

A Long, Hard Look at Military Education

reviewed by Col Michael D. Wylly

THE TRAINING OF OFFICERS: From Military Professional to Irrelevance. By Martin van Creveld. The Free Press, New York, 1990, 134 pp., \$19.95. (Member \$17.95)

In this concise criticism of how the United States selects military officers and educates them, Martin van Creveld correctly identifies the fundamental issues that stand between our Armed Services and a top quality officer corps. He does not seek an unattainable ideal but draws valid comparisons between the U.S. model and those of other countries that work well. Having served on the faculty of the National War College (1986-1987) as well as having written three books on military history, van Creveld is qualified to criticize.

First, regarding selection of officers, he questions why the U.S. Armed Forces choose civilian youths for commissioning programs at the same time that universities select them for college education. He contrasts this practice against the Israelis and the Vietnamese who choose their candidates for commissioning from their best enlisted rank and file. What is the correlation between eligibility for college and leading in combat? While van Creveld agrees that the young person who will join the commissioned ranks should be highly educatable, it does not follow that having an education in, say, business administration tells us anything about an aptitude for command in war. The Israelis and Vietnamese focus on success as a soldier first. The selected candidate will still have to prove his intellectual ability. And, if he is fortunate, he may have an opportunity to obtain a college degree. But the degree is not of prime importance. Why, van Creveld asks, are most American candidates for commissioning "designated as such even before they are taken into the force?" He contrasts U.S. entrants in commissioning programs, mostly "boys and girls just out of high school who select themselves on the basis of personal ambitions, family pressures, and the like" against the "self-confident young soldiers" of Israel and Vietnam.

U.S. military educational practices,

correctly and realistically evaluated by van Creveld, leave the reader wondering why we do what we do, but these practices leave little doubt as to why quality suffers.

The lack of a meaningful grading system lends itself to the atmosphere of a gentleman's club at the war college and staff college levels where a great deal of socializing but relatively little learning takes place. However, during working hours there is a deceiving appearance that something meaningful is happening as students tend to be in class all day, five days a week, "attending lectures, seminars, workshops, and exercises far more time than at any civilian postgraduate school, far more than is advisable if the goal is in-depth study." Van Creveld is correct that given a workday of this duration, little actual education can be taking place. Research time is sorely lacking, and the student comes home from a full day of classes as burned out as he would be after an intense day in an office—often burned out as much from boredom and long hours as from work. This simply is not the kind of atmosphere in which collegiate or graduate-level education can take place. While whole days of continuous classes may sometimes be the norm in high school, higher levels of education are dependent on student initiative and self-study.

Another curiosity of U.S. military education, accurately described by van Creveld and well known to anyone who has served on the faculty of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, for instance, is the propensity of the institution to dictate to the teacher what texts he must use and even the methodology of his teaching. In fact, he is not allowed to design his own course. If we so mistrust the officers we assign to our faculties one may well wonder why we hire them. And, furthermore, according to van Creveld, officers are commonly called upon to teach subject matter with which they are relatively unfamiliar or, for that matter, have neither special qualification nor desire to teach. This, according to van Creveld, is at odds with the way civilian institutions of higher learning are run. Faculty should teach the subject in which they have a background of experience and knowledge

and, in fact, a desire to teach. This may seem a statement of the obvious, but it is not what is occurring in the typical U.S. war college or staff college.

Another criticism has to do with who is admitted to the schools. Selections for U.S. Armed Forces schools have been made by the personnel systems of the various Services for so long that this is accepted as the only way. Yet, any respected civilian educational institution sets its own standards for admission. Van Creveld believes that this ought to apply also to military professional schools. He has a point. Once again, it becomes a matter of trust. If the educational institution is competent to teach, it is competent to know what needs to be taught. And if it is competent to know what to teach, it, more than any outside agency, would know how well equipped its students need to be when they arrive. In order to determine whether or not its candidates for admission have the necessary equipment, again, no one is better qualified to make this determination than the educational institution itself. The vehicles used to determine these qualifications are called entrance exams. Why, after all, shouldn't

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our staff colleges use them?

Van Creveld compares and contrasts U.S. professional military education with that of Britain, France, Germany, and the Soviet Union. He is not particularly complimentary toward all of them. About Britain's Staff College at Camberlay, described as a place where "the atmosphere is pleasant and the food very good," he says, "Here officers who are also 'good sports' spend a not too strenuous two years playing games, thinking about war, all the while consuming large quantities of alcohol and socializing among themselves." At least he concedes that our British allies think about war, which is more than he credits us. Of the French and Soviet schools he is more respectful, characterizing them as concentrating on "theoretical science."

His evaluation of German professional military education is unique, being at the same time complimentary and condemning. He attributes its merits to the traditional strong emphasis on education (or *Bildung*) in German society, the result of "the German middle classes more than their counterparts in other countries [having been] long excluded from political power." As his final "verdict" on the "old Kriegsakademie" he submits:

As a school for staff officers and experts on the operational art of war, it was unrivaled in its time and has probably remained so to the present day. However, it did not do enough to

prepare men for the exercise of command at those elevated levels where military, political, economic, and social affairs merge and become one. This shortcoming in turn was due partly to the way in which the German army and German society defined war and partly to the fact that the prestige of officers was so high that they could scarcely be bothered to master any topics outside their own profession. In the end, this was deliberately exploited by Hitler. Viewed in this way, the *Kriegsakademie* must be held coresponsible for the German army's success, but also for its eventual failure.

He goes on to generally praise today's German military education and then to give credit to a strength recognized in the United States to the exclusion of all others: that is, that we have realized "the importance of nonmilitary problems in the conduct of modern war." It was the Army War College and the Army Industrial College that first "paid attention to questions of economic and industrial mobilization, acquiring some expertise in these fields and laying the foundations for cooperation with civilian agencies. In this respect they were matched only by the Soviet General Staff Academy—and even the Soviets did not have an equivalent of the Army Industrial College." This, of course, is the father of our present Industrial College of the Armed Forces. But, this does not mean our schools' course content is good; in the subject of warfare, it has

been historically wanting. Instead of education in tactics and operational art, we still get formulaistic pedantry based on an outmoded style of warfare.

Though Americans have shown some flashes of brilliance in some areas of education, by and large, our pedagogical methodology has held us back, especially since World War II. The vast mobilization of World War II left us with some very bad habits. We run our schools like factories. Schools are not factories, and so long as they are run that way, education will not take place. Fortunately, we have a few friends in government and elsewhere in the civilian world, as well as a few good Marines, trying very hard to change things. Much is at stake. There is much to be done. If we are ever to be serious about education, we should read van Creveld's book and study its lessons. The road ahead to meaningful professional education in our military is long and arduous. Those who are prone to resist change resist educational change most of all. Once people are educated, after all, they threaten the old order. For this reason, the more senior the rank the more resistance to change. Thus, the road to change is virtually a minefield of bureaucratic impediments.

USMC

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The Corps in Korea

reviewed by Col Wendell N. Vest, USMC(Ret)

AMERICA'S TENTH LEGION: X Corps in Korea 1950. By Shelby L. Stanton. Presidio Press, Novato, CA, 1989, 342 pp., \$24.95. (Member \$22.45)

ESCAPING THE TRAP: The U.S. Army X Corps in Northeast Korea, 1950. By LtCol Roy E. Appleman, AUS(Ret). Texas A&M University Press, 1990, 411 pp., \$35.00. (Member \$31.50)

Most students of the Korean War are well aware, and all U.S. Marines know by heart, that the 1st Marine Division fought two historic battles in the first six months of that war. The

first was the amphibious assault at Inchon and the seizure of the Korean capital, Seoul. This operation, well to the rear of the invading North Korea Peoples Army (NKPA), changed the nature of the war. The second was the epic battle against three Chinese armies in northeast Korea. The 1st Marine Division's "attack in another direction" from the Chosin Reservoir to the sea remains to this day one of the most difficult and heroic actions ever fought by U.S. Marines.

America's Tenth Legion and *Escaping the Trap* remind us that the 1st Marine Division was part of X Corps and that Marines, after conducting the assault landing at Inchon, were joined by other forces in the battle for Seoul.

These books also remind us that the 1st Marine Division was not the only force in northeast Korea when the Chinese attacked, i.e., that U.S. Army and Republic of Korea (ROK) Army forces were also involved in that battle. This in no way diminishes the role of the 1st Marine Division; in fact, both of these books are full of praise for the fighting qualities of the Marines involved.

X Corps was what today would be called a joint task force. In 1950 that terminology, and the appropriate doctrine accompanying it, was used only in amphibious operations. Throughout the Korean War the 1st Marine Division operated under U.S. Army command, and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) operated under the U.S. Air Force's Fifth Air Force. For the assault on Inchon and the battle for Seoul, X Corps consisted of the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry