

## NOTES

1. Some instant accounts are better than others. Some, such as Williamson Murray and Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Robert H. Scales Jr., *The Iraq War: A Military History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), which received heavy official sponsorship and can almost be considered an "official" product, are published in such a hurry after a conflict that they are little more than quick analyses of a handful of senior leaders (not very objective sources) blended with journalists' accounts and are often short through with the most elementary of military errors. These are not histories at all, even if the word "history" appears in the title, but are just expanded, somewhat more knowledgeable, accounts of subject matter experts trying their hand at being semi-official reporters.

2. Upon his return from Somalia, Lt. Gen. Thomas Montgomery, who had commanded U.S. forces in that country, assembled a team of writers and participants to prepare an after-action report and summary of lessons learned in Somalia. The report was so sensitive, however, that it was classified secret and not released, and rumors of Clinton administration pressure to keep it under wraps. With no official report, it took a journalist to write a later instant analysis (more of a novel) on some of the dramatic aspects of the mission to Somalia. This book, however, was not officially sponsored and did not place the events in context. *The United States Army in Somalia, 1992-1994*, a pamphlet published by the Center of Military History in time for the ten-year anniversary of the intervention, tried to place the events in context. The Center printed an unclassified version of the Somalia after-action report at the same time. Somalia is an orphan.\*

3. While one can rightly argue that many of the first volumes of the official U.S. Army history of World War II did not take a generation to be published, the circumstances of the time made such a sequence possible. Not only did the Army devote to the project huge amounts of financial and personnel resources (records managers, historians, clerks, etc.), but the excellent records preparation, collection, retention, and declassification also created an ideal situation. Neither the resources nor the records are available to begin writing official histories of current operations so quickly today.

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### Center Publishes Annual Army Historical Program and Directory

The Center of Military History is publishing the *Army Historical Program, Fiscal Year 2006*. This document reports the activities of the Center and other Army elements with substantial historical programs; lists works published, in progress, and projected; and presents Army Museum System statistics. It is anticipated that this publication will appear in December 2005. The Center will also publish an *Army Historical Directory, 2006*, listing the names, business addresses, and other contact information about Army historians and others associated with Army historical work. It is anticipated that the new directory will appear in January 2006. These publications will be distributed widely within the Army historical community; staffers who deal with the Army historical program may request additional copies from R. Cody Phillips by phone at 202-685-2624 or by email at [phillr@hqda.army.mil](mailto:phillr@hqda.army.mil).

### Commercial Presses Publish Work of Army Historians

Westholme Publishing has issued *Year of the Hangman: George Washington's Campaign against the Iroquois* by Glenn F. Williams. The author has been a historian at the Center of Military History since June 2004. The book describes the

4. *Certain Victory* does not compare unfavorably, however, with the Center of Military History's own instant history of the Gulf War, *The Desert Storm: The United States Army in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, edited by Frank N. Schubert and Theresa L. Kraus, which was published in June 1995. The Center's product was somewhat more objective and analytical but less rich in detail and not published as quickly. In its defense, the book apparently was written even more quickly than *Certain Victory* but because it was not viewed as as positive a light by the Army hierarchy, it took longer to get permission to publish it. It too is a "bridging the gap" type of study meant to satisfy the Army's interest in what happened before the definitive official history, or histories, could be written.

5. A study produced in 1992 by the Army Special Operations Command history office on Army special operations forces in Operations *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm* has still not been published, in part because of security concerns about the use of the real names of the participants. The Army Special Operations Command history office plans to compile for those with the appropriate clearances a classified version of *Wagon of Choice* containing the names and real history sources omitted from the published version.

6. The Center's own brief essay on events in late 2001 and early 2002 is a pamphlet entitled *The U.S. Army in Afghanistan, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, October 2001-March 2002*, written by the author of this review essay. A former Army Special Operations Command historian, he had traveled to Afghanistan under the auspices of the joint U.S. Special Operations Command as the historian for Task Force Dagger. Even though the pamphlet tries to summarize events from an Army and not just a special operations perspective, it too focuses heavily on TF DAGGER, the source of most of the author's data, with an assist from some material from 10th Mountain Division. It avoids the identification and clearance problems by mentioning few names of special operations soldiers. It is little more than an introduction to the events and admittedly only whets the appetite of the reader. The author cannot claim it to be an official history in the full sense of the word.

course of the Revolutionary War in the Iroquois country of western New York through 1779. The Naval Institute Press has issued two books to which John T. Greenwood contributed. Greenwood is chief of the Office of Medical History at the U.S. Army Medical Command. He and F. Clifton Berry Jr. are coauthors of *Medics at War: Military Medicine from Colonial Times to the 21st Century*, an illustrated survey history of U.S. military medicine from the Revolutionary War to the present. Greenwood also oversaw the preparation of *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West*, an English translation of *Blitzkrieg-Legende. Der Westfeldzug 1940*, by Karl-Heinz Frieser. This book was initially published in Munich, Germany, in 1995. The Association of the U.S. Army sponsored the publication of these two books by the Naval Institute Press. Greenwood's work on *The Blitzkrieg Legend* began at the Center of Military History in 1996, when he was chief of the Center's Field Programs and Historical Services Division.

### Army Museum Director Authors New Books

Roger S. Dunham, director of the Army Heritage Museum at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, has written *High Seas and Yankee Gunboats: A Blockade-Running Adventure from the Diary of James Dickson* (University of South Carolina Press, 2005). He also compiled the book on Fort McAllister, Georgia, that appeared in 2004 in the Images of America series issued by Arcadia Press.

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the evolving nation-states, even their democratic variants, such wartime restrictions seemed sensible, especially when national survival was at stake. However, as the line between war and peace became increasingly blurred after 1945, the practice of restricting public information broadened in both scope and duration, threatening at times to limit the understanding of government actions that is vital to a healthy democratic process.

The gradual fusion of military and commercial technologies in the modern industrial state has further encouraged such tendencies. More ominous still has been the politicization of both the release of such information and its historical use. National institutions, private entities of all sizes and political orientations, and individuals representing a broad variety of supporters have increasingly sought to use historical data to support a wide range of agendas. Indeed, since 1960 a new form of political correctness tending to impose on the academic world an ideology of opposition to government policies at home and abroad has increasingly rivaled the contrary biases that have sometimes infected official history products sponsored by governments seeking to put their actions in the best possible light.

A final ingredient in this porridge has been the professionalization of the military itself. The American Civil War may have been the last struggle dominated by such "Great Captains" as Robert E. Lee and Ulysses Grant, with their military genius subsequently replaced by the collective wisdom of the general staff. In truth, war had become too complex to be controlled by one man, be he a Frederick or a Napoleon, with the expansion of the battlefield, the creation of the "home front," and the profusion of military capabilities in terms of weapons and trained manpower, all necessitating a highly educated officer corps and soldiery. One result has been a new appreciation of the ability of history and its teaching tools, including staff rides and war games, to supplement practical experience, which in warfare tends to be both costly and intermittent, with military training and classroom instruction. To better train their officers, armies have demanded that their histories be accurate, balanced, and comprehensible, even suggesting a marriage, however rough, between the academic and military professions. Although the narrow world of tactical lessons learned cannot be compared to the causal analysis that constitutes the core and heartbeat of narrative history, the net effect of this new appreciation has been to more fully sensitize military leaders to historical change and to the historical relationships between their contemporary endeavors and the larger human environment in which they operate. Military historians have, in fact, been among the first to expand their horizons beyond the narrow confines of their discipline, tackling such subjects as institutional history and war economies and topics relating to race, gender, and ethnicity before such fields became fashionable elsewhere. On the debit side, the quest for immediate assistance has led the military to a preference for instant history before the entire documentary record can be gathered and adequately digested. Some military history writers, meanwhile, have thrived on the ties between the

## COMMENTARY

### The Care and Feeding of Contemporary History

By Jeffrey J. Clarke

Following the Second World War, the gradual rise of what some have called "instant history" has bedeviled decision-makers and analysts of current events—not to mention the historical profession itself. So compelling has been our thirst for understanding that we have tried to re-create key contemporary events almost as soon as they have occurred, mining them for their immediate significance and attempting to use them as a foundation for future action. In the rush for relevance, professional standards have often been discarded or ignored and causal relationships asserted with minimal factual evidence. Nowhere is this phenomenon more prevalent than in the realm of military history.

In the past, traditional military history focused on battles lost and won, both for their human drama and for their decisive influence on the course of history. Since about 1850, the telling of such events has followed a well-marked trail. Initial accounts have almost always been journalistic in nature, based on limited but contemporary observations of the battlefield and its vicinity. While accuracy has sometimes been problematic ("truth is the first casualty"), the attention paid to the more sensational aspects of these conflicts often captured the imagination of contemporaries and the curiosity of those that followed. The next historical generation was normally dominated by memoir literature as dutifully recalled by generals and corporals alike, who, in the telling often weaved the fanciful with the factual. Meanwhile, almost unseen, the less glamorous but hopefully objective documentary records of these clashes quietly made their way to staid government and private archival institutions, where they were sifted and sorted into comprehensible masses of source material. Finally, and often after many years had passed, professional historians—those with academic training or inclination employed either by government or private institutions—drew upon these archives to produce more factual and scholarly accounts, often ushering in a succession of interpretations and reinterpretations that might compete for many decades, depending on the richness and popularity of the material. Key elements underlying the entire process have been a reading public, an unfettered press, a commercial publishing industry, and a government bureaucracy with paperwork requirements designed to produce an institutional memory, as well as a historical profession dedicated to examining what its members considered the great questions of the times.

Several trends have tended to complicate this happy picture. Perhaps the most obvious has been the desire of governments to restrict the flow of military information in time of war. For

Army's "heritage," or the glorification of its positive historical experiences—no one in the Army speaks of America's heritage of resistance to the draft—and troop morale, and even the morale of the nation—state at war. In sum, the study of history—the examination and interpretation of things past—must still be guided by the warning *aveat empior*.

Government historians have often been afflicted by these trends. After World War II, the U.S. Army broke from its tradition of documentary history, producing the much acclaimed "Green Book" narratives that avoided the institutional biases plaguing earlier efforts abroad. While these detailed new studies generally lacked sophisticated analyses and refrained from discussing the character of individual military leaders, they relied for sources on official documents, many still classified; employed professional academic standards in their methodology; and were subjected to a rigorous system of peer review that saw draft manuscripts regularly savaged by both independent military and academic reviewers prior to publication. The authors assumed credit and responsibility for their work, and the products in no way reflected official government policy; a factor that alone appeared to ensure their legitimacy. The output of the history offices of the other services and many foreign governments joined to a greater or lesser extent in this pioneering effort, the products of which not only saw extensive use in the Army school system but also served as a foundation for many of the academic and commercially published interpretations that followed.

Yet, as each succeeding decade accelerated the problematic trends noted above, producing official military history that would meet such rigorous standards became increasingly difficult, if only because resources for such work remained scarce and the demand for more immediate, short-range historical products grew exponentially. Security restrictions became an even greater problem as classification authorities multiplied and their purview became increasingly compartmentalized. At the same time, greatly improved electronic communications worldwide enabled contemporary historical products to have more immediate political and social ramifications than anyone hitherto had thought possible, sometimes influencing not only public support—or non-support—for the military or the administration, but also the fates of the individual services and their components. In addition, many defense leaders and defense intellectuals—a category of history consumers that grew after World War II—looked to analyses, or histories, of current events to formulate or justify their own prescriptions regarding future security needs.

Not surprisingly, the contemporary potpourri of works produced by the U.S. Defense Department's greater historical community reflects many of the trends, developments, and influences noted above. For example, on the heels of the Persian Gulf War of 1991 almost all participants scrambled to put their stories before a greedy public. Rick Adkinson's *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston, 1993) was perhaps the best of the journalistic genre—the prose is superb and

the factual material fairly reliable—while the initial memoir accounts, seeking to capitalize on the commercial interest in the conflict, proved less illuminating. In the U.S. Defense Department arena, the Air Force initiated the effort with a huge project headed by Johns Hopkins University that drew upon significant service participation. Following the lead of the post-World War II 317-volume *United States Strategic Bombing Survey* (Washington, D.C., 1945–47), the five-volume *Gulf War Air Power Survey* (Washington, D.C., 1993) promised to validate the claims of contemporary air power advocates regarding the primacy of the air service on the modern battlefield, making extensive use of service documentation and oral histories. The results, however, were less than satisfactory for those who expected a paeon to the service's efforts rather than an objective analysis. Consequently, the tomes were published in an unattractive format, received limited distribution, were never reviewed in peer journals, and suffered from the omission of significant material contained only in a security-classified version. Neither version received the attention it deserves, for the survey contains a wealth of data that still needs to be mined, especially as the limits of air power in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq have become more evident, just as its new capabilities were showcased in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The Army made more diverse efforts to capture the "immediate history" of Operations DESERT STORM and DESERT SHIELD. The first project to be completed was the draft "Whirlwind War," assembled at the U.S. Army Center of Military History less than a year after the end of the liberation of Kuwait from contributions written by more than a dozen military and civilian Army historians. Based entirely on unclassified sources, it provided a good overview of the experience but little detail on controversies such as the decision not to deploy National Guard combat brigades, the level of effectiveness of Patriot missiles, and the larger command and control questions at the theater level. However, criticism within the Army over the limited credit for the operation's success given to certain high-ranking individuals nearly caused the entire project to be scrapped, and the manuscript was ultimately published only in 1995. Equally troubled was an account produced by the Army's Center for Lessons Learned, which was more technically and topically oriented rather than a true narrative history. Ultimately the project—which was grounded on rich sources of both documentary material and oral testimonies—was taken over by a special uniformed task force led by Brig. Gen. Robert H. Scales Jr. and the results published as *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans., 1993), accompanied by no less than three informational videos to boot. Given only a limited initial distribution—about 500 copies—the result was severely panned in *Joint Force Quarterly* for its "shameless self-promotion of Army doctrine and prowess" and for addressing few of the problems highlighted by the campaign.<sup>1</sup> The third attempt, Col. Richard M. Swain's *Lucky War: Third Army in Desert Storm* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans., 1994), also sponsored by the Center of Military History, fared much better, its title

reflecting the author's more critical approach. However, Swain's refusal to subject his draft to the Center's review process, while it may have speeded the publication process, did not enhance the book's quality. More disquieting overall was the fact that these last two books masqueraded to some extent as balanced, comprehensive histories—which they were not—and that all three were published almost simultaneously with the first memoir and book-length journalistic accounts and well in advance of the migration of official records to their archival resting places. A full sifting of those records remains to be accomplished.

The Army has now begun issuing historical accounts of operations undertaken in the aftermath of the attacks made against the United States on 11 September 2001. *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans., 2003), produced by the historical office of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, examines the military campaign in Afghanistan from September 2001 to May 2002. *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Washington, D.C., 2004), prepared by a team of three officers led by retired Col. Gregory Fontenot at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, showcases Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and the spring 2003 drive on Baghdad. Neither project was associated with the Center of Military History, neither addressed the more extensive and costly stabilization campaigns that followed; and neither managed to beat the accelerated outpouring of memoirs and journalistic accounts. But both used extensive collections and interviews and official records as primary sources and within the scope of their directives tried to be as critical and accurate as possible. The first, *Weapon of Choice*, bravely highlights the normally highly classified activities of U.S. special operations forces, which played a key role in the destruction of the Taliban regime, and details, as much as can be revealed, how that was done. The work is well written, well organized, and extremely heavily footnoted. The sources in fact are both its strength and its weakness, as they generally consist of either press releases or in the author's own words, "non-attributable sources." Both text and citations rely heavily on pseudonyms—made up names—with perhaps over one thousand sprinkled liberally throughout the work. Thankfully an unsanitized version with keys to the actual names of the participants and sources will be prepared and presumably will be released at some future date.

A different animal is *On Point*, representing an effort modeled after the earlier *Certain Victory*, but with a totally different outcome. Assembled by a group of three Army officers—two active and one retired—this instant history of the operation that overthrew the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq is jam-packed with detailed information on small tactical actions as well as the equally vital minutia relating to combat support and service support for the three-week endeavor. The extensive use of acronyms and the book's semi-topical organization make for hard reading at times, but if one wishes an explanation of such matters as "Blue Force Tracking" or the attack's "running start," this is the place to find it. Within its narrow scope, it is also extremely forthright in exposing problem areas and

shortcomings, leading the *New York Times* (3 February 2004, page A1) to trumpet a purportedly early draft as an internal report exposing all manner of military deficiencies.

Both histories illustrate the risks of trying to issue historical products too quickly without adequate time for study and analysis. Yet even the Army's Historical Advisory Committee, Weinberg and Jon Sumida, has consistently encouraged service history offices to publish more contemporary history, if only to ensure the relevance and survival of their programs. One solution to the dilemmas of instant history pursued by the Center of Military History has been the publication of shorter studies, campaign brochures providing a limited overview, chronology, and analysis of such ventures as the 1989 invasion of Panama (Operation JUST CAUSE), the Somalia intervention, and the Bosnian peacekeeping effort (Operations JOINT ENDEAVOR, JOINT GUARD, and JOINT FORGE). For Somalia, that short history, coupled with the Center's publication of a Somalia "source book," combining a chronology with a list of available oral histories, and the declassified version of the contemporary after-action report of the top American military headquarters in Somalia, seems wholly adequate until a more definitive account can be written. Meanwhile, works like *Black Hawk Down*—both Mark Bowden's 1999 book and the movie—do a good job of capturing some of the human flavor of the experience before it has dissipated. As more of the documentation has become available, the Army Historical Program's DESERT STORM coverage has continued with the publication of more specialized works like Janet A. McDonnell's *Supporting the Troops: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Persian Gulf War* (Alexandria, Va., 1996), Stephen P. Gehring's *From the Fulda Gap to Kuwait: U.S. Army, Europe, in the Gulf War* (Washington, D.C., 1998), Stephen Bourque's *Jayhawk: The VII Corps in the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, D.C., 2002), and Gordon W. Rudd's *Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, 1991* (Washington, D.C., 2004). But whatever the future holds, the old historiographical model of publication has clearly been ended, replaced by a more rambunctious and free-wheeling pattern whose course is shaped by a larger number of conflicting variables and a more interested and a better informed audience.

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## NOTE

1. Grant T. Hammond, "Desert Storm Warnings: A Book Review," *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 8 (Summer 1995), p. 129.