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# History of the Arts of War Within the Framework of Political History, Vol 1

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## 104 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Delbrück, Hans. *History of the Art of War Within the Framework of Political History, Vol. I Antiquity*, translated by Walter J. Renfro, Jr. Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1975. 604pp.

Walter Renfro's translation of *Geschichte der Kriegskunst in Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* is a major contribution to the literature of military history in the English language. The students of military affairs who have limited themselves to books in English have been the poorer for not reading such classics in their field. This translation of the first volume of a four-volume work is a major step in bringing a wider readership to one of the most important German studies. One hopes that the remaining volumes will appear shortly.

Hans Delbrück was the leading civilian expert on military affairs in Germany at the turn of the century. Like his contemporaries in the field of naval theory, Mahan and Corbett, Delbrück was clearly aware of the relationship between war and politics. He saw, too, the importance of economics, geographic position, logistics, and technology. But in his analysis of history, he did not seek to find a single, universal theory of strategy. Following Clausewitz, he believed that politics determined strategy in every circumstance and that no single strategy could be correct for every era. In his work, Delbrück concentrated on the distinction, alluded to by Clausewitz, between two methods of conducting warfare. The first, which he called the strategy of annihilation, was the search for the decisive battle. The alternate strategy he called the strategy of exhaustion. By this method, a commander could obtain his objective by means other than a decisive battle: occupation, blockade, or troop movements. Both these strategies, in Delbrück's mind, were equally valid. Their appropriateness depended on the political aims and the military means available.

In exploring these ideas in terms of European history, Delbrück did not wish to write a general history of warfare. "It is not the mission of a history of the art of war to present these events in detail," he wrote, "that would lead to a constantly broadening military history, but only to examine and to establish new forms and discoveries." His history is a selective study which illustrates his understanding of the two alternative strategies.

The first volume is devoted to ancient history. It covers the Persian wars, the Peloponnesian wars, the second Punic war, and the campaigns of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. In his discussion of antiquity, Delbrück regards Caesar as the culmination of ancient military development. In reaching this conclusion, the author was not denigrating Scipio, Hannibal, Miltiades or Alexander. Among all of them, Caesar had at his disposition the most refined means for the conduct of warfare. The Roman art of warfare which Caesar personified was the fruit of a development which had taken centuries to create, and it was a development which lived on in the Roman world long after his death. This was a consummation in military organization, weapons and logistics, but the classical world also showed to Delbrück two workable methods of strategy. Caesar and Alexander represented the strategy of annihilation while the strategy of Pericles stood in contrast as an example of the strategy of exhaustion.

In discussing strategy, Delbrück made it quite clear that the subject could not be separated from the means of warfare. Strategy was not an esoteric matter, but only an aspect of a very practical problem. For this reason, he paid particular attention to the methods of combat, the weapons used, the terrain, and the number and organization of troops involved. In order to achieve some accuracy in this task, Delbrück critically evaluated the ancient texts and

## PROFESSIONAL READING 105

combined stringent, philological examination with a knowledge of more modern military experience. This method earned him a great deal of criticism, both by those who disagreed with his interpretation of the documents, and by those who believed it improper to allow later developments to be used to provide a critical basis for understanding earlier events. Some of the controversy generated may be seen in the footnotes in the translation of this, the third (1920) edition of Delbrück's *History*.

The modern reader may feel that the detailed discussion of numbers, weapons, and terrain is out of proportion to the philosophical points which Delbrück is making, particularly when more than a half century of research will certainly have challenged the accuracy of his facts. Yet his detailed discussion remains essential to the logical process by which he proceeds, and in the absence of any later study of similar scope, it retains its value.

Throughout the study, it is abundantly clear that the author understands warfare as a single unit, not as a series of special studies. For him, tactics, logistics, organization and strategy are all part and parcel of a single problem. For him the conduct of war involved a mental process quite unlike that used in a game of chess. Delbrück believed that warfare is not a game of refined, all-inclusive estimation, but rather it involves the mastery of that which is beyond estimation. In summarizing his views he wrote that the art of command "demands not only the intelligence, but also the entire personality of the man, who even pits himself against chance, counters it with new information, and thereby masters capricious luck and ties it to his chariot."

It is sometimes said that a classic is a book to have on the shelf, but not to read. This is certainly no easy book to read, but it should not be ignored by any serious student of military history.

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Endicott, John E. and Stafford, Roy W. Jr., eds. *American Defense Policy*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. 626pp.

The fourth edition of *American Defense Policy*, originally published in 1965, is 70 articles and documents compiled by the Department of Political Science and Philosophy, U.S. Air Force Academy. The editors' stated objective is the reaction of "a book especially applicable to the undergraduate level of defense policy studies" which enables students to "know the issues and understand the processes involved in determining defense policy." Associate Professors Endicott and Stafford point out that no attempt has been made to convince or to indoctrinate. They rather "hope to show the reader that there are no simple answers in the study of defense policy . . . a field dealing in large measure with the unknown—the future—and the intentions of men." Uncertainty notwithstanding, the editors predict that a knowledge of the issues and an understanding of the processes will lead to a better product.

In Chapters one through four the dominant analytical theme is the classic view of national, multinational, and international systems. The subjects include the international environment, the evolution of U.S. strategy, arms control, limited war, and insurgency. The issues here are slanted toward the post-World War II era, particularly the problems of dealing with nuclear technology in order to achieve the realistic objectives of deterrence and defense as well as the more idealistic objectives of arms control and disarmament. In these chapters the student is exposed to real defense problems and policies. These articles are useful as cases to analyze and as fundamental conceptual material. There is Truman on his doctrine, Kennan on containment, Dulles on massive retaliation, McNamara on his "era," Laird on realistic deterrence, Schlesinger on