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Peter J. Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II*. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2010. Pp. xi, 295. ISBN 978-0-7006-1714-2.

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America's School for War adds to a growing body of revisionist work on the nature and performance of the US Army in the World War II era. Much of this research has appeared over the past fifteen years in the excellent Modern War Studies series published by the University Press of Kansas.¹ In his engaging and important installment in that series, Peter Schifferle considers how the US Army's professional education system shaped the concepts, doctrine, and habits of mind of its officer corps and ensured success on the battlefields of 1941-45. While militaries can (and do) undergo tremendous changes to adapt to the demands imposed by particular wars, they are heavily conditioned by earlier doctrine and practices. Schifferle's detailed treatment of pre-World War II education at the Command and General Staff School (CGSS) at Fort Leavenworth, where he is a professor,² provides a much-needed corrective to broader works critical of the Army's intellectual and professional development before World War II and its apparent negative consequences during the war.³ His analysis throughout is balanced, impartial, and grounded in scrupulous research.

Schifferle divides his subject into four discrete elements. The first two chapters examine the Army's efforts to identify the lessons of World War I and incorporate them into the body of formal doctrine developed during the interwar years mainly by the faculty of the Leavenworth schools. The next two chapters show how instruction there fostered the decision-making and problem-solving skills that officers would later need in their staff and command positions. Chapters 5-7 survey in detail the Leavenworth educational experience, assessing teaching methods, student selection, and curriculum. The last two chapters look at wartime mobilization and the role of Leavenworth graduates during World War II.

Schifferle contends that the Army used the lessons of the Great War to develop an appropriate "operational framework" for contemporary warfare (187). This featured deliberate offensive operations to defeat a "stabilized front" and initiate mobile warfare (36). He judges that the doctrine of combined arms "was sound, consistent and based on constant principles" (60). Throughout the interwar years, the Leavenworth Schools inculcated this "valid and relevant doctrine" in the Army's officer corps, helping to ensure its success in World War II (192-93). CGSS, like other equivalent institutions of the time, such as the British Army Staff College at Camberley, struggled to develop both future battlefield commanders and trained staff officers, whose educational requirements were not identical. It did, however, manage both to teach the combined arms techniques needed by division- and corps-level commanders and to prepare students for command and staff duties at division, corps, and intra-corps areas (35).

Schifferle's experience as a twenty-first-century military educator shines through in his perceptive chapter on the "Applicatory Method," which focused on "the application of certain principles to practical problems" by combining tabletop map exercises, outdoor terrain exercises, and force-on-force map maneuvers involving large formations (108-10). These were crucial preparations for the exercise of professional

1. Volumes on the Second World War include Michael Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945* (1995); Peter Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945* (2002); Harold Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes* (2007).

2. A retired Army lieutenant colonel, he has also taught at the prestigious School of Advanced Military Studies at CGSS.

3. See, e.g., Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the US, British and Israeli Armies* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford U Pr, 2011) and Robert M. Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2004).

judgement and initiative in progressively fluid and complex tactical situations, especially in an era when large-scale field maneuvers exceeded the financial and manpower assets of a peacetime Army.

The applicatory method was essential to the quality of instruction at Leavenworth. Indeed, if the school had not used this pedagogical technique, it is difficult to see how the vast gulf between the minimal field experience of the typical Leavenworth student and confidence in handling large-formation operations could have been bridged. As most Leavenworth students' experience was primarily in battalion-size units during the interwar period, with occasional maneuvers and C[ommand] P[ost] E[xercise]s under restricted conditions, the application of new knowledge in practical exercises was the only system available to span this gap. (121)

Although the shortcomings of the applicatory method have been studied, Schifferle believes the strict and careful use of this approach to the teaching of combined arms tactics and practical techniques of command at Leavenworth yielded the generation of well-prepared combat leaders who served in World War II. By 1944-45, Leavenworth graduates commanded "practically every division" and, indeed, at "every echelon above regiment," skillfully directing their formations on the battlefield (194).

Despite this record of success, Schifferle dedicates the final section of his book to major failings of the Leavenworth system in meeting the demands of war on a global scale. Though the system did manage to provide sufficient personnel to man critical posts within a rapidly expanding wartime army, it had earlier signally failed to train the officers who could oversee the initial mobilization itself (192). Conventional wisdom holds that Allied armies triumphed primarily by leveraging massive economic and industrial might to offset indifferent tactical and operational performance. But Schifferle argues that a critical lack of emphasis on the training of Service of Supply and air power specialists (167-70) hampered the logistical and air branches that became so essential in World War II.

Aside from such curricular gaps, Schifferle clearly demonstrates that the German Army was not alone in investing in serious officer education after World War I, with consequent benefits accruing during the Second World War. Interwar training at the CGSS was highly selective, much sought after, and necessary for career advancement and the assumption of higher commands. A very valuable aspect of *America's School for War*—unfortunately given too little space and attention—is its relating of prewar education to the quality of command decisions during key actions of World War II.

The book's final substantive chapter begins with a detailed analysis showing that Leavenworth graduates later filled a high percentage of vital command and staff positions in the wartime army. Schifferle then turns to a more general discussion of the nature of the late World War II European battlefield, leaving behind the theme of close linkage between Leavenworth education and wartime commands (177-87). His best examples of the value of the Leavenworth schools for the performance of wartime officers are to be found in tantalizing vignettes embedded in the overall story of the educational programme, its development, and effects on future commanders during the interwar years. The most striking case in point is the account of Maj. Gen. Ernie Harmon's thought processes as he led the 2nd Armored Division across the Albert Canal in late September 1944. Schifferle deftly blends a concise summary of the engagement, Harmon's own vivid firsthand recollections, and intelligent commentary on the worth of lessons learned at CGSS: "In the heat of combat Harmon seized the initiative, found a bridge inside his division sector, crossed over a combat command, and rapidly outflanked the Germans holding the opposite bank. He knew well the traditional techniques for a frontal river crossing, but instead he chose professional intuition based on self confidence and relied on his Leavenworth training for the details of execution, even the 'red herring' of a flanking movement" (70).⁴

Schifferle makes good and extensive use of the rich archival resources of the Combined Arms Research Library at Leavenworth, complemented by material from World War II-era professional publications, like *Infantry Journal*, which highlight in-service thinking and attest to the "vibrant intellectual development" of the Army in the period (60). As in any thought-provoking study of this kind, some of the author's interpretations are open to challenge. For instance, the US Army's prewar doctrinal prescriptions concerning the

4. It is good to read (252n61) that Schifferle intends to pursue further inquiry into this subject area.

conduct of command by senior officers do not support Schifferle's generous contention that "initiative was to be the norm; control from higher headquarters was to be tolerated only when conditions required tight command and control" (52). Like its chief allies, particularly the British Army, the US Army faced obstacles in formulating truly effective higher command doctrine during World War II. Recent research suggests that the negative effects of the prewar command culture of tight, top-down control and over-supervision reached well into the Cold War era.⁵

America's School for War makes a clear and convincing case for an interwar US Army that was much more professional and intellectually active than is commonly realized. It should be read by all serious students of the US Army's conduct of World War II as well as those interested in the manner of its victory in that war. We may also hope that the book will encourage other scholars to explore further the largely neglected topic of how the US Army's professional development in the critical years of the 1920s and 1930s laid the foundations for ultimate victory in 1945.

5. See William M. Donnelly, "Bilko's Army: A Crisis in Command?" *Journal of Military History* 75 (2011) 1183-1215.