

An Approach to The Study Of Military History



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SINCE military history covers vast areas, both topically and chronologically, the student who would enter the field has a wide range of choice. The study of Alexander the Great, for instance, still offers relevant insights into the exercise of power—military, economic, and political—at the highest level; and a good biography of King Gustavus Adolphus of seventeenth-century Sweden offers a case history in the application of theory to the problems of reorganizing a military system. Frederick the Great tells us in his own words of tactical genius and the training of eighteenth-century soldiers. Napoleon Bonaparte has filled many bookstore shelves both directly through his memoirs and maxims and indirectly through a mass of idolizing and scathing biographies. From Napoleon the student can learn of generalship and in the process appreciate the crushing burden and responsibility of supreme command; he can better understand the military problems of maintaining an empire won by the sword and the limits of military power in suppressing newly aroused nationalism.

Military history includes biography, fiction, battle narratives, memoirs, theoretical treatises, scientific discourses, philosophy, economic studies—and more. Studying the subject can be somewhat like shopping in a used book store where the books are stacked on many different shelves. If one enters with no idea of what he is looking for, chances are he will leave unsatisfied. But if he enters with some general ideas of what he is seeking, as well as ability to recognize valuable items not presently on his “want list,” then the venture will be rewarding.

The study of history is not a great search for details in the pages of dusty books; it involves the discovery of knowledge in the broader sense and the enrichment of the intellect. Military history is history first and military second. Methods of studying it are invariably tied to individual goals and individual concepts

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of what military history is. If directed to prepare a list of the ten most important books of military history, ten different persons would probably draw up ten different lists, each list representing its compiler's values, priorities, and biases, although some titles would appear on more than one list. In using this *Guide* and its extensive book lists, the reader must decide what he is seeking and frame questions to be asked while reading, questions that will deter aimless wandering.

The skills needed to investigate the many dimensions of military history can be tailored to one's concept of the nature of history. The study of military history can be rewarding and exciting, but it can become drudgery if pursued in a methodical but plodding way. Students have a tendency to equate the study of history with the commitment to memory of facts that can be returned to the instructor at examination time little the worse for wear.¹ We are not concerned with this type of historical study. Allan Nevins, one of the most noted American historians, counsels:

There is but one golden rule in reading history: it should be read by the blazing illumination of a thoroughly aroused intellectual curiosity. . . . A self-stimulated interest, one based upon a fixed ambition to master some select period of history, and to do it by systematic, intensive reading, is of course far more valuable. It represents a steady disciplined impulse, not a transient appetite.²

Essentials of a Study Program

Military history should be studied in width, depth, and, most importantly, in context. In this way, according to Professor Michael Howard, "the study of military history should not only enable the civilian to understand the nature of war and its part in shaping society, but also directly improve the officer's competence in his profession." Reading with a purpose to gain a better understanding of the nature of war and the practice of warfare sharpens the intellect and develops perspective to face current problems in an informed manner as well as to plan for the future. But "history has limitations as a *guiding signpost*," said Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart, "for although it can show us the right direction, it does not give detailed information about the road condition."

1. This idea was paraphrased from Carl L. Becker's imaginative essay, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in *Everyman His Own Historian* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966).

2. Allan Nevins, *The Gateway to History* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1938), pp. 365-66.

Bertrand Russell also offers some advice that is pertinent to the problem of beginning a study program:³

If history is not necessary to your career, there is no point in reading it unless you enjoy it and find it interesting. I do not mean that the only point of history is to give pleasure—far from it. It has many other uses. . . . But it will not have these uses except for those that enjoy it. The same is true of such things as music and painting and poetry. To study these things either because you must, or because you wish to be cultured, makes it almost impossible to acquire what they have to offer.

Formal graduate training in military history is obviously one way to launch a long, rewarding career of continued study. There are many opportunities to pursue graduate studies in the service, all clearly spelled out in current regulations. You can complete an unfinished degree with Army financial assistance which provides for full-time study as you near graduation. And the Army will share the cost of your gradually accumulating the necessary course work for an advanced degree. You may combine duty as an instructor and formal study in a nearby graduate institution. As long as continued educational development remains a goal in the Army, there will be opportunities for anyone with the determination to take advantage of them.

Academic study is not the only way. Another is self-instruction through reading. It would be difficult if not impossible for anyone to construct a single reading list that would fit all the needs of students whose interests are necessarily diverse; a more fruitful approach is to develop a set of questions around which a reading program may be built. The student must develop his own questions to reflect his goals, values, and personal interests.

How can you formulate that basic list of questions and themes that will govern your reading program? You will discover questions as you read, but, by way of suggestion, some of the fundamental questions involve:

- The formation of armies (militia, conscript, volunteer, mercenary)
- Explaining why armies fight (religion, dynastic interests, nationalism, ideology, discipline)
- Assessing how armies fight (shock tactics, firepower, linear tactics, employment of masses, mobility, position warfare)

3. Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 107 (1962):4-10. Liddell Hart, *Why Don't We Learn From History?* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), p. 15. Bertrand Russell, *Understanding History* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), pp. 9-10.

—Investigation of the relationships between the armed forces (naval defense, the army as the first line of defense, geographic position of the state)

—Who directs the employment of the armed forces (soldier king, chief executive, commanding general, general staff, legislature)

—How armies are sustained (logistics, technology, morale, national style, industrial power)

—How wars are ended (exhaustion, negotiated settlement, surrender, destruction)

The ingredients of battle have prompted many soldiers and civilians to write extensively about how combat power is applied on the battlefield; tactics, training, doctrine, and generalship are frequently the subjects of these examinations. The men who wage war—commanders, statesmen, soldiers, guerrillas—are natural subjects of investigation to one interested in gaining a better understanding of war. The general has attracted much attention as the focal point of battlefield activity.

Each period of history has something to offer. Try to determine what is distinctive about the military history of a given period. You might ask, for example, if warfare as practiced by Napoleon's *Grande Armée* was different from warfare in the time of Frederick the Great? Certainly. Armies were larger, battlefields had expanded into theaters of war, logistics became more complex, and the French soldier was part of a more flexible army because he could be trusted not to desert. Frederick's army was dynastic, mercenary, expensive, and effective. Then you might ask what about the Napoleonic period is relevant to military affairs today? The idea is not to apply Napoleonic solutions to our current problems but to try to fathom how Napoleon approached his problems, say with conscription and recruitment, and then armed with new perspective tackle our own problems. History is not an exact science governed by rules, theorems, postulates, and principles. Liddell Hart "always tried to take a projection from the past through the present into the future" in his study of military problems.⁴ Sometimes the lens through which we view the past gets a little out of adjustment, distorting the image, but our improved understanding and sharpened perspective can help rectify that.

What nonmilitary factors have affected the course of warfare over the ages? How is the decision to go to war arrived at? Frederick the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte had less of a

4. *Why Don't We Learn From History?*, p. 16.

problem in deciding for war than did President Lincoln or President Franklin Roosevelt; in an autocracy the autocrat has powers of decision unchecked by democratic processes. Yet all four men were very sensitive to the opinions of others; in Frederick's case, the concern was for other monarchs, not the Prussian people.

Finance and economics have frequently played important roles in warfare. Frederick depended on British financing during the Seven Years' War. Napoleon understood that economic power can be a successful adjunct to raw military power, but he also appreciated that without a navy it would not be possible to strike directly at Britain's mercantile power. The Continental System employed a type of boycott designed to seal off the European continent and deny markets to British goods. The plan had flaws, but it did squeeze the merchants in mighty Albion.

Political and social factors also play an important role in warfare. Frederick was careful to promote discord among his potential enemies. In the American Civil War, Lincoln played his powerful trump card, the emancipation of Negro slaves in the Southern states, at the propitious moment to enlist support for the Northern cause both at home and abroad. The Emancipation Proclamation was a military instrument, argues John Hope Franklin, that the president wielded only after he had gained a seeming victory at Antietam in September 1862.⁵ The assumption of victory disarmed the argument that the slaves were freed as an act of desperation and so helped to sway opinion in England against intervention on the side of the South. In World War II, Roosevelt used the fervor generated by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor to carry through full mobilization for war.

Reading biographies of leading soldiers or statesmen is a good way to begin the study of military history. Examination of leadership during periods of great stress and crisis may well be a springboard to a satisfying reading program. A study of Franklin D. Roosevelt as war leader, for instance, can lead to an exploration of most of the aspects of modern war—leadership, political and military; decision making, personal and institutional; mobilization and war production; censorship and propaganda; diplomacy and national strategy. Such a study also illustrates the variety of approaches and interpretations different historians may use in dealing with a strong leader's actions.

5. John Hope Franklin, *The Emancipation Proclamation* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1965), pp. 129-46.

Examining Roosevelt's part in the coming of war, Charles A. Beard found in 1948 that "At this point in its history the American Republic has arrived under the theory that the President of the United States possesses limitless authority publicly to misrepresent and secretly to control foreign policy, foreign affairs, and the war power." Examining the evolution of American strategy, Maurice Matloff emphasized the different point, that the military planners "had also learned that whatever their theories and plans, they would have to reckon with an active and forceful Commander-in-Chief bent on pursuing his own course".⁶

Although the president's biographer, James MacGregor Burns, seems to agree with this interpretation, he argues that Roosevelt as war leader was intent on immediate tactical moves during the first years of the war rather than on grand strategy. "Roosevelt's utter concentration on the task at hand—winning military victory—raised difficult problems, just as his absorption with winning elections at whatever cost had created difficulties during the peace years." Herbert Feis, on the other hand, finds the president not so capricious as often painted in his decision to support unconditional surrender as the basic Allied war aim. The decision, he says, was not made on the spur of the moment at the Casablanca press conference of 24 January 1943 but was "preceded by discussion." Even though he may have acted on impulse in selecting that particular moment to make the announcement, "the record shows plainly that the idea of doing so had been in his mind for some time."⁷ All these interpretations of Roosevelt's actions are not necessarily incompatible; they simply illustrate the many facets of his wartime leadership and the ways in which historians look at them.

Even in very narrow fields of historical study it is now almost impossible to roam through all the available literature in pursuit of your objectives. As far back as 1879, in delivering his inaugural address to the Military Service Institution of the United States, Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield alluded to the information explosion which has continually complicated the labor of the military student.⁸ The proliferation of literature has increased many times since General Schofield made his obser-

6. Charles A. Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941: A Study in Appearances and Realities* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1948), p. 398. Maurice Matloff, "The American Approach to War, 1919-1945," in *The Theory and Practice of War*, ed. Michael Howard (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 236.

7. James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), pp. 459-64. Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 109-10.

8. *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* 1 (1880):8.

vation. It may be necessary to revise your questions and your reading program periodically, both to meet your needs, which certainly may change, and to accommodate the new literature in your field of interest.

The best way to keep your program current is to consult some of the many scholarly historical periodicals such as the *American Historical Review*, the *Journal of Modern History*, and the *Journal of American History*.⁹ There are also specialized periodicals such as *Choice* and *Perspective* that are devoted almost entirely to short reviews of the most recent publications. Many weekly newspapers carry book reviews. The *New York Times* provides the Sunday reader with a large selection of reviews and the *Times Literary Supplement* (London—frequently called the *TLS*) even reviews scholarly foreign-language books. There are scores of magazines such as *American History Illustrated* and *History Today* (Great Britain) that you can scan to keep current. *Foreign Affairs* has a handy list of available documents and monographs on a variety of subjects in addition to the useful book review section. The Superintendent of Documents in Washington, D.C., can provide a list of publications available from the U.S. Government Printing Office. It is apparent that the many references available to update your reading program may in themselves be something of an obstacle; you cannot consult all of them.

The Mechanics of Study

Although it is more difficult to describe the mechanics of successful study than to raise questions, there are simple ways of organizing an approach to studying some of the fundamental questions. Ten years ago cadets at the U.S. Military Academy were taught to organize their study of military history around the ubiquitous “principles of war.” Many decades of teaching practices had led to that method. A broader concept of military history now forms the basis of study at West Point; cadets organize their inquiries by the device known as the threads of continuity. The ten “threads” presently in use are as follows:

Military theory and doctrine—ideas about war; a generally accepted body of ideas and practices that governs an army's organization, training, and fighting

9. For a list of the main scholarly historical journals, see Appendix B. Practically all these journals devote space to book reviews.

Military professionalism—an attitude or state of mind distinguishing the expert from the amateur. The military professional is an expert in the management of violence and is characterized by his sense of responsibility to his men and to the state.

Generalship—the art of command at high levels. Generalship includes both leadership and management (but neither word is a synonym) and many diverse functions involving preparation for combat, supervision during combat, and administration and maintenance of combat strength.

Strategy—the preparation for war and the waging of war; getting to the battlefield as opposed to action on the battlefield. Strategy is a changing concept now generally divided into national (or grand) strategy and military strategy (a component of national strategy).

Tactics—the preparation for combat and the actual conduct of combat on the battlefield

Logistics and Administration—defines the relationship between the state's economic capacity and its ability to support military forces

Technology—in a military sense, the application of science to war. Technology includes not only new ideas, techniques, and equipment but also their application.

Political factors—those characteristic elements or actions of governments affecting warfare

Social factors—those elements affecting warfare that result from human relationships

Economic factors—those elements affecting warfare that result from the production, distribution, and consumption of the resources of the state

Portraying history as a "seamless web" or a "tapestry of man's past" with the woven strands representing the major themes is a commonplace.¹⁰ The threads of continuity have no inherent worth; they function merely as ways to get at information or as that lens used by Liddell Hart to place events in perspective. By examining a portion of the changing nature of war or warfare, for example tactics, over a specific period of time such as 1850 to 1950, one can expect to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of the whole. The ten threads of continuity are not necessarily definitive or final, but they are a useful means of organizing the study of military history.

10. See the comments of Bruce Mazlish, general editor of the Macmillan series, *Main Themes in European History*, in the foreword to Heinz Lutzbasz, *The Development of the Modern State* [New York: Macmillan, 1964], p. v.

By the same token, the principles of war still have some utility, but now as part of the military theory and doctrine thread of continuity. Since the purpose of our study of military history is not to search out examples of the valid application of the principles of war and demonstrate that failure generally stemmed from ignorance of or unwillingness to abide by them, we can restore the principles to their proper historical position. Principles of one sort or another have been alluded to by most theorists and successful commanders. There must be some rules, however general, that will allow man to cope with war. Or so thought General J. F. C. Fuller when, from his study of Napoleonic warfare, he constructed the list of principles of war American soldiers now generally recognize. Rear Adm. Joseph C. Wylie describes the principles as "an attempt to rationalize and categorize common sense." As long as a "principle of war" remains a tool and does not become a maxim to be demonstrated as immutable the student can proceed with confidence. Neither the threads of continuity nor the principles of war—or any conceptual device for that matter—can substitute for an intelligent and discriminating search to gain understanding of the past.¹¹

Somewhere in your study you will want to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a particular military system, the wisdom of a particular strategic decision, or the generalship in a particular campaign, in short to render critical judgment on military history. Military men are trained to do just that, to solve problems by rational analysis and then choose the best course of action. It is through this process that they use history in formulating doctrine. But recognize that there is a difference between the military historian and the military critic, as the noted German military historian, Hans Delbrück, points out. Ideally the historian is concerned with describing events as accurately as possible in proper sequence and with cause and effect relationships in those events, not with personal judgments on the leading characters. The latter is the province of the military critic. Delbrück made this distinction, Peter Paret explains, not to "impute greater value to one or the other, but to

11. Jay Luvaas, *The Education of An Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 338 (for a discussion of Fuller's ideas); Joseph C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 21. For some other thoughts on the utility of the principles of war see Cmdr. Bruce Kenner, III, "The Principles of War: A Thesis for Change," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 93 (Nov. 1967):27-36; James A. Huston, "Re-examine the Principles of War," *Military Review* 35 (Feb. 1956):30-36; and Maurice Matloff, gen. ed., *American Military History* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), pp. 4-13.

establish meaningful standards for both."¹² And the distinction is valid, even though Delbrück's own works reflect much personal judgment, praise, and condemnation, as do those of many other noted military historians who double as critics.

Military men do need to prepare themselves to be critics and, when called upon, to use judgment sharpened by historical study in formulating Army doctrine. This preparation is clearly one of the uses of military history. But for the student of history to judge past activities and decisions by present standards or to assign praise or condemnation to acts of leadership in combat may result in distortion and injustice. "What is the object of history?" asked Liddell Hart. And his reply to his own rhetorical question was "quite simply, 'truth'."¹³ The student of military history should first seek the truth and then base his critical judgments upon it, recognizing that in the latter process he is acting as military critic and not as military historian.

Because the pursuit of military history involves extensive reading, it is worthwhile to cultivate good reading habits. There are many good primers on the subject. *How to Study History* by Norman F. Cantor and Richard I. Schneider is a good starting point. *The Modern Researcher*, revised edition, by Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1957), and *Understanding History*, second edition, by Louis Gottschalk (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1969) are useful introductions to the historical method. Helen J. Poulton's *The Historian's Handbook: A Descriptive Guide to Reference Works* is indispensable. B. H. Liddell Hart's *Why Don't We Learn From History?* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946) provides insight into the method of one of the great modern strategic theorists. For a provocative examination of the historical method in very readable and entertaining style see J. H. Hexter's *The History Primer*.

Oliver L. Spaulding's advice on how to evaluate books on military history, given in a lecture in 1922 and summarized in an Army pamphlet, is still basically sound. Spaulding stressed the value of book reviews and the use of title page, preface, index, table of contents, and bibliography as clues to the coverage of volumes, the credentials of their authors, and their value to the prospective reader. "A systematic use of book reviews and of the clues . . . will lead to the discard of many books and will direct the student's attention to the particular parts of those he wishes

12. Peter Paret. "Hans Delbrück on Military Critics and Military Historians," *Military Affairs* 30 (Fall 1986):149.

13. Liddell Hart, *Why Don't We Learn From History?* p. 15.

to study."¹⁴ The ineffective way to read is to plunge in at the beginning and not stop until you reach the objective which lies near the index. There never is enough time to turn this method into an efficient one, but the opposite—scanning the entire work—is as ineffective. You must identify the significant parts of the book and concentrate on detecting, then understanding, the author's theses. Ask your own questions of the book, or no relevant answers will be forthcoming. What the author is trying to convince you of is not nearly so important as what his material and point of view mean to you.

Where does one start with a reading program? Your interest has undoubtedly been stimulated by reading newspapers and magazines. For example, *London Daily Express* and *New York Daily News* articles on Martin Bormann renewed public interest in the final days of World War II when Berlin fell to the Soviet Army. There is a great deal of published material on that subject, as a quick check of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, the *New York Times* index, and any library's general card catalog will reveal. If you find Bormann interesting, you might select the most recent article from the *Reader's Guide*. The documentation (footnotes, bibliography, text references) in the article will lead to other sources.

After you have selected your book or article, read for the author's thesis and mentally note his documentation. One way to keep track of what you have read is to start a card file. Enter the author's full name, complete title of the book, place of publication, publisher, and date of publication near the top of the card. Note the number of pages and comments on any unusual features of the book such as particularly well-made maps. Briefly summarize in a sentence or two the topic of the book and the author's thesis. List your own impressions of the book with respect to your areas of interest. If the author is not familiar to you, make a biographical note. Finally, indicate where you located the book and include the library call number. This process sounds tedious, but it will pay off when you discover the limitations of your memory. Identifying the author's thesis will help in evaluating each piece you read.

Along with a framework for study, such as the threads of continuity, and a method of keeping track of what you have read, some suggestions regarding study techniques are in order. Responsible criticism is one way of testing your grasp of the

14. DA Pamphlet 2-200. *The Writing of American Military History: A Guide* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1956), p. 17-18.

material you study. As military critic you are taking that step beyond merely understanding what happened and why it happened; judgment and assessment of accomplishments and errors are useful to the man interested in sharpening his perspective. Campaign and battle analysis can be conducted mentally only or in a written essay. There are different ways of organizing the analysis, some of which are familiar to any student of warfare. The commander's estimate of the situation is a good format. Ask then answer the questions: (1) who was involved? (2) what happened? (3) when did it happen? (4) where did it happen? (5) how did the action develop? (6) why did things progress as they did? and (7) what was the significance of the action? This will generally lead you systematically through the action.

Another way of making a campaign analysis is the narrative technique, which can be organized in the following fashion:

—Evaluation of the strategic situation (period of history; war; international adversaries; principal events leading up to the battle, campaign, or conflict analyzed)

—Review of the tactical setting (location; any terrain advantages held by either antagonist; approximate force ratios; types of forces if relevant; feasible courses of action available to antagonist)

—List of other factors affecting the event (effects of terrain or weather; special advantages or disadvantages possessed by antagonists)

—Synopsis of the conduct of the event (opening moves; salient features; outcome)

—Statement of the historical lessons provided by the event

—Assessment of the significance of the event

The following analysis of the battle of Gaugamela, in which Alexander the Great defeated the Persian army in 331 B.C., illustrates the narrative format.

Strategic setting: Having secured the eastern Mediterranean with the victory at Issus and the successful siege of Tyre, Alexander marched his army eastward into the heart of the Persian Empire. Darius III was drawn into a decisive battle at Gaugamela in the spring of 331 B.C.

Tactical setting: Darius placed his troops on a broad plain and employed chariots with his infantry. Although the terrain favored neither side, the more numerous Persians extended far beyond the Macedonian flanks. Darius attacked forcing Alexander to react. Expecting a Persian envelopment, Alexander had deployed his army to refuse his flanks and to provide all around

security. The main striking force was positioned to exploit any gaps that might open in the advancing Persian front.

Other factors: Alexander had scouted the battlefield. The Macedonians were rested; the Persians, perhaps less confident, had remained awake through the night. Weather had no significant effect on the battle. Darius apparently had planned to attack all along the line with no provision to exploit weaknesses in the Macedonian formation.

Conduct of the battle: The Persian army closed with a chariot and cavalry charge. The Macedonians inclined to their right in oblique order and, as the Persians followed, a gap opened near the Persian left. Seizing the opportunity, Alexander drove a wedge of Companion cavalry into the breach and dispersed the Persian infantry. King Darius fled the battlefield close behind them. The Persian cavalry had enveloped the Macedonian left, but Alexander reinforced. The flight of the Persian infantry soon spread to the cavalry and a general retreat began. Alexander relentlessly pursued the remnants of the Persian force through the night, effectively destroying Darius's army.

Lessons: Alexander calculated that the Persian formation would break apart as it attacked and therefore was justified in surrendering the tactical initiative by standing on the defensive. Carefully weighing the terrain conditions, the experience of his army, and the disparity in leadership, Alexander took a calculated risk to offset the advantage in numbers enjoyed by the Persians. The Macedonian commander regained the initiative at the critical point in the battle and exploited the advantage he had created.

Significance: The professional Macedonian army was equal to the difficult task planned by its bold commander. Alexander's decisive victory assured his conquest of the Persian Empire. The Macedonian treasury was swelled with thousands of talents of gold and the palace of Xerxes in Persepolis was burnt. Further consolidation and expansion to India provided more territory to be divided at Alexander's death in 323 B.C. The Persian threat to the Hellenic world was eliminated.

Certainly not every analysis needs to be written. As you study battles, campaigns and wars, thoughtful mental analyses will deepen your understanding of cause and effect in war and will provide a better appreciation of the role of chance or friction. As a military critic you can probe the apparent errors made during the event in order to render your considered judgment and to identify those lessons that have meaning for you. Similarly, you may identify actions that had a positive influence on the outcome

of the event. General Sir Edward Bruce Hamley saw his writings as enabling students to study military history "with the confidence of one who does not grope and guess, but surveys and judges."¹⁵

Analyses can also be organized around the critical decisions made during the course of events under examination. The important thing to remember in making a historical analysis is to organize your investigative process in an orderly fashion and then explore the subject in depth. Regardless of format, the questions you ask yourself are of utmost value. Absorbing information is not your goal, but it is an essential element of your study. Understanding is a legitimate goal of historical study; it is also a personal achievement which comes through hard work. Although there is a need to be systematic, study should not become an overburdening routine, a chore to be accomplished. Seek diversity in your reading and avoid boredom.

Evaluating different versions of historical events and decisions is one of the first hurdles you must clear in your reading. People write books for definite reasons—to inform, to entertain, to chastise, or even to precipitate a desired action by the reader. The reader must evaluate the author's reliability, how well the author supports his thesis with evidence and examples. In this way he can determine whether the book is honestly drawn. As Robin W. Winks observed, "the truth ought to matter."¹⁶

Physical evidence can be found in places other than books; for example, a Civil War battlefield still holds much information for a student of that conflict. Most of us have made the "tourist sweep" of our National Park Service battlefields, but it is a far different experience to stand on the high ground one hundred yards north of the Bloody Lane at Antietam and look back at the muzzles of the Confederate battery in firing positions above the lane. Lieutenant Thomas L. Livermore of the 5th New Hampshire, which was in line as part of Maj. Gen. Israel Bush Richardson's 1st Division, II U.S. Corps, observed, "in this road there lay so many dead rebels that they formed a line which one might have walked upon as far as I could see. . . . It was on this ghastly flooring that we kneeled for the last struggle."¹⁷

15. Quoted by Jay Luvaas in *Education of an Army*, p. 140. For further information on Alexander's wars of conquest see Chester G. Starr, *A History of the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), Chap. 19; J. F. C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Alexander the Great* (New York: Minerva Press, 1968); F. E. Adcock, *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1962); and J. F. C. Fuller, *A Military History of The Western World*, 3 vols. (New York: Minerva Press, 1967), 1:140.

16. Robin W. Winks, ed., *The Historian As Detective: Essays on Evidence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. xiv.

General John M. Schofield in 1899 saw the great object of historical study as "to reduce the 'chances' of war to the minimum; to bring it as nearly as possible within the domain of exact science; . . . to learn how to rapidly organize, equip, discipline, and handle new troops, and then to judge correctly what enterprises may be undertaken with a reasonable expectation of success."¹⁶ Schofield concluded that the great value of study of this sort was the cultivation of a habit of thought which tempered hasty decisions and insured proper preliminary plans essential to effective orders. Military history is normally not utilitarian in a direct way. Eighteenth-century Austrian armies were molded in the Prussian image without the understanding that a Frederician system required a Frederick. Armies marched into Belgium and France in 1914 expecting another short war of maneuver culminating in a decisive battle as in 1870. The realities of modern war and faulty strategy soon matured in the trenches.

But if you approach the study of the past with an attitude of growing wise forever rather than clever for the next time, there is a use for history. In battle, as elsewhere, great courage should be attended by sound intellect honed through study. The method you develop must be tied to your conception of military history.

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17. Livermore's story is one of the many contained in Henry Steele Commager, ed., *The Blue and the Gray* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950) Livermore is introduced as a member of the 18th New Hampshire Regiment; but Commager does not tell us that Livermore finished his military career as colonel of the 18th, but fought with the 5th New Hampshire at Antietam—the 18th was not there. Colonel Edward E. Cross, commanding the 5th New Hampshire at Antietam, cited Livermore in his report of 18 September 1862. This document can be found in U.S., War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. 19, Pt. 1, p. 288. Using Commager's end notes, Thomas Livermore's recollections of Civil War service, *Days and Events, 1860-1866* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), can be located and used to corroborate and expand the small selection provided in *The Blue and the Gray*.

18. "Inaugural Address," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* 1 (1880):9-10.

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