



*The Role of History in
Transmitting Values*

Frederic Remington

Talking about the science of war, a top Army leader noted that “the duties of a military officer are becoming, year by year, more complex and more difficult to perform.” His words could have been occasioned by a recognition that we are, in the last decade of the 20th century, in the throes of a technological revolution, the Third Wave reported by the Tofflers. Or his remarks could have been prefatory to a study of where the Army needs to be in the next century—a study called Force XXI. But because Maj. Gen. John Schofield was addressing a West Point audience in 1877, some 120 years ago, we are struck by the realization that the U.S. Army has a tradition of keeping pace with change. It has traditionally met this challenge by relying on military history. With warfare becoming more complicated, it was even more important, Schofield argued for the officer to learn not only from his own “observation, [and] experience,” but from “the careful study of the experiences of others who have gone before us.”¹

This introduces the first of three ideas I want to examine as they exist in the U.S. Army. They are history, values and leadership. These three concepts are interlocking and, most

often, one cannot exist without the other two. The values of any society are deeply ingrained in its history and any successful leadership must tap into shared values in order to release the energy of a community. For any leader, a knowledge of history is fundamental to understand what values hold a society together and where they come from.

There is a long tradition of studying history in the U.S. Army. Carol Reardon pointed out in her book *Sol-*

study of military history offered reliable guideposts along each route. First, each officer had to understand his role as a soldier, as a professional trained in the principles of war and their applications on the battlefield. This required him to transcend his own sense of nationalism to learn all he could from the past experiences of others, even those of potential enemies. Second, each American officer needed to understand the relation between his army and his government in order to comprehend his nation’s

conception of the proper conduct of war. Both goals placed great demands upon the record of the past.”²

Schofield’s sentiments were echoed in the years that followed by a host of military history advocates, like Capt. James S. Pettit who said that military history is “the foundation of our art, the basis of our profession,” or Captain Arthur L. Conger who said, “Military history is the laboratory of the military profession.”³

Military history has never been without its critics within the U.S. Army, and that was certainly true in the latter part of the 19th century

when there arose such a groundswell for a more professional officers’ corps. Many officers who had risen through the ranks and learned their lessons in the field chasing Indians, felt they would be left behind if the Army turned to book learning as its new

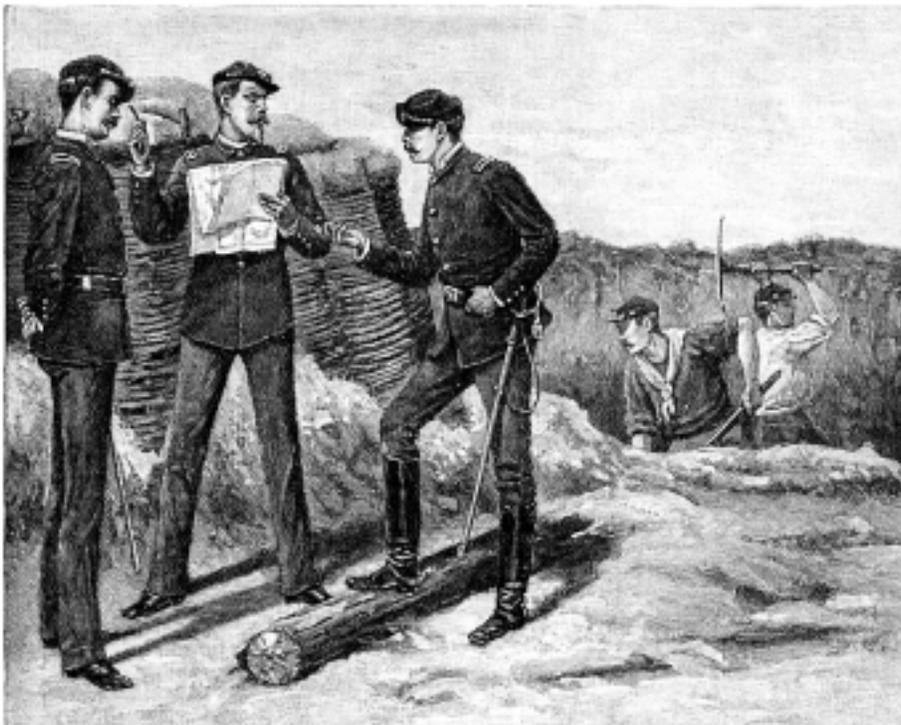


THE RECRUITING SERGEANT.

diers and Scholars that the Army’s use of history was far beyond hero worship or drum-and-bugle history. “For many contributors to the new American literature on the art of war, the path to a more professional officer corps followed two tracks, and the



ARTILLERY—A LIGHT BATTERY.



THE ENGINEER CORPS—INSTRUCTION IN FIELD FORTIFICATION.

Rufus F. Zogbaum, born in Charleston, SC, in 1849, studied art at the New York Art Students' League in 1878 and 1879. He went to Paris in 1880 to study for almost three years under Leon J. F. Bonnat. After observing some of the armies of Europe, his specialty became military subjects and when he returned to America he began illustrating U.S. Army subjects for Harper's Monthly magazine in 1884. A number of assignments followed. The engravings that appear here were done for an article on the U.S. Army that appeared in Harper's in 1890, just four years after the final Geronimo campaign ended.

standard of professionalism. The naysayers claimed that the study of history only prepares the student to fight the wars of the past, not future wars. They claimed that the qualities of the good officer were inbred and could not be taught away from the battlefield.

Arthur Wagner, as one of the leading proponents of professional standards within officer education, was quick to respond to these critics. As a captain, he wrote in 1899: "There are officers who pose as practical soldiers, and affect to despise all theory. These...are generally ignorant and obstinate men who know as little of the practice as they do of the theory of war.... How can we be sure that they will not some day find themselves compromised on service from want of knowledge, not from want of talent?"⁴ In an unkind swipe at the immigrant soldier who earned his commission on a Civil War battlefield, he referred to this class of anti-progressive officer as the "Ireland army...whose military education was acquired in following the company will cart."⁵

During and after the Vietnam War, the U.S. Army did a lot of soul-searching. It found it had somehow drifted away from the values of the Old Army. Duty, honor and country had in some instances been replaced by careerism, ticket-punching, and self-interest. Leadership had in some cases been replaced by management. A belief in the lessons of history had given way to a reliance on technology. Almost a century before, Capt. Arthur Wagner advised the study of military history because "the ablest of generalship is merely human wisdom applied to human knowledge." It would be a mistake, he ad-

vised, to forget that human wisdom is fallible and to rely on misinformation. In Vietnam history had been replaced by statistics and macabre body counts.

For all its inadequacies, distortions and misuses, military history is still the best weapon a soldier can carry into an uncertain situation. Martin Van Creveld, writing about *Command in War*, observed that "studying the past may be a matter of marginal utility only, but the past is us and it is on the past alone that all decision-making is inevitably based. If



COURTESY—THE BRITISH ARMY

systematic study of the past is taken away, only personal experience, hearsay, and intuition remain. Military history may be an inadequate tool for commanders to rely on, but a better one has yet to be designed."⁶

Military leaders are plagued by uncertainty. It is their demon. What article would be complete without the obligatory nod to Clausewitz, who remarked that "three-fourths of those things upon which action in war must

be calculated are hidden more or less in the clouds of great uncertainty."⁷ A knowledge of history is a counterweight to uncertainty, bringing the possibility of sound judgment into a better balance. It is no longer enough for the officer or NCO to just know the enemy Order of Battle. Today history must figure into the equation.

When you go home
Tell them of us and say
For their tomorrow
We gave our today.

—*Inscription at the gravesite of British soldiers killed in the battle of Kohima, India, March-June 1944.*⁸

It shouldn't take a study from Rand Corporation to tell us, as one did in 1987, that "The military services have acquired personalities of their own that are shaped by their experiences and which, in turn, shape their behavior."⁹ Just what are the values that shape the Army's personality? It is clear that readers could make long lists of those virtues that are common to the Army experience. The short list would be: Duty, Honor and Country. These three words are more than some lofty sentiments chiseled in the transept at West Point. They, along with other values, have defined the U.S. Army.

Not everyone finds themselves in the Army out of a sense of Duty, Honor, and Country. As tempting as it is to seize upon this clarion call as the measure by which to define the Army's values, it is necessary to go beyond this bedrock triad. There are more virtues to be encountered in military service. These are compassion, camaraderie, courage, self-discipline, integrity, responsibility, self-sacrifice, and a belief in justice.¹⁰ Feel



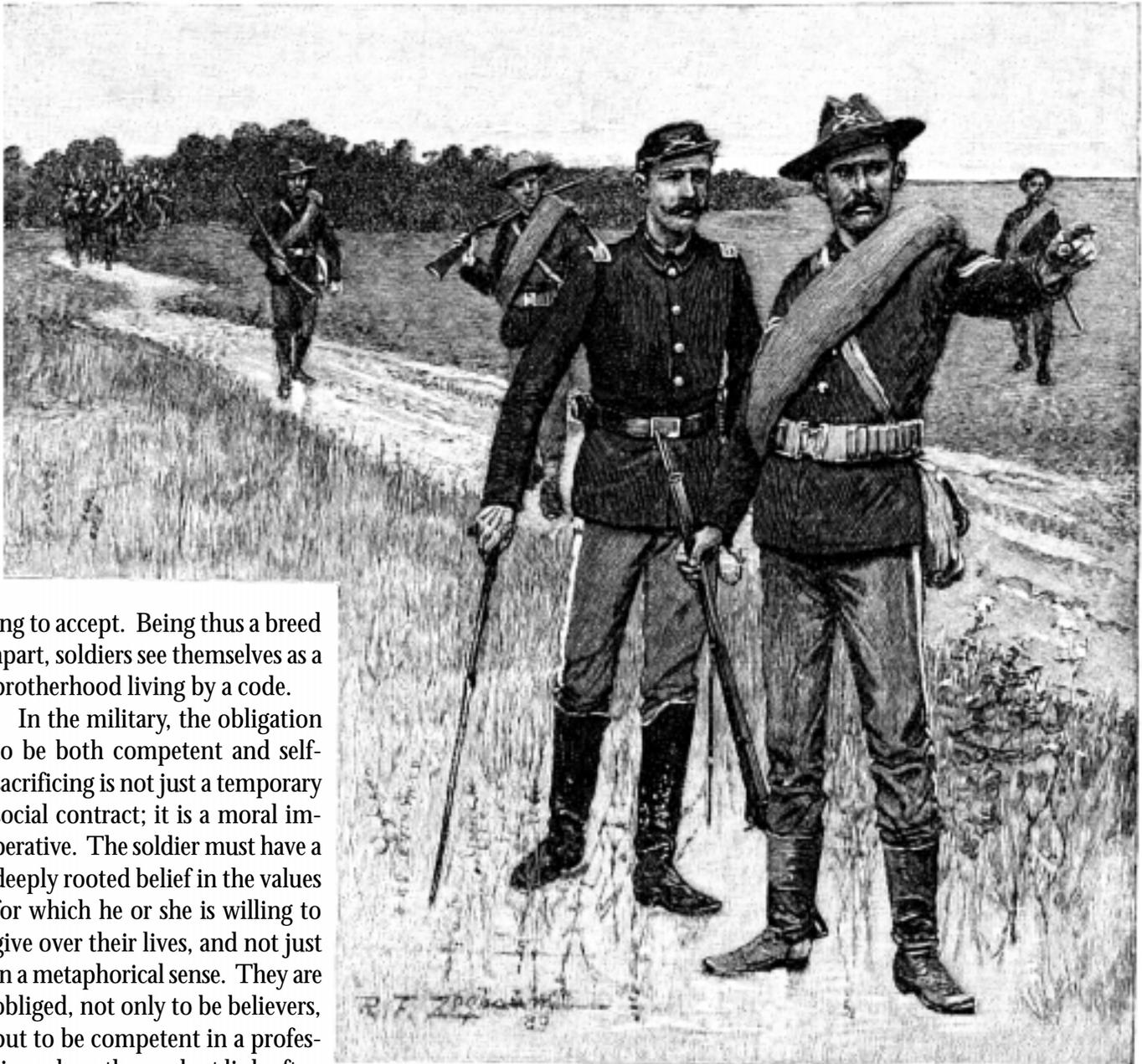
MEDICAL DEPARTMENT—THE RED-CROSS AMBULANCE.

welcome to add your own to the list. These things are not all always present in each and everyone of us. We can only aspire to call upon the needed virtue at the needed time and place and find it answering the call.

One of the clearest dimensions that separates soldiers from civilians is sacrifice. That is not to say that there are not civilians who make the occasional sacrifice for the good of someone else. But they are not called upon to do so as a matter course. Soldiers are expected to make daily sacrifices and sometimes the ultimate one. It is this idea that underpins mission. Missions are accomplished only at the sacrifice of the soldier's well being. That is what Armies are all about—undertaking the risks that most of the society they serve would be unwill-



QUARTERMASTER GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT—READY FOR THE MARCH.



INFANTRY ADVANCE-GUARD.

ing to accept. Being thus a breed apart, soldiers see themselves as a brotherhood living by a code.

In the military, the obligation to be both competent and self-sacrificing is not just a temporary social contract; it is a moral imperative. The soldier must have a deeply rooted belief in the values for which he or she is willing to give over their lives, and not just in a metaphorical sense. They are obliged, not only to be believers, but to be competent in a profession where the weakest link often determines the outcome of the whole enterprise. This is no less true for the technician remote from the action as it is to the member of an infantry squad.

Is there corruption in the Army? Careerism? Venality? Are there time-servers in these ranks? Are there coffee coolers? Because we are searching for those things that make the Army unique, not those things that make it the same as the larger society, we will

leave those questions for others to investigate.

Not all would come to accept the Army's value system. Many would take a discharge or desert. Some who stayed in would trample upon those values. Careerism became a cancer in the military in Vietnam and after. There were those who would inflate body counts. There were My Lai's.

A big part of the reason these kinds of dishonorable acts were seared into the American consciousness was because they were aberrations. They were such radical and unexpected deviations from the core values of the American way of life. But, in the main, many lived by the principles of duty, honor, country.

A society will define its own ideas

of right and wrong and demand certain norms of conduct. The values of the Army community are often embedded in its policies and regulations. But they reach beyond the policy directive to the attitudes of the rank and file about such things as integrity, tolerance, honor, responsibility and compassion. Values erect a scaffolding of meaning for any organization and this supports commitment. They give people faith in their purpose. Without this moral mortar, any organizational edifice will crumble.

Institutions come and go as their value systems erode or prove to be illusionary. When values prove to be false, as was the case with the Soviet disavowal of entrepreneurship, society's suffer a disruptive discontinuity and even collapse. The Army is the oldest surviving institution in American society, outside of the Congress which authorized it in 1775. It is older than the judicial branch, the executive branch, General Motors or IBM. It has an unmatched record of success. It has accomplished its victories with the help of American society as a whole and in spite of it.

Values add their weight to myths, customs, traditions, associations, symbols, and literature to form that collection of shared beliefs which we call culture. When a person joins the Army they do not stop being an Episcopalian, an African-American, an Arizonan. But they do subscribe to a new, and sometimes just a renewed, set of values which come to define them as soldiers. The Army is a society within a society. What is it that unites soldiers across lines of race, gender, religion, politics, class, and sexual orientation?

Soldiers are products of the soci-

ety from which they are drawn, but at the same time different, adhering to a more rigid code with more meager economic reward. Soldiers work for a more symbolic kind of recognition rather than monetary enhancement.

Soldiers have a temperament of their own, one that is described illuminatingly by John Keegan. "As those who know soldiers as members of a military society recognize, such a society has a culture of its own akin to but different from the larger culture to which it belongs, operating by a different system of punishments and rewards—the punishments more pemptory, the rewards less monetary, often, indeed, purely symbolic or emotional—but deeply satisfying to its adherents. I am tempted, after a lifetime's acquaintance with the British Army, to argue that some men can be nothing but soldiers. ...The warrior hero is admired by both sexes for running real risks; but the man of soldierly temperament—how blinkered social scientists are to the importance of temperament—will run risks whether admired by the outside world or not. It is the admiration of other soldiers that satisfies him—if he can win it; most soldiers are satisfied merely by the company of others, by a shared contempt for a softer world, by the liberation from narrow materiality brought by the camp and the line of march, by the rough comforts of the bivouac, by competition in endurance, by the prospect of *le repos du guerrier* among their waiting womenfolk."¹¹

If there are a distinct tradition and identifiable values within the U.S. Army, there are also traditions within the branches and corps of the Army. When one looks at some of the his-

tory of military intelligence within the U.S. Army, some patterns emerge and some values coalesce. I believe it is worthwhile to examine history to find some clues as to what it means to be a member of the military intelligence corps.

¹ Reardon, Carol, *Soldiers and Scholars: The U.S. Army and the Uses of Military History, 1865-1920*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 1990, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁶ Van Creveld, *Command in War*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985, p. 15.

⁷ Quoted in Atkinson, Rick, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War*, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 1993, p. 171.

⁸ Middleton, Drew, *The Crossroads of Modern Warfare*, Doubleday, New York, 1983, p. 164.

⁹ Quoted in Atkinson, p. 223.

¹⁰ "The military virtues are...: *subordination of the good of the self to the good of the nation and military unit, courage, obedience, loyalty, integrity.* ...Integrity is the foundation virtue for military leaders if they wish to successfully develop loyalty and obedience in their subordinates. But of their functional necessity; success in battle is impossible without them; preparation for battle requires their inculcation. Please note that these moral virtues are not merely "nice to have," they are functional imperatives in the military profession." Makin, Malham M., "Ethics of Leadership," in Taylor, Robert L., and Rosenbach, William E., editors, *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, Westview Press, New York, 1984, p. 56.

¹¹ Keegan, John, *A History of Warfare*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1993, p. 226.

