

# FORUM & FEATURES



## Professional Reading Program

CAPTAIN HAROLD E. RAUGH, JR.

Our best professional soldiers have long recognized that the diligent study of military history is essential to their success. According to Antoine Jomini, Swiss general, historian, and author of *The Art of War*, "Military history, accompanied by sound criticism, is indeed the true school of war."

Why study military history and spend precious time poring over yellow-paged tomes crammed with the exploits of long-dead warriors? Quite simply, because we can learn from history. In the words of Captain Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart, history "provides us with the opportunity to profit by the stumbles and tumbles of our forerunners."

Even though the tactics, techniques, and weapons of warfare have changed and become increasingly lethal with the progression of civilization, the human element of leadership and military history remain constant. Brigadier (later Field-Marshal the Earl) Archibald P. Wavell of the British Army, a highly successful commander and proconsul and a keen observer and chronicler of military history, emphasized studying the individual soldier. He wrote:

*I do advise you to study the human side of military history, which is not a matter of cold-blooded formulas or diagrams, or*

*nursery-book principles such as be good and you will be happy; be mobile and you will be victorious; interior lines at night are a general's delight; exterior lines in the morning are the general's warning, and so on.*

*To learn that Napoleon in 1796 with 20,000 men 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 out-marched, outwitted, out-bluffed and defeated men who had studied war all their lives and waged it according to the textbooks of the time, you will have learnt something worth knowing.*

### GUIDANCE

More recently, the Chief of Staff of the Army has charged "all soldiers, from private to general, who are serious about the profession of arms and making our Army one of excellence," with reading and studying military history. It is therefore the duty and responsibility of all leaders, especially at the Infantry brigade, battalion, and company levels,

to translate this guidance into meaningful, effective, and productive military history study programs.

Toward that end, Company B, 5th Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, a COHORT battalion of the 7th Infantry Division (Light), has developed a professional military history reading and writing program that has the potential to be extremely effective in improving the knowledge and the leadership abilities of all its officers.

The personnel stability in a COHORT unit is especially conducive to the long-term study of military history, with virtually no repetition in the program. For example, in Company B, all four lieutenants (the executive officer and the three rifle platoon leaders) are all second lieutenants with dates of rank within one month of each other; all arrived in the unit within a three-month period; and they all have about the same level of knowledge and experience. Other types of units, however, can easily adapt the program to suit their own needs.

The company's professional military history reading and writing program was conceived and developed during the three-month chain-of-command training period before its soldiers arrived and the unit was formally activated.

Informal sessions were conducted in which anniversaries of famous unit battles, stories of regimental Medal of Honor winners, and other vignettes of unit heritage were used to explain the value of military history to the unit's officers. To further stimulate and enrich their intellectual interest, the program called for all of Company B's officers to read and discuss two chapters from *A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History*, published by the Army's Center of Military History (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979). The two chapters were Chapter 2, "A Perspective on Military History," by Colonel Thomas E. Griess, and Chapter 3, "An Approach to the Study of Military History," by Lieutenant Colonel John F. Votaw. (This illuminating book, which is issued to all lieutenants in the Infantry Officer Basic Course at Fort Benning, served as the foundation for the unit's military history study program and its jumping-off point.)

## HUMAN FACTORS

The first year of the company's military history reading program, in which the company's officers are now engaged, concentrates on studying the human factor in the Army, small unit tactics, and battlefield leadership, and provides a historical and philosophical "perspective on infantry." (See accompanying chart.)

After reading and studying the first year's books, each officer prepares a short, handwritten synopsis of a specific chapter or incident in each book, then discusses that item in an informal symposium. This gives each officer a chance to express himself both orally and in writing, and the company commander an opportunity to assess each lieutenant's ability to communicate effectively. Then the commander can recommend remedial programs where they seem to be needed.

In addition to reading professionally enriching books during the first year, each of the unit's officers is expected to hone his reading and writing skills by compiling a research paper on a historical topic of individual interest in one of the following areas:

## ASSIGNED READINGS

### FIRST YEAR

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Jul-Aug 1985 | Malone, Colonel Dandridge M., USA (Ret.). <i>Small Unit Leadership</i> . Novato, CA: Presidio, 1983.               |
| Sep-Oct 1985 | Rommel, Field Marshal Erwin. <i>Attacks</i> . Vienna, VA: Athena, 1979.  |
| Nov-Dec 1985 | English, John A. <i>A Perspective on Infantry</i> . New York: Praeger, 1981.                                       |
| Jan-Feb 1986 | Blumenson, Martin, and James L. Stokesbury. <i>Masters of the Art of Command</i> . Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975. |
| Mar-Apr 1986 | Newman, Major General Aubrey S. <i>Follow Me—The Human Element in Leadership</i> . Novato, CA: Presidio, 1981.     |
| May-Jun 1986 | Lanham, C.T. <i>Infantry in Battle</i> . Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1939 (CGSC Reprint).            |
| Jul-Aug 1986 | Peters, Thomas J., and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. <i>In Search of Excellence</i> . New York: Harper & Row, 1983.      |

### SECOND AND THIRD YEARS

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|--------------|---|
| Sep-Oct 1986 | Collins, LTG Arthur S., USA (Ret.). <i>Common Sense Training</i> . Novato, CA: Presidio, 1978.                        |
| Nov-Dec 1986 | Marshall, S.L.A. <i>Men Against Fire</i> . Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978.   |
| Jan-Feb 1987 | Gugeler, Russell A. <i>Combat Actions in Korea</i> . Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1970. |
| Mar-Apr 1987 | MacDonald, Charles B. <i>Company Commander</i> . New York: Bantam, 1978.  |
| May-Jun 1987 | Du Picq, Ardant. <i>Battle Studies</i> . Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1958.   |
| Jul-Aug 1987 | Van Creveld, Martin. <i>Supplying War</i> . New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.                               |
| Sep-Oct 1987 | Sun Tzu. <i>The Art of War</i> , trans. Samuel B. Griffith. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963.                  |
| Nov-Dec 1987 | Von Mellenthin, F.W. <i>Panzer Battles</i> . Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958.                              |
| Jan-Feb 1988 | Von Clausewitz, General Carl. <i>Principles of War</i> . Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1960.                             |
| Mar-Apr 1988 | Patton, General George S., Jr. <i>War As I Knew It</i> . Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.                              |

- Infantry Battalion (Light) concept of operations in a low-intensity conflict.
- Battlefield logistics and resupply operations for the Infantry Battalion (Light).

- A historical example of a battle won by light infantry forces.
- A historical example of effective small-unit leadership in combat in a light infantry unit.

These papers must include the following information, which Colonel Votaw recommended in his article:

- An evaluation of the strategic situation (period of history; war; international adversaries; principal events leading up to the battle, campaign, or conflict analyzed).
- A review of the tactical setting (location; any terrain advantages held by either side; approximate force ratios; types of forces, if relevant; feasible courses of action available to antagonist).
- A list of other factors that affected

the event (effects of terrain or weather; special advantages or disadvantages the antagonists had).

- A synopsis of the conduct of the event (opening moves; salient features; outcome).
- A statement of the historical lessons provided by the event.
- An assessment of the significance of the event.

As these projects are completed, they are evaluated by the company commander. Then, in an officer professional development (ODP) session, each officer presents his topic and shares his ideas with his fellow officers of the battalion. The purposes of this historical research project, in addition to giving the company's officers a greater appreciation for military history and teaching them lessons about its application, are to improve their analytical and research abilities and their oral and written communication skills.

During the second and third years of the company's military history reading program, the books to be read and studied include those on military philosophy, small unit actions, training, and logistics, and also an autobiography (see chart).

Again, each lieutenant will study these books, prepare a synopsis of an assigned chapter or incident, and relate it to contemporary aspects of military leadership and tactics.

The members of Company B realize,

of course, that they may not always be able to keep strictly to the program's schedule of reading and writing projects. Nevertheless, the initial successes indicate that the communications skills of the company's lieutenants have already significantly improved and that these officers now have a much greater appreciation for the lessons of military history and for their unit's heritage.

The importance of the diligent and thorough study of military history in

making our Army one of excellence cannot be overemphasized. We can, and must, learn from the experiences of our forebears in the profession of arms.



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# Buzzword Cowards

FRED BOST

Too many otherwise brave infantrymen become cowards when faced with a certain recurring duty requirement. It doesn't help to realize that this same kind of cowardice prevails throughout much of the rest of the Army. This cowardice is displayed almost every time a leader sits down to write the narrative section of an officer or an enlisted evaluation report (OER, EER)—and hides behind buzzwords.

In theory, OERs and EERs are a key factor in the promotion and assignment of soldiers, because they allow a comparison of strengths and weaknesses. But this strange quirk of cowardice has kept the theory from becoming fact. Because ratings on the numerical scales of OERs and EERs have always been inflated, the narrative section of the report is the only place a user of the report has any hope of "seeing the individual" (and thus of making accurate comparisons). But too many evaluators refuse to narrate the simple truths the users need.

Why? Their reasons are hard to pin down, but judging by their submissions, these people seem to be highly uncomfortable with "writing" and afraid that commonly used, everyday words—"you and me language"—will be regarded as inadequate and below standard.

In short, too many soldiers (even some with college degrees) fear that their writing will somehow reveal them as uneducated or unsophisticated. Because of this fear, they try to give their writing more "pizzazz" by borrowing strange words and unfamiliar phrases, the kind of wording supposedly considered impressive. This "borrowing" not only cheats the government of the intent of the report—an accurate, detailed assessment of the soldier being evaluated—but sometimes it backfires on the writer and makes him look like a dunce.

## EXAMPLES

One writer, for example, was obviously unfamiliar with the meaning of the word "potential" when he wrote, "SFC Walkonwater has far surpassed his highest potential."

The writer of this next sentence, from another report, apparently borrowed more than a single word:

*SFC Carefree's basically questioning nature regulates his adaptability to somewhere on the borderline of excellence; however, his outstanding attitude and initiative traits, combined with his graded sense of responsibility and*

*performance, cause him to be a reliable asset to this section or an attribute to the Army.*

Confess! You recognize these borrowed words, don't you? You've probably latched onto some of them yourself: *adaptability, outstanding attitude, sense of responsibility, reliable asset, attribute to the Army.*

It's not that these words are bad in themselves. When used to introduce something specific, any of them will work fine. But when such words are tied together as a group, introducing nothing, as in this example, they lead nowhere.

What is making these empty word structures more destructive than ever is that they are becoming more prevalent. Today, in fact, they are being actively pushed by the ignorant as the correct approach to writing narratives. As a result, the use of copycat phrases has become a fad. At various posts, multi-page lists of phrases and buzzwords are openly exchanged by soldiers. Apparently just two criteria are used for composing such a list: The wording must sound pretentious, and it must be so nonspecific that it can be applied to just about any soldier doing just about any job.

Here are some examples of suggested phrases culled from a list entitled