggerated. As Michael Howard warned,

> the differences brought about between one war and another by social or technological changes are immense, and an unintelligent study of military history which does not take adequate account of these changes may quite easily be more dangerous than no study at all. Like the statesman, the soldier has to steer between the dangers of repeating the errors of the past because he is ignorant that they have been made, and of remaining bound by theories deduced from past history although changes in conditions have rendered these theories obsolete.[12]

Carefully grounded in military history, the soldier can nevertheless develop useful theories, ideas, and interpretations about the practice of the military profession. This is the immensely stimulating and educational role of the critic, a role in which one explores and tests alternative solutions to a given problem. The person who attempts this exercise will need to know military history well since it will form the base of the criticism, whether the problem is strategic, tactical, logistical, or social. A knowledge of philosophy, political science, and sociology will also be useful to complement the historical base. And our critic will still need much patience, analytical skill, honesty, and objectivity. Such qualifications, exploited by individual brilliance and dedication, produced a Clausewitz. And this type of critical inquiry led Liddell Hart to discover and advocate his "indirect approach." Here we have an example of how military history studied in depth and involving careful research can provide the basis of a doctrinal idea. After considerable study, Liddell Hart wrote *Strategy*, which was a form of special pleading for the theory of the indirect approach,

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11. Ad Hoc Committee, Department of the Army, "Report on the Army Need for the Study of Military History" (West Point, N.Y., 1971), vol. IV.

12. Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 107 (1962):7.

using selected examples to support that theory which earlier research had assured him was universally valid.[13]

But conceptions based upon historical experience do not necessarily guarantee success in the field. A careful study of history will illustrate that principles are not immutable rules which the commander is forbidden to violate. Nor should a theory be based on historical examples arbitrarily selected to support an unfounded preconception. What is necessary is rigorous testing and honest, thorough research. If an historically based principle is fallible, however, it is infinitely better than pure theory ungrounded on historical experience. The French strategic paralysis in 1940, for example, resulted at least as much from faulty, highly theoretical thinking as from lack of resources.

The study of military history, particularly of the operational variety, can inspire many men and women. Because of the tendency to magnify the obstacles and hardships of warfare, soldiers may adjust more quickly to combat if they know that others have overcome similar or worse conditions. Accuracy of depiction is important, however, for inspiration can turn to disillusion if the history is distorted or propagandist. Overly didactic unit histories may paint war romantically and the deeds of the unit in terms more mythical than realistic. When the young soldier of the unit then first experiences war he may find the shock completely demoralizing. And if military history is exploited too often to stimulate a superficial patriotism, it can produce cynicism among throughtful persons.

Historically, pride of profession has been a necessary and foremost characteristic of the soldier. A wide and critical reading of military history can help the soldier define and appreciate the meaning of professionalism. Personal understanding will be shaped by learning what others have used as yardsticks in the past. Broad study and careful reflection on earlier views will also encourage analysis of the military ethic which can stimulate useful discussion of that ethic with others who may be less well informed. What obligations does professionalism require? How do the demands of war determine the nature of military professionalism? How does one educate oneself for the grave responsibilities of leadership on the battlefield? History can help provide answers to these questions.

Professionalism also nurtures the ability to reach conclusions

13. Support for this interpretation appears in Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964).

by combining recognition of a sense of duty with a scientific commitment to the determination of cause and effect. Studied in depth, military history can contribute to learning this approach to a problem. The scientist works with matter, energy, and natural laws, but the soldier in addition works with the most unpredictable material of all—human beings. The leader's mental attitude, or professional frame of mind, must accordingly be both tough and compassionate. Studying military history can help one gauge human capabilities and limitations while offering guidelines on how to make the best use of both. It may also help some soldiers learn how to lead faltering human beings to accomplishments they believe beyond them. Speaking to British Staff College candidates, Sir Archibald Percival Wavell advised:

> Study the human side of history . . . to learn that Napoleon in 1796 with 20,000 beat combined forces of 30,000 by something called economy of force or operating on interior lines is a mere waste of time. If you can understand how a young unknown man inspired a half starved ragged, rather Bolshie crowd; how he filled their bellies; how he outmarched, outwitted, outbluffed and defeated men who had studied war all their lives and waged it according to the text-books of their time, you will have learnt something worth knowing.[14]

Personal study for the American troop leader must also include an examination of American institutions, society, customs, and general history since they contribute to beliefs and ideals that motivate subordinates. Study of the American military experience can help a leader gain valuable insights: the changing outlook of citizens who enter the Army and their reactions to military service; views of the regular versus those of the conscript; what subordinates expect of their leaders; and human reactions to adversity. Leadership, an important aspect of professionalism, can be profitably studied by reading history with its many examples, good and bad. The leader who knows his own leadership style learns what to emulate and what to avoid. In learning vicariously about people one perceives that the basic elements of human nature do not change even though society and institutions are in a constant state of flux. This perception requires a critical reading of works which may be self-seeking autobiographies or propaganda offered under the guise of history.

There is a good deal of the visceral in military leadership, but the moral side of leadership is particularly important because it is so influenced by a person's character. By studying military

14. Quoted by Major General E. K. G. Sixsmith, "Military History or War Studies?" *The Army Quarterly and Defense Journal* 101 (1971):439.

history one can learn something about strength of character. In all American military annals, there is no better example of contrasting character in battlefield leadership than that of Lee and Hooker at Chancellorsville where the absence of strong leadership doomed a brilliant plan to failure. But leadership involves more than personal resolution or physical courage: It includes a deep and abiding understanding of the traits, weaknesses, and aspirations of subordinates. And it involves personal integrity as well. Beginning with Washington, through Sherman, Lee, Pershing, and beyond, a long, honored list, the student can find a tradition of integrity well worth emulating.

Careful reading of military history can supply a valuable perspective for the critical examination of contemporary problems. Historical perspective leads to a sense of proportion and encourages the long view; it contributes to an awareness that life moves in a channel of continuous change, thus helping to counter excessive optimism or pessimism about current developments. Moreover, it will help one reassess the values used to weigh achievements, methods, and decisions. Shielded from the heat and passion of partisan argument, for example, one can learn something of the wisdom as well as the practical difficulties in our subordination of military forces to civilian direction. Or the thoughtful person may appreciate that the apparent American penchant for absolutes can lead to a tendency to view problems as always susceptible of solution, thereby creating additional problems. Gradually, the student learns that with greater knowledge it is easier to assimilate new material and to associate the new with the old. Judgment grows more discriminatory, and one begins to separate the transitory from the permanent as ideas and concepts are weighed. One becomes aware that discerning differences in the historical flow of events is often more meaningful than establishing similarities through strained analogy.

The sharpening of judgment is part of the total intellectual process to which a study of history contributes. Rather than testing hypotheses in search of predictive models, history deals with cause and effect of individual events. It broadens the soldier's vision and arouses curiosity about specific problems, none of which are exactly like those faced in the past. A careful reading of military history can help develop what Liddell Hart calls "the scientific approach":

> Adaptation to changing conditions is the condition of survival. This depends on the simple yet fundamental question of *attitude*. To cope with the problems of the modern world we need, above all, to see them clearly and analyse them scientifically. This requires freedom from

> prejudice combined with the power of discernment and with a sense of proportion. . . . Discernment may be primarily a gift, and a sense of proportion, too. But their development can be assisted by freedom from prejudice, which largely rests with the individual to achieve—and within his power to achieve it. Or at least to approach it. The way of approach is simple, if not easy—requiring, above all, constant self-criticism and care for precise statement.[15]

One can properly question that it is possible to learn strategy from a textbook in the same manner as one learns an academic skill. But history can help the soldier by revealing qualities that other men have found useful in developing independence of mind and by emphasizing that confusion, lack of information, and friction are normal in war. Although no concrete lessons can be learned from history and then blindly applied, there is an argument for the broad deduction of general principles. Based upon a careful analysis of warfare, for example, J.F.C. Fuller articulated the principles of war now generally accepted as doctrine throughout most of the world. Similarly, students learn some basic rules that usually pay dividends (e.g., be stronger at the decisive point, thorough training often compensates for inferior strength, be aggressive). They also learn that these rules are frequently violated, sometimes knowingly and for specific reasons.

Experience improperly gleaned can make one dogmatic and lead to an attempt to apply lessons too literally. But this vicarious experience is the raw material of imagination and can lead to the development of new ideas. Combined with intelligence and ingenuity, imagination can lead to wisdom, sometimes a wisdom more advanced in years than a soldier's age would indicate. In search of either principles or wisdom, however, one must study military history critically and objectively.

Alfred Vagts complained that military men too often looked backward, ignoring changed circumstances, in order to prepare for the future.[16] And indeed historical examples are rarely, if ever, exact enough to allow unquestioning application to specific contemporary problems. By analyzing trends in tactics, strategy, and weapons, however, soldiers can grasp the evolution of warfare and learn something of the basis for doctrine—or devise a rationale for questioning it.

There is, of course, a danger in blithely applying narrowly based historical experience to the general case in search of

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15. B. H. Liddell Hart, *Why Don't We Learn From History?* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), p. 10.

16. Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 27.

doctrine. Although the historian tries to bring order out of chaos, his use of evidence is necessarily selective. Moreover, war is anything but simple. Weapons change, technology advances, the motivation of human beings to fight varies; the last war may be completely irrelevant to the next one. Yet there are numerous valid examples of the doctrinal application of military history: Studying the ancient art of warfare, Maurice of Nassau devised tactical changes which Gustavus Adolphus brilliantly put to the battlefield test; a War Office committee painstakingly studied the British official history of World War I to confirm or to establish a basis for changing the Field Service Regulations; and, more narrowly, an exhaustive study of the American intelligence failure at Pearl Harbor resulted in a statement of doctrinal principles for command application. Douglas MacArthur understood both the danger and the benefits of this doctrinal application:

> The military student does not seek to learn from history the minutiae of method and technique. In every age these are decisively influenced by the characteristics of weapons currently available and by the means at hand for maneuvering, supplying, and controlling combat forces. But research does bring to light those fundamental principles, and their combinations and applications, which, in the past, have been productive of success. These principles know no limitation of time. Consequently, the Army extends its analytical interest to the dust-buried accounts of wars long past as well as to those still reeking with the scent of battle. It is the object of the search that dictates the field for its pursuit.[17]

As a final comment it is vitally important to reemphasize that the soldier's study of military history must involve more than purely operational accounts. He must also study the institutional aspects of the military and the relationship between civilian and the soldier in peace and war: the development of the American military system within the society which fosters and sometimes berates it, and how military choice in strategy and tactics must conform to American traditions and the constitutional system. And studied in such broad context, military history can tell much about what Sir John Fortescue characterized as the supreme test to which war subjects a nation. The case for the study of military history in its broader milieu was well made by Richard Preston three decades ago:

> War, as is becoming realized in the modern world, is more than a mere clash of arms. The development of armies and of their organization, and the narratives of campaign strategy and of operational tactics, which

17. General Douglas MacArthur, *Report of the Chief of Staff U.S. Army, 1935* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935), p. 32.

> were formerly the military historian's exclusive concern, can be understood only in relation to developments in the world at large, in relation to advances in technology, and in relation to changes in political and economic organization.

In short, as Michael Howard urged, the soldier should study military history in depth to get beneath the historian's necessarily imposed pattern of seeming orderliness and to try to understand what war is really like; in breadth to understand the flow of events and the existence of continuity or discontinuity therein; and in context to appreciate the political, social, and economic factors that exercise important influences on the military part of the equation.[18]

In sum then, the study of military history has both an educational and a utilitarian value. It allows soldiers to look upon war as a whole and relate its activities to the periods of peace from which it rises and to which it inevitably returns. And soldiers who know what was attempted, and what results followed, are better able to deal positively with immediate problems. As their thought process grows more sophisticated, soldiers will attempt, more and more, to analyze critically, conceptualize creatively, and test theories. Military history also helps in developing a professional frame of mind—a mental attitude. In the leadership arena, it shows the great importance of character and integrity. Finally, military history studied in depth helps the soldier to see war, in Clausewitz's time-worn phrase, as a chameleon, a phenomenon that affects and draws its spirit from the society which spawns it.

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18. Richard A. Preston, "The Teaching of Military History in Canada," *Canadian Army Journal* 3 (1948):15. Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," pp. 7-8.

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