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Jörg Muth, *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, 2011. Pp. x, 366. ISBN 978-1-57441-303-8.

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Jörg Muth (Univ. of Utah) has written an angry book.<sup>1</sup> He makes it clear that writing it was very difficult and his often acerbic tone reflects his frustration (vii-x, 1-13, 213-17). The primary targets of his invective are the officer corps of the US Army and the *Reichsheer* (German Army) of 1901-1940. He takes as axiomatic “the centrality of the ‘German military heritage’ to the U.S. Army and the centuries-long relationship between the two militaries...” (10). In his examination of the officer education and command cultures of the two armies, the Americans come off worse in the comparison. Muth’s major thesis is that education is a primary element of officer culture. The structure of the book reflects this approach, with the second and third chapters comparing officer accession through professional military academies and the fourth and fifth treating intermediate professional military education.

Muth’s provocative secondary theses challenge the scholarly consensus regarding the US Army. He accepts the old saw that the Germans were better tacticians than their US counterparts in World War II, but finds the existing literature deficient in explaining why this was so. He also disputes some scholarship<sup>2</sup> that has identified US professional officer education at Fort Leavenworth’s Command and General Staff School (CGSS) as crucial to the Allied victory in World War II (4-7, 225n44, 284n67). Specifically, he contends that the training at both CGSS and the US Military Academy at West Point in this period was inferior to that of the German system. In his mind, that accounts for American officers’ lack of initiative and even competence at the tactical level. Chapter two, one of the highlights of the book, offers a particularly devastating critique of hazing and its impact on pedagogy at West Point.

Scholars reassessing higher level professional military education at CGSS have recently revised older, harsher judgments (which Muth does not challenge) of American staff officers’ ability at the operational level of war (284). As a CGSS faculty member, I found myself nodding in agreement with some of Muth’s specific findings: “in the interest of fairness’ the courses were tailored to suit the weakest student.... [The Germans’] American counterparts had often forgotten how to study when they finally made it to the CGSS” (118, 176). But Muth really breaks new ground in explaining the “ineffectiveness” of education at CGSS despite its being (supposedly) modeled on Prussian methods (121). He claims US observers of the Prussian system did not understand the concept of *Auftragstaktik*—loosely, “mission type orders.” Muth believes the word denotes a tactical command philosophy that “emphasizes the principle of command within the philosophy” of decentralized, aggressive initiative by subordinates (173). Americans instead stressed narrow doctrinal solutions (“the school solution”) over creative thinking and personal resourcefulness. The contrast is rather sarcastically highlighted in the titles of Muth’s chapters (4 and 5) on, respectively, the CGSS and the *Kriegsakademie* (“war academy”): “The Importance of Doctrine and How to Manage” vs. “The Importance of the Attack and How to Lead.”

Muth does provide a very good overview of the one US institution that did implement the true spirit of the German-Prussian command culture—the Infantry School at Fort Benning, as led by George C. Marshall

1. A condensed version of his Univ. of Utah doctoral dissertation. He is also the author of *Flucht aus dem militärischen Alltag: Ursachen und individuelle Ausprägung der Desertion in der Armee Friedrichs des Großen* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2003).

2. E.g., Timothy K. Nenner, “Leavenworth and Its Critics: The U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, 1920-1940,” *Journal of Military History* 58 (1994) 199-231, and Peter J. Schifferle, *America’s School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2010).

in the 1930s. He attributes the success of the Infantry School to Marshall's common sense and the exploitation of a German exchange student named Adolf von Schell. During Marshall's tenure (1927–32), Schell, later a major general in the *Wehrmacht*, helped construct the curriculum and taught at the school (145). Muth puts the occasional excellent performance of US officers down to either exposure to Marshall's system at Benning or the perseverance of men educating themselves (as in the case of George Patton) by the critical reading of military history.

In chapters 3 and 5, Muth sheds much light on the myth-shrouded topic of German professional military education. He deals comprehensively with the *Kadettenschulen* ("cadet schools"), which terminated in graduation from the *Hauptkadettenanstalt* ("main cadets institute") and the possibility of a commission. He also details the intermediate level education at the *Kriegsakademie*, including: honest competition from an early age (which Muth partially criticizes); a relaxed, flexible pedagogy; and, especially, a spirit of comradeship and real interest in intellectual development. Though this great German system led to very effective performance at the tactical and sometimes operational levels, Muth condemns the German officer corps's moral failures in World War II—despite their liberal education they behaved criminally:

The officers who went along with the dictator's criminal policies were senior, high-ranking officers whose personal aims were in many cases so congruent with Hitler's. Chief culprits among them were ... Werner von Blomberg, the war minister ... von Fritsch, the commander in chief of the army, and ... Walther von Brauchitsch, his successor. They were the first to replace the matter-of-fact statements about what a German officer had to be with proclamations that had a weird, near-religious twist to them. (202–3)

Muth, like many other scholars, critiques the German "way of war" as inadequate at the operational and, especially, strategic levels. He strengthens the emerging consensus by positing that American officers outperformed the Germans operationally and strategically because of schools like the Army War College and, especially, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF)—for which there were no German equivalents. Given such a strong endorsement, I would like to have seen more discussion of the ICAF.<sup>3</sup> Also, nowhere does Muth mention the naval educational system. Admittedly, this would have exceeded the scope of his book, but some army officers did go through the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. And, too, Ronald Spector<sup>4</sup> has established that the Navy's education system derived from Prussian-German models—something Muth should investigate.

Muth hits other targets as well, often in the some one hundred pages of endnotes, ranging from historians guilty of errors in scholarship or intellectual honesty, to the narrow-mindedness of German academia, and the quality of librarians (!) at the Combined Arms Research Library (223n30, vii–viii, and 287–88n108). One wishes the publisher had opted for footnotes instead of endnotes, since they contain so much useful information. The book is also marred by poor English usage and a too colloquial writing style; a good editor might have helped the author, whose first language is German, not English, to remedy this. Although Muth, in an Afterword, seeks to justify his book's often irate tone, his intemperate judgments and gratuitously harsh criticisms will put off many readers.

Despite these shortcomings, this is an important book that disputes the triumphalist literature about officer education in the US Army and recommends a more honest educational approach to achieve an effective command culture, at least at the tactical level. *Command Culture* has received much critical attention and is shaping an ongoing debate about American officer education.<sup>5</sup> With the caveats mentioned, I strongly recommend it to anyone interested in military education, both today and in the past. After all, it is a topic of critical national security interest.

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3. Muth's bibliography does not list the key work on the ICAF, which is less enthusiastic about its importance before World War I: Alan L. Gropman, *Mobilizing United States Industry in World War 2: Myth and Reality* (Washington: Nat'l. Defense Univ., 1996).

4. In *Professors at War: The Naval War College and the Development of the Naval Profession* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Pr, 1977) 28–30.

5. See, e.g., former *Washington Post* columnist Tom Ricks's article "An Elusive Command Philosophy and a Different Command Culture," *Foreign Policy* (9 Sep 2011) [www.miwsr.com/rd/1132.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1132.htm).