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# Command Culture: Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901–1940, and the Consequences for World War II, by Jörg Muth

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This book illuminates the strategic debate over the importance of uncontrolled spaces to groups like ISIS. ISIS's effective use of low levels of indiscriminate violence to take over large parts of Syria and Iraq since 2013 demonstrates the opportunity that ungoverned space affords malignant actors such as ISIS. The ISIS movement began in the Kurdish areas of Iraq outside the reach of Saddam Hussein in 2002, and moved quickly into Anbar after identifying a security vacuum following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The collapse of the Assad government in eastern Syria and the defeat of the Sunni Awakening militias and their Iraqi security partners in several Iraqi provinces (2008–12) once again created space for the ISIS movement—this time to recover from its 2007 defeat in Iraq. Despite today's blistering air campaign, ISIS maintains control over most of the Sunni areas of Iraq and Syria, and arguably continues to develop deep roots of support among the population.

The authors also highlight the problems of both the Bush and Obama administrations' war-termination strategies for Iraq, in what has become a recognized weakness in the American way of war. Comfortable with outsourcing security in Sunni areas to an untrained civilian militia, both the Iraqis and Americans turned a blind eye to the fact that ISIS would make the Sunni Awakening an important target in order to reestablish core sanctuaries inside Iraq. The authors point with amazement to the gradual release of hard-core ISIS prisoners (2008–11) back into their communities as one of several factors that helped fuel the growth of ISIS from its post-surge nadir. While the reasons for this shortsighted approach were undoubtedly political and legal in nature, these

policies surely have contributed to the untimely deaths of thousands of Iraqis and the loss of much territory to ISIS. As of 2015, nineteen of twenty of ISIS's top leaders were formerly in American custody at Camp Bucca before being released or escaping from custody.

Overall, I highly recommend this book to policy makers, educators, and military professionals who seek a deeper understanding of the ISIS movement. The authors have provided a very believable representation of a contemporary group that I believe will be vindicated by additional research in the future. Until that time, this book will become the basis for most of our understanding of a highly secretive and effective pseudostate that remains a threat to the region and beyond.

CRAIG WHITESIDE



Muth, Jörg. *Command Culture: Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901–1940, and the Consequences for World War II*. Denton: Univ. of North Texas Press, 2013. 376pp. \$29.95

Dr. Jörg Muth has written a serious comparative account of the German and American precommissioning courses and general staff colleges from 1901 to 1940. Any new work comparing German and American military effectiveness in the first half of the twentieth century is guaranteed to be controversial, and Muth certainly achieves controversy. However, there exists a significant revisionist school of thought that offers an interpretation much different from Muth's.

The May 2010 Society of Military History annual meeting, held at the Virginia

Military Institute, featured a very well-attended roundtable that posed the question of American or German operational or tactical superiority. The panel moderator first asked how many of the historians in the room had spent their teenage years reading books promoting the vaunted Prussian and German militaries. Nearly every hand went up. Attracted by the works of Heinz Guderian, F. W. von Mellenthin, Liddell Hart, J. F. C. Fuller, and others, many of these teenagers grew up to be believers in the conventional wisdom that the Germans got it pretty well right. A complementary opinion was that the American military forces got very little right. In 1986, Heller and Stofft's *America's First Battles* became the standard history for those who found in the German army the bravery, intelligence, and aggressive leadership they sought for America.

Muth and this reviewer were both in the audience for the 2010 roundtable, and both of our hands went up. However, the revisionist school, with Michael Doubler's *Closing with the Enemy* (1994), Keith Bonn's *When the Odds Were Even* (1994), and Peter Mansoor's *GI Offensive in Europe* (1999) in the vanguard, is alive and well. Perhaps the most useful direct discussion of this historiographic misalignment was Brian Linn's piece in the *Journal of Military History* (April 2002) "The American Way of War Revisited" and the comments in response by Russell Weigley. Linn's article and Weigley's response effectively frame the distinct difference between interpretations that hold that the German armed forces in both World War I and World War II either were superior to the armed forces of the United States or were not.

Muth has significant challenges using primary and secondary sources.

He seems to relish his biases, and even partly explains those biases in the "Author's Afterword," which Muth states was added upon the sage advice of Edward M. Coffman and Dennis Showalter. Muth's characterization of U.S. Army officers—as people from whom he should hide as a youth hanging out with American soldiers on maneuvers—may be more self-revelatory than Muth realizes.

Muth arguably tries to do too much in a single book. His interpretation of officer education in both Germany and the United States focuses on two levels: cadets in their precommissioning programs and field-grade officers attending the equivalent of a general staff college. Unfortunately, Muth does little beyond making assertions unsupported by evidence. These assertions are frequently that American army officer education was bad, and that the equivalent in Germany was good. He absolutely fails to place either education system in its historical context, going so far as to say that the word *Prussia* would be needlessly complicating, and that he therefore only uses *Germany*. Muth claims that "school solutions" at Leavenworth were "always the norm" and that "ineffective courses were led by instructors who sometimes lacked knowledge of their fields and usually failed in didactics and pedagogics." The only footnote to this paragraph refers the reader to Craig Mullaney's *Unforgiving Minute* about junior officers and tactical combat in Afghanistan. No other source is cited, except for a vague reference to a 2000 West Point graduate.

This is not an isolated case. There are multiple unsubstantiated claims throughout the book. For two more examples, Muth says nothing of the poor reputation of the XI Corps of the Army of the Potomac when he asserts

that German immigrants made for highly respected soldiers in the American Civil War. He also misses the First and Second Schleswig-Holstein Wars of 1848–51 and 1864, respectively, when he asserts that in 1866 Prussia had not been at war for nearly fifty years.

Despite these significant shortcomings, this reviewer hopes that Muth continues to contribute to both the conversation and the controversy.

PETER J. SCHIFFERLE



Philbin, Tobias R. *Battle of Dogger Bank: The First Dreadnought Engagement*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2014. 198pp. \$32

This title is the latest work from American naval historian Tobias Philbin, who is probably best known for his 1982 biography of Admiral von Hipper. In the author's words, the book is "designed to provide new insights into the first battle between the largest fighting machines of the early twentieth century." As such, one might expect that a detailed analysis of the conduct of the battle itself would form the heart of the work, with perhaps a supporting explanation of the tactics employed on both sides and a discussion of whether these were or were not in line with prewar expectations. This could have been further supported by brief chapters explaining the strategic situation in the naval war at that point; the role of the key personalities; and the original thinking behind the development of the "fast Dreadnought cruiser" as a warship type, insofar as it might help explain the platform's performance in the battle itself. The work could then have been concluded with a discussion on the lessons learned and whether the

proposed corrective measures were successful. In other words, the focus should have been clearly on the engagement itself and what it vindicated or didn't.

Sadly, however, and despite good intentions, Philbin falls well short of this aim. His coverage of the actual battle is scanty and disjointed, and the remainder of the work is notably deficient or simply inaccurate. This is doubly frustrating given that this battle, the first of only two dreadnought-versus-dreadnought engagements in the entire war, probably represented each side's "last, best chance" to put things right, so to speak, before the better-known battle of Jutland a year later. As such, it is indeed an important area for study by the naval historian.

Philbin's difficulties are threefold. First, and as intimated, the balance is arguably wrong between the coverage of the battle itself and the supporting text. He devotes only 30 of the 150 or so pages to actual analysis of the battle, with the remaining pages dealing with the supporting areas. Unfortunately, these 30 pages, more than many others, fall victim to the second difficulty he has, which is in developing a clear and coherent narrative of a series of events, free from repetition and diversion. Rather than recounting the main features of the engagement in a chronological fashion, he chooses to take the different perspectives of the individual ships involved, which does not help the reader elucidate the decision making as it might have appeared to the opposing fleet commanders at the time—a feature central to his stated aim—and leads to a nonsequential presentation of the main events. None of this is helped by the maps in the book that, although reproductions of the original battle reports and histories, are almost unreadable in the scale presented. Thus, despite