

Richard S. Faulkner. *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 327. Appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Review by David Kerby.

In *The School of Hard Knocks*, Richard Faulkner looks at how the U.S. Army and American Expeditionary Forces' (AEF) prepared junior leaders and the effects of this preparation on the AEF's performance in World War I. He argues that the AEF's selection and training of junior leaders failed to prepare these men to lead and resulted in these leaders learning lessons the hard way ("the school of hard knocks") at an immense cost of human life. He further argues that this failure in preparation was due to the U.S. Army's "shortsightedness, institutional uncertainty, and administrative missteps" (p.9). The theme of memory is essential here, as the Army's memory of previous wars profoundly influenced its approaches to leader development. Faulkner's motivations for writing are intensely personal; he served as a U.S. Army officer and commanded a tank company in combat. He is expertly qualified to comment on the nuances of leadership and combat. However, Faulkner notes that he took great pains while writing to distance himself from the AEF, as he recognized it was a wholly different organization than the one with which he served. Through writing this work, Faulkner hopes to provide a new study of the tactical¹ level of the war while also providing observations into World War I's contributions to modern warfare. Faulkner organizes his work into twelve chapters, with the first and last acting as an introduction and conclusion, respectively. Chapters one and twelve are omitted and incorporated into the introduction and conclusion of this review. Chapters two through eight discuss different aspects of the traditions, selection, training, and development process for junior leaders. In chapters nine through eleven, Faulkner shifts to discussing the consequences of these aspects and the hard lessons these leaders learned at the cost of human lives. Faulkner's work draws heavily on primary sources from the Americans, British, French, and Germans. American sources included publications or commercial manuals, policy, memorandums, and writings from both officers and enlisted in the U.S. Army. British and French sources included doctrine and writings from officers who attempted to instruct American troops. German sources included first-hand accounts from units that fought the Americans and provided valuable perspectives and critiques of American battlefield effectiveness. He also includes important secondary sources that detail the psychological side of combat leadership.

In chapter two, Faulkner argues that the U.S. Army's conceptions of leadership development and performance were a paradoxical mix of older traditions and newer ideas of military professionalism that left leaders unprepared for the realities of World War I combat. In the Army, collective memory glorified eighteenth-century cultural ideas that portrayed military leaders as gentlemen, noble, and deferential to authority. This collective memory clashed with newer ideas about the need for professional leaders, specially educated, efficient, and promoted based on merit instead of social status. Consequently, the Army had no uniform doctrine on leadership or the training of leaders. Without an official policy, veterans wrote down their

¹ Tactics refer to how to win a battle. They are associated with small unit actions, usually at the battalion level or below. Faulkner uses tactics when referring to companies, platoons, and squads. It is important to differentiate tactics from operations (how to win a campaign), strategy (how to win the war), and grand strategy (how to win the peace or prevent future wars).

leadership ideas and sold them to officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs).² The Army closely tied ideas surrounding leadership to eighteenth-century ideas of order and obedience. Here, one must imagine the stereotypical Prussian soldier, marching like a robot with a sparkling uniform. This stereotype was still considered the ideal by the U.S. Army, which envisioned battles occurring in neat lines consummating with glorious bayonet charges, despite the lessons of years of counterinsurgency operations in the Philippines. These notions of linear battles drove the Army to continue training leaders much as it had in the previous centuries. The Army placed heavy emphasis on marching, mechanical body movements, and bayonet techniques. The Army instilled instant and unquestioning obedience through repetitive drilling, for this was the time-tested answer to the psychological problem of convincing troops to march across open fields against enemy cannon fire. Of course, the Army would not encounter cannons in 1918 France but rapid-firing artillery and machine guns. Herein lay the paradox. Army leaders recognized that new weapons technology required greater dispersion among troops. This dispersion meant that senior officers could no longer tightly control their troops as in days past. This dispersion also meant that NCOs and lower-ranking officers would have to be trusted to make decisions and think creatively to react to unexpected situations on the battlefield. To train individuals to exercise initiative and think creatively, Army leadership would have had to undermine their long-held ideas surrounding obedience and order, and this they could not do.

In chapter three, Faulkner focuses on the selection and training of officers, and he argues that despite Army success in procuring the needed quantity of officers, the Army ultimately failed to produce officers of the needed quality. The Army completely remade its officer selection and training program into a highly efficient, centralized, and industrial machine. The Army succeeded in creating standardized schooling for officers (in the form of Officer Training Camps or OTCs). They also were able to narrow their selection of officer candidates to high-quality individuals. However, despite these two advancements, other factors prevented the optimization of these high-quality Americans. First, the OTCs failed to provide relevant and practical training to officer candidates. Again, with a collective memory that glorified bayonet charges and neat lines, the OTCs emphasized marching and bayonet training. While OTCs attempted to cultivate thinking and initiative through educational lectures, they failed to implement effective teaching techniques. In this same trend, training lacked realism and left officers unprepared for the conditions they would encounter in France. The training trenches officers dug were straight, and they practiced attacking “enemy” trenches that instructors left

² Non-commissioned officers (NCOs) differ from officers in some important ways. NCOs are enlisted; they sign a contract for a certain period of service. Enlisted ranks are those many are familiar with: privates, corporals, sergeants, staff sergeants, gunnery sergeants, and sergeant majors. NCOs are a specific sub-set of enlisted soldiers who have proved through competence and experience the ability to lead other enlisted. Corporals and sergeants are two examples of NCOs, and they typically filled roles such as the squad leader. In contrast, officers do not sign a contract, but instead take a commission. In lieu of a contract, officers sign on to assist in the mission (commission) of the President of the United States. Officer ranks are also familiar to many: lieutenants, captains, majors, commanders (for the Navy), colonels, and generals. Officers and NCOs historically work together in the leadership of a unit. For example, a lieutenant will command a platoon of 30-45 troops with the assistance of a staff sergeant or gunnery sergeant. Under the lieutenant, sergeants will command one of three or four squads of 10-15 troops. Officers and NCOs all serve in leadership roles, but they fill different responsibilities and bring different experience with them. For example, imagine a factory where the supervisor is young individual who holds a degree in systems engineering or business administration but is new to the factory. Underneath the supervisor is a foreman, an old and experienced floor worker with a high school education. The supervisor fills a similar role to the military officer, and the foreman to the NCO. Both complement each other in the running of the factory.

unprotected by barbed wire. Second, the OTCs continued to instill in officers the belief that the Western Front had stagnated from a lack of aggressiveness on behalf of the allies. Victory would come, the OTCs taught, if Americans would reignite the aggressiveness needed to charge and overrun German defenses. This mindset led to wasteful expenditures in American life. Third, Army leadership was resistant to allowing French or British officers to provide training to Americans, likely due to the previous beliefs about aggressiveness stated above. This resistance prevented American officers from learning many of the tactical lessons the Allies had learned over the previous years. Fourth, and counter to the previous shortfall, OTCs copied and attempted to implement tactical doctrine and manuals developed by the French from the lessons they had learned. However, the OTCs and the officers they trained failed to correctly implement these doctrines because of their attachment to outmoded tactics centered on tight formations and marching. Fifth, the OTCs lacked qualified instructors, which compounded the previous issues. Sixth, the OTCs lacked all of the necessary equipment to provide adequate training. The Army sent the bulk of its available equipment to France, where it was needed most. OTCs had to make do with what they had. Faulkner notes that because the OTCs trained officers, all of these shortfalls multiplied as these officers trained their soldiers in the U.S. or France.

In chapter four, Faulkner discusses the changes in OTCs in 1918, and he argues that they “continued to demonstrate the ad hoc and stopgap nature of the American mobilization for the war” (p.98). Despite minor changes to improve the training, the OTCs continued to produce officers of sub-standard capability due to a growing increase in demand and decreasing supply of time, instructors, and equipment. Furthermore, these officers continued to lack the technical and tactical competency required for modern warfare, about which they had learned unrealistic ideas. The first change the OTCs instituted was a decision to allow enlisted men into the courses and commission them as officers. While this grew the pool of qualified candidates from which OTCs could pull, it resulted in the depletion of high-quality NCOs from Army units about to deploy to the Western Front. Additionally, other candidates who were used to the traditional system met the decision to allow enlisted men into the OTCs with resistance. The traditional view of enlisted men as simple-minded hindered the acceptance of many of these men. Second, OTCs extended the camps to add more time for training. However, instructors filled this time with “administrative” tasks like paperwork and cafeteria management or more obsolete tactics like drill. Third, the OTCs also attempted to improve their training’s realism, but the outdated *Infantry Drill Regulations* continued to function as the foundation for training. The continued shortfalls in instructors and equipment further hindered these improvements. With the number of OTCs growing, many instructors were recent graduates themselves and lacked any useful experience. Faulkner points out that many Army officers and even students themselves realized and criticized these shortfalls, but their criticisms did not result in any notable changes.

Chapter five details these new officers’ mobilization and argues that the rapid and disorganized nature of mobilization prevented many officers from receiving the necessary “on-the-job” training after graduating from OTCs. The primary problem stemmed from the inability to build the cohesion of a unit. With such little time together before their first battles, officers could not get to know their soldiers and the fellow officers they worked with, a critical requirement for combat effectiveness. A consequence of this inadequate training was the continuation of the outdated belief held by senior commanders that junior officers were incapable of making decisions independently. This belief justified the continuation of centralized command and hyper-obedient junior leaders, two qualities that were not suited for modern war. Faulkner also addresses the selection and training of NCOs to serve under these

officers. He notes that, due to shortages of experienced men, officers chose NCOs based on simple seniority (who had been there the longest, even if only by a day). This meant that many NCOs did not possess the requisite knowledge and experience traditionally relied upon to counter new officers' inexperience.

In chapter six, Faulkner argues that the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) failed to implement a quality training plan for units once they joined the AEF in Europe. Faulkner explains how continued failures to refine Army doctrine, hasty or unrealistic training, and poor manpower management led to this failure. From the beginning of American involvement in the fall of 1917, General John J. Pershing, the AEF commander, instituted a standardized training plan for all units arriving in Europe with the AEF. His goal was to correct any shortcomings or variations in training that troops received in the United States. Unfortunately, AEF leadership based this training plan on faulty assumptions that hindered training in the United States. The training kept marching and bayonet techniques as its foundation and focused on instilling "automatonlike" discipline (p.144). Additionally, a lack of experienced instructors and an uptick in German attacks prevented all units from receiving the same training. As with units in the United States, AEF manpower management resulted in the constant shifting or transfers of junior officers from one unit to another. Much of this was due to the AEF's insistence on staffing its failing training programs, but some were also due to rushed attempts to backfill casualties in frontline units. These shifts in manpower further prevented units from properly conducting training and developing unit cohesion.

Chapter seven discusses the AEF's strict systems for getting rid of incompetent officers, and Faulkner argues that this system hurt the AEF by suppressing initiative and instilling a culture of fear among officers. General Pershing recognized that many new officers had not received proper training or lacked the needed leadership qualities for their office. Pershing instituted various methods to evaluate officers' ability and investigate officers after failed operations. However, these approaches undermined the very type of leadership the U.S. Army needed on a modern battlefield. The constant fear of higher commanders and a zero-risk environment drove many officers to micromanage those below them, a task almost impossible in the chaos of artillery, machine guns, and gas. Furthermore, these same officers were fearful of acting on initiative and instead stuck to orders precisely as their superiors worded them, even if the orders were not appropriate for the current situation.

In chapter eight, Faulkner shows how poorly trained officers failed to build the necessary relationships between themselves and their men. Officers found it hard to balance different leadership approaches. Faulkner explains four ways in which leaders achieved respect and willing obedience from their troops. Rewards and punishment were one way to *coerce* subordinates. Cultural norms and military law gave officers a form of *legitimate* authority over their subordinates. Treating subordinates with respect and caring for their welfare was another way officers could gain their subordinates' *reverence* and affection. Officers who were proficient in the art and science of war gained their subordinates' respect as *experts*. Officers needed to balance coercion, legitimacy, reverence (or referent power), and expertise to lead their units effectively. However, some officers punished too harshly or failed to care for their men's welfare, or showed themselves incompetent. Potentially worst of all were the officers who clung to traditional ideas of officers as nobility and of a higher class than enlisted men. For American troops, this mentality clashed with their egalitarian principles and invited resistance to these officers. Furthermore, Faulkner observes that the Army's continued insistence on outdated ideas

centered on absolute discipline and obedience hindered officers who did try to build relationships with their enlisted and treat them in such a way as to build rapport.

Chapter nine shows how new technologies and other factors in World War I combined to create a more dangerous battlefield than ever before. This chapter takes a break from the previous ones that focused on leader development to provide context for chapter ten, which will discuss the learning process leaders when faced with this dangerous battlefield. Without prior exposure to the nuances of tactical and technological developments at the Twentieth Century's turn, Faulkner's chapter could easily overwhelm a casual reader. The first factor was the inherent chaos of a World War I battlefield. Unlike earlier wars where leaders could impose a degree of order through tight formations, machine guns and artillery prevented the same approaches on the Western Front. Additionally, the constant transfers among leaders and men contributed to this chaos, as discussed in previous paragraphs. Artillery technology was another factor. While rapid-firing and increasingly accurate artillery became prevalent throughout the war, range and communications limitations prevented this artillery from supporting the infantry during their last dash towards enemy trenches. Communication technology was the third factor, as it was not portable and often left units unable to coordinate with each other or request assistance when they encountered unexpected situations. A fourth factor was the inability of units to master "fire and maneuver" with the weapons technology they possessed.³ After crossing the open terrain separating the American troops from German trenches, the Americans were too close to the Germans to be safely supported with artillery and machine-gun fire back across the land they had just crossed. At the same time, American troops still had roughly 100 yards⁴ to cross before they reached German positions. This charge across the last 100 yards was the most chaotic portion, and American leaders never completely solved how to protect the troops during this last dash.

Chapter ten argues that due to the previously identified shortfalls in leadership training and the realities of a World War I battlefield, American leaders had to learn how to lead and fight in the "school of hard knocks," where they learned lessons through immense casualties after every mistake. As previously discussed, American officers' tactical training relied on outdated ideas centered around drill, the bayonet, and strict discipline. Training in marching left officers unprepared to maneuver their units intelligently against accurate artillery and machine-gun fire. Bayonet training left officers obsessed with the idea of a glorious bayonet charge over those last 100 yards and left them unable to combine fire with maneuver effectively. Strict discipline hindered initiative and left officers unable to adapt when faced with new situations. Officers were more likely to sit in one place and let artillery destroy their unit than risk

³ Fire and maneuver refers to the use of various weapons (artillery and machine guns) to prevent an enemy from affecting the movement (maneuver) of an attacking unit. This is known as suppression, and when combined with skilled maneuver, it results in the enemy being caught in a dilemma. If the enemy raises their head above ground to fire at attacking troops, they will be killed by machine gun fire. If the enemy stays in their trenches, they will be killed by artillery fire. If the enemy runs, they will be killed by the attacking infantry or more artillery and machine gun fire. The desired effect is an enemy that cannot act while friendly troops can act without being cut down by enemy fire. Of course, this is an over-simplified description, but it suffices for this context.

⁴ Why 100 yards? This is a rough average, but it represents the error probability for artillery fire. Because artillery shells could "fall short" by about 100 yards, it was not safe to fire on the enemy trenches when American troops were within 100 yards of those same enemy trenches.

disobeying an order that no longer made sense. When officers finally adapted their tactics to these realities, it was often only after losing many troops.

Chapter eleven ties the book together as Faulkner argues that most American casualties were due to flaws in junior leaders. Faulkner begins with depressing accounts of the number of casualties the Americans sustained. He explicitly cites the example of a single company that required complete rebuilding three times between 22 September and 5 November 1918. Faulkner takes the reader through engagements with various units and returns to all the previous observations of shortfalls in AEF officer training and manning, relating them to the American casualties. Specifically, Faulkner points out the self-perpetuating cycle of casualties among inexperienced officers. Young officers followed outdated tactics that led to high casualties. These officers often became casualties before they could pass on their hard-learned lessons, and even more inexperienced officers replaced them, starting the process all over again.

Faulkner succeeds in demonstrating how the U.S. Army and AEF's outdated ways of thinking, antiquated tactical doctrine, and poor manpower management resulted in poorly trained officers who ultimately learned lessons from the enemy at the cost of countless American lives. His work's organization breaks down the different elements of a leader's development as they worked their way from the OTCs to the Western Front. Faulkner is careful to provide the context in each chapter and contrast the lessons these leaders learned with contemporary and modern combat studies and psychological studies that detailed the faults of those notions and ideas. Finally, Faulkner seals his argument with a devastating portrayal of the brutal World War I battlefields, the costly lessons leaders learned, and the severe toll these lessons had on the American soldiers. Spencer Tucker of the Virginia Military Institute applauds Faulkner's work as a useful and meaningful addition to works on World War I and combat leadership. Tucker further describes how Army leadership drastically improved during World War II but again suffered during the Vietnam War.⁵ Scott Porter, a retired Lieutenant Colonel, notes the importance of Faulkner's book, as much of the "official" history of World War I overlooks these failures in favor of focusing on the importance of America's involvement. Porter adds that while other works in World War I history focus on individual units, Faulkner's book proves that leadership problems were widespread.⁶ Ultimately, *The School of Hard Knocks* joins a diverse historiography of military history. With insights into the mental aspects of combat leadership, Faulkner's work belongs alongside other studies of military psychology and group dynamics. With his focus on U.S. Army officer development, Faulkner's work is equally at home among other combat leadership studies from the Revolutionary War to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Finally, this work's perspective on the short involvement of the United States in World War I merits its inclusion into any World War I history collection.

⁵ Spencer Tucker, review of *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces*, by Richard S. Faulkner, *The Journal of American History* 99, no. 4 (March 2013): 1274.

⁶ Scott Porter, review of *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces*, by Richard S. Faulkner, *Military Review* 93, no. 1 (January and February 2013): 77-78.