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## The Training of Officers: From Military Professionalism to Irrelevance

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the reality he knows. It is well worth the price.

MICHAEL PALMER  
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Van Creveld, Martin. *The Training of Officers: From Military Professionalism to Irrelevance*. New York: The Free Press, 1990. 134pp. \$19.95

*The Training of Officers* will not earn Martin van Creveld much praise from the nation's war college faculties and alumni. In a short but pointed monograph, he raises disturbing questions about how Western nations, particularly the United States, prepare their officers for high command, especially at the staff and war college level.

Beginning with a brief history of how senior military commanders achieved their positions in the past, Van Creveld notes that formal education and training of officers are relatively recent phenomena. Driven by the increased complexity of warfare and the rise of standing armies, most major powers had established military academies and war colleges by the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the latter varied widely in quality and not all were taken seriously by their respective militaries.

Van Creveld devotes considerable attention to the Prussian-German War College, or *Kriegsakademie*, which between 1815 and 1945 "was regarded as the best of its kind and served as a model for many of the

rest." Several factors were responsible for its sustained excellence, most of which are missing from contemporary American institutions, according to the author. The *akademie* produced proven officers who had survived the tough entrance exam (twenty percent passing rate) and a rigorous three-year, diversified, professional education. Its well-specified "product" was a middle-grade officer qualified to perform as chief of staff or operations officer of divisional and higher formations. Graduates gained considerable seniority vis-à-vis contemporaries and, following a probationary period, entered the elite General Staff. Perhaps most importantly, the military faculty consisted of senior promotable officers who served as role models for students. Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Guderian, and a host of other future field marshals and senior generals taught there; some at their own request. Indeed, "service on the faculty was a coveted assignment and an honor. Far from sidetracking a man's career, it carried substantial financial benefits and was regarded very much as an essential step on the way to a senior post."

In contrast to the *Kriegsakademie* as well as today's top Soviet academies (which have many of the former's attributes), U.S. staff and war colleges suffer from numerous institutional flaws. Among other problems, they lack: competitive entrance exams; a college role in student selection; a sufficiently long, comprehensive educational program ("the true reason" for the *Kriegsakademie's*

excellence); rigorous academic standards; the authority to award graduate degrees; the power to fail students (it is not considered cost-effective to sack officers whose previous training may have cost millions merely for failing to pass school-type exams); a senior and promotable military faculty; and, above all, a significant role as an instrument for screening and promoting officers on their way to the top. Moreover, the product desired from them is not well defined.

Van Creveld asserts that major reform is necessary: it is unacceptable that "when presidents and prime ministers seek top-level politico-military advice, war colleges are merely their last resort." In addition to the recommendations already noted, particularly as to the quality and status of the military faculty, he offers several other suggestions for reform: choose smaller, select groups of officers, commensurate in numbers with anticipated needs for their skills, for admission to higher education; focus at staff college level on military training rather than general education. Training of true staff officers familiar with other services and thoroughly knowledgeable of their own, at the operational level, should be the goal of the curriculum; graduation should carry promotion advantages.

Van Creveld also suggests, at the war college level, the establishment of one national defense university (located away from Washington) instead of the four separate war colleges. It would prepare the best officers from each service to exercise command at

the highest levels. He also suggests a one-year three-part program divided into: joint military operations; the political, social, and economic aspects of war as they affect the United States and likely opponents; and some completely unrelated subject to broaden perspective. However, the majority of students would concentrate on joint operations. A small number of the best qualified (as determined by their performance) at the university would stay a second year to complete a Ph.D. Military faculty members would be both distinguished and senior, while civilian faculty would be required to engage in significant research in return for reduced course loads. The key benefit of such a program is a uniform training of students and a common outlook at the highest levels of command.

I do have one criticism. Perhaps there are characteristic American cultural and political considerations that make some facets of the putatively superior German and Soviet systems unworkable (or undesirable). For example, the common outlook among senior officers commended by the author for those systems' military advantages may also have potential political drawbacks (as the German experience might suggest). Furthermore, the U.S. military continues to do a great many things well, which supports the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" argument. It remains open to debate whether staff and war college shortcomings reflect a fundamental problem within the U.S. armed forces or are merely the result of the

inefficient use of resources. Regardless, this book poses many troubling issues well worth debating.

*The Training of Officers* is short, to the point, and well worth reading. It should cause more than a little discomfort among those associated with the nation's military colleges.

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Jones, R.V. *Reflections on Intelligence*.

London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1989. 383pp. \$45

In 1939, R.V. Jones was the principal scientist, (indeed the *only* scientist) in the Air section of MI-6, Great Britain's foreign intelligence service. He was twenty-eight years old.

His first book *The Wizard War*, published in 1978, was an account of the Oslo Report, the search for German radar, the ECM battle in the strategic bombing campaigns, and the search for countermeasures to the V-1 and V-2 weapons. It sparkles as literature.

*Reflections on Intelligence* is a commentary on *The Wizard War*. Professor Jones leads the reader through the postwar corridors of power.

The first section contains eight essays that deal with the relationships between intelligence and ethics, secrecy, security, deception, and command. In addition, Jones discusses both science of World War I and the general subject of the scientific method as applied to defense. The second section contains postscripts on

the "most secret war" that tell of the men and women whose determination and dedication helped to win World War II (alias the wizard war).

Part three is an assessment of the impact of the Oslo Report as wartime scientific intelligence. The Report came into British hands in 1939, and uncovered the German secret weapons research program: homing torpedoes, proximity fuzes, jet aircraft, ballistic and anti-shiping guided missiles. The Oslo Report's role in World War II scientific intelligence was profound: it told the British what to look for and how to look.

The "Reflections" section is a fine commentary on the author as a human being. Jones repeatedly protected the identity of his sources (some of them authentic heroes) until either they gave him permission to disclose their identities or they had died. This scrupulously ethical behavior says much about Professor Jones, and makes reading his book a nice experience.

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Hagan, Kenneth J. *This People's Navy*.  
New York: The Free Press, 1991.  
434pp. \$27.95

Theodore Roosevelt wrote: "There are two kinds of historians: one, the delver, the bricklayer, the man who laboriously gathers together bare facts; and the other, the builder, the architect, who out of these facts