

# S O P D



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## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

This month's SOPD brings ten articles drawn from the literature on Professional Military Education (PME), and especially on the role and importance of military history in that process, specifically, and for the development of Army officers of all ranks, more generally.

Military history is, arguably, the oldest form of historical writing. Indeed, Thucydides, the Athenian general and participant-historian of the Peloponnesian Wars, is considered to be the father of the modern historical method and the *realpolitik* school of international relations. Generations of soldiers and commentators since have pointed to the importance of history in the development of officers, as Williamson Murray argues. More recently, as General Van Riper demonstrates with illustrations from his own career in the United States Marine Corps, Western militaries have sought to incorporate a close and detailed study of military history into their respective PME systems, sometimes fitfully.

Within the US system, the USMC has generally taken the lead in the extensive and sophisticated use of history at all levels of officer education. The record in Australia is more uneven, despite the attempts of the founding editor of the original *Australian Army Journal*, Colonel E.G. Keogh, from the 1940s onwards. Smallness of scale, and the less prominent place of military history in the university sector, helps to explain this, in part. So too does an emphasis in the Army's culture on the value of experience over 'book learning'. This emphasis is misplaced, as Frederick the Great pointed out. The Long War presents an increasingly complex operational, strategic and politico-cultural environment within which the ADF must operate, and Army can ill-afford to discount any weapon—physical or intellectual—that will assist it in completing its missions successfully. As General Van Riper reminds us, an officer's primary weapon remains his brain.

Enjoy  
The Editors

**Roger Spiller, 'Armies in History, History in Armies' in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds), *A Century of Service: 100 Years of the Australian Army*, The Chief of Army's Military History Conference, Army History Unit, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2001, pp. 1–11.**

Roger Spiller is the George C. Marshall Professor, Emeritus, of Military History at the US Army Command General Staff College, and author of *An Instinct for War: Scenes from the Battlefields of History*, first published in 2005 by Belknap Press with a new and revised edition due to be released in early 2007.

Spiller writes that, as part of a 'new, evolving general staff culture in the West,' military officers have come to serve as institutional historians. Official military history was considered as an integral component of the military's education and development processes, and in a much broader sense, it was seen as a kind of living memory—particularly within the institution itself. However, official military history is different from the study of military history. The former is work that is done for, and within, a military institution; the latter is not. In this essay, Spiller explores when the modern official military history and historians emerged and how it effected our way of thinking about the military as both an institution and profession.

He reminds us that history is seen through the lens of an individual, whose perspective of a particular event, at a particular point in time, is not only subject to their environment but also their convictions. This essay will interest anyone with a keen interest in official military history, especially those who have read or learned of B.H. Liddell Hart's 1959 essay entitled, 'Responsibility and Judgement in Historical Writing', which featured in the journal *Military Affairs*. Spiller focuses on evaluating Liddell Hart's assertion that historians, inadvertently or otherwise, stand in the way of truth. Some might find themselves 'subordinated to a *raison d'être* other than the pursuit of historical truth.' Although Liddell Hart was suspicious about all kinds of historians, his greatest criticism was saved for military historians who he believed provided 'the worst examples of suppression and distortion'.

Spiller concludes by emphasising that the practice of military history has changed considerably over the last twenty-five years or so. Most significant is how a military historian distinguishes themselves from other historians: by an additional responsibility—'the very intimate connection between thought and action.'

**Paul K. Van Riper, 'The relevance of history to the military profession: an American Marine's view' in W. Murray and R. H. Sinnreich (eds), *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of Military History to the Military Profession*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 34–54.**

*This article, and Williamson Murray's work that follows, have been taken from a recently released collection of essays that explore the difficulties contemporary military officers have in obtaining a complete understanding of the present, let alone the past. Edited by Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*

*contains fourteen essays which argue that the study of history is central to the training and education of officers. Contributors include retired military officers, such as Lieutenant General John P. Kiszely and Major General Jonathon B. A. Bailey, and internationally recognised military scholars such as Sir Michael Howard and Colin S. Gray.*

In this essay, Lieutenant General Paul K. Van Riper of the United States Marine Corps reflects on how the military education system in the United States has evolved since his enlistment in the 1950s and how it has contributed to his development as a marine and a leader. His belief that the importance of ongoing military education and the study of history is vital to the professional development of any military professional is evident throughout his writing. By using his personal experiences from a four-decade career in the Marine Corps, he underscores the vital connection between obtaining knowledge and how knowledge can affect change in ways of thinking at all levels.

After briefly outlining how the military education system has developed in the United States since the early twentieth century, Riper then describes how his interest in military history came about and its impact on his career path. He discusses how certain scholars and various books influenced his ideas, and how he tried to enlighten those who served under his command by encouraging them to read more and explore historical writings. Later in his career, Riper came to understand ‘that the primary “weapon” that officers possess remains their minds’ and ‘that books provide the “ammunition” for this weapon.’ However, he warns against looking for answers by reading, especially history; rather, studies should be absorbed ‘as part of their being.’

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**‘The American military, along with many European militaries, evidenced a disdain for overt intellectual activities by its officers for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.’**

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Although in retirement, Riper is still an active writer and intellectual contributor in US military circles, but is increasingly concerned that flawed post–World War Two military ideas are again finding their way into the contemporary US military education system. He finds himself ‘habitually warning those who will listen of the potential for repeating the tragic mistakes’ of the twentieth century. Riper concludes that military history should remain at the core of professional development and education—those who believe otherwise are grossly ill-informed or ignorant of its responsibilities underpinning the military profession at large.

**Williamson Murray, ‘Thoughts on military history and the profession of arms’ in W. Murray and R. H. Sinnreich (eds), *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of Military History to the Military Profession*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, pp. 78–92.**

Williamson Murray is a Professor Emeritus of European Military History at Ohio State University and a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Defence Analysis. He is the author of many books including *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (with Allan R. Millett).

Generals, statesmen and military institutions have a poor record of critically examining their own performance over the past 2500 years. All too often civilian and military leaders, particularly of great powers in the West, have shown little regard for the past and as a result the study of history has become a 'peripheral discipline'. In this essay, Murray examines how this has come about and what modes of thought in contemporary education and political systems are perpetuating this tendency.

The author draws upon literature from the ancient world through to the present day. He examines the difficulties of studying history experienced by military professionals, and argues that 'History's value often lies in its ability to suggest the possibility of the improbable.' As Michael Howard has highlighted numerous times, the military is the only profession that does not get to regularly practice its vocation. For this reason Murray believes that the study of past military campaigns, innovations and the nature of war itself are the only reliable sources on which an understanding of the profession can be drawn.

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**'Historians often argue that armies and navies invariably study the last war and that is why they get the next one wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, one of the major reasons military institutions get the next war wrong is because they either deliberately fail to study the last war, or do so only insofar as it makes leaders feel good.'**

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It is important to keep in mind that military officers and institutions, as well as statesmen, will get it wrong to some degree, and history will always prove a challenge to the military professional, but its value to the profession is and has been taken for granted. History suggests 'a range of possibilities in thinking about the future'; technology will gain the soldier little if they do not understand their enemy.

**F. Maurice, 'The Value of the Study of Military History as Training for Command in War,' in Julian S. Corbett and H. J. Edwards (eds), *Naval and Military Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1914, pp. 133–47.**

In his long career Frederick Barton Maurice combined the roles of military officer and academic. He rose to the rank of Major General and after retirement from the British Army took up the post of Professor of Military Studies at London University. This essay is from a collection of papers presented to the Naval and Military Section of the 1913 International Congress of Historical Studies when Maurice was just a Lieutenant Colonel. Maurice's definition of the requirements of military history is slightly dated, but as an early advocate of the discipline's utility in officer training his essay remains worth reading.

Maurice used this essay to answer two questions. First he asks, 'What help ... can the study of history give us in training officers for command in war?' Second, he questions, 'How can it in any way replace practical experience?' In his answer Maurice shows a preference for the

practical side of learning, but he admits that experience derived from war was exceptional and had its own limitations. Writing before the onset of the First World War, Maurice accepted that many officers could spend the bulk of their careers in a garrison station without ever seeing operational duty. Even if an officer was fortunate enough to participate in a campaign, his perspective and experience would be confined to his own 'narrow circle of activities'. Operations, Maurice knew, do not provide a comprehensive learning environment. Moreover, practical experience, while valuable, may not be directly transferable to other situations. In fact, Maurice suggests, practical experience can be misleading or even dangerous if it is not applicable to present need.

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**'With the theoretical experience obtained by dealing with the problems which have faced the great leaders of other days, corrected by practical experience in the handling of men, a commander may hope to fit himself to deal with the innumerable permutations and combinations of war.'**

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Maurice decides that professional preparation requires a broader knowledge of war than that which an officer can obtain from operational experience alone. He has a definite idea of the type of knowledge a studious officer should obtain. He expects officers to read the campaigns of the great commander, not to memorise facts but to observe a successful leader's decision-making process. How generals reacted to the stressful conditions of field operations is Maurice's priority. The study of military history, he concludes, is the only effective method by which contemporary senior officers can gain insight into effective command techniques.

**Richard H. Kohn, 'History as Institutional Memory: The Experience of the United States Air Force,' in David A. Charters, Marc Milner, and J. Brent Wilson (eds), *Military History and the Military Profession*, Westport, CT, Praeger, 1992, p. 159–68.**

*This article is taken from a collection of fifteen essays whose themes are the condition and effectiveness of military history in academia and the military. Other contributors include: Allan R. Millett, Ian Beckett, Robin Higham, Dominick Graham and Eric Grove.*

Richard H. Kohn is a Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Previously he had served as the Chief of the Office of Air Force History. In this essay, Kohn takes a slightly different twist on the utility of history than is discussed in the other articles recommended in this month's SOPD. His focus is on the USAF's employment of historians to help it meet its operational mandate.

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**‘[It] becomes increasingly important that the record of our participation ... be accurately recorded and preserved for the final analysis of accomplishments, as well as failures and responsibilities for each.’**

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Kohn immediately identifies the rationale behind the USAF’s commitment to the collection of historical information, its analysis and publication. The Office of Air Force History has operated continuously since its establishment in 1942. For the leaders of the USAF, the advancement of the service’s history is considered a core institutional function whose goal is to make the Air Force ‘more

efficient and effective in combat.’ As Kohn points out, USAF commanders see a direct link between knowledge of past battles and campaigns and operational capability in the contemporary environment.

In his essay, Kohn outlines the scope of the USAF’s commitment to the recording and dissemination of its own history. The scale is vast. He breaks down the USAF’s history effort into three elements:

- 1) historians serving on the staff of major commands and operational units;
- 2) the work of the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell AFB; and
- 3) the role of the Center for Air Force History in Washington, DC.

Each centre employs both civilian academics and military personnel who are either professional historians or have received specialty training for their tasks. Whatever their origins they are experienced in the collection and writing of history. On operations, teams of historians deploy in order to gather material in the field and to provide ready support to their units. The USAF’s history organisation also collects records and documents the service’s peacetime functions.

Kohn describes the activities of the USAF’s historians in proactive terms. Their task is to help the institution achieve its training and campaign objectives. In fulfilling their function, the USAF historians demonstrate the benefits of linking the events of the past with the needs of the present.

**Michael Howard, ‘The Lessons of History,’ in Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 6–20.**

Sir Michael Howard is an eminent military historian. He is co-founder and President Emeritus of The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and Professor Emeritus at both Yale and Oxford Universities. This article was first given as an Inaugural Lecture at the University of Oxford in 1981.

Howard does not use the article to address military history or the instruction of military professionals directly. Instead his target is the community of historians. Yet, in the process of exhorting his peers, Howard reveals his personal philosophy of history and in so doing identifies the discipline’s function and utility to society. What Howard has to say, therefore, is of

considerable importance to the military profession because he highlights the uses and limitations of his craft, and places the task of the historian into its context.

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**'To know the way in which our society came to be formed ... is not only an advantage in the conduct and understanding of public affairs: it is indispensable.'**

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Michael Howard is alive to the limitations of history. He asserts that, 'there is no such thing as history.' Instead, 'history is what historians write, and historians are part of the process they are writing about.' Howard explains that our knowledge of the past is always incomplete and that even with the greatest objectivity, the surviving evidence is filtered through the perspective of the historian.

However, Howard is quite clear on the need of historians to reveal the past, even if incompletely. He states that ignorance is a powerful force in decision making, and that our knowledge is shaped not only by the history we know but also by what we do not know. While historians cannot write with total clarity, it is essential that they dig deeply and provide society with as broad and as factually based an interpretation as possible.

Howard challenges his colleagues on the need to engage the broader community rather than to simply debate their ideas amongst themselves. He insists that historians have a social obligation. By this Howard means not just compensation for the monies they receive from the public purse, but that as a profession, historians are the gatekeepers to the past. In order for the community to benefit from its past historians must reach out to their society.

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**'The understanding of the past ... is the most difficult of the historian's tasks.'**

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Howard offers four lessons to historians. They are:

- 1) to not generalise from false premises based on inadequate evidence;
- 2) to recognise that the past is a foreign country and that little can be said about it until one has learned its language and customs;
- 3) to comprehend cultural diversity and to equip oneself to cope with it; and
- 4) to realise that the historian's craft is vulnerable to changes in the social contract.

**Michael Howard, 'The Use and Abuse of History,' in Michael Howard, *The Causes of War*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 188–97.**

In this article, Michael Howard assesses the utility of history in the training of military professionals. This essay is the seminal work in the field and is widely cited by military historians in their discussions on the value of history as a component of officer education. While aimed at an academic audience, it contains much of value for the officer. Its first presentation was as a lecture given to the Royal United Services Institute in London in 1961. It was subsequently published in *JRUSHI* and reprinted in *Parameters*.

Howard is aware that history can be misused. In some cultures history is a tool of the state and historians have little choice but to produce a directed narrative. In other cases, such as regimental stories, the published work often does not rise above the level of daring tales that lack depth and analysis. However, when written objectively and honestly history provides one of the few tools an officer can use to extend their preparations for warfighting.

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**'If there are no wars in the present in which the professional soldier can learn his trade, he is almost compelled to study the wars of the past.'**

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Howard identifies three rules for officers who wish to use history as a guide. They are to study history in:

- 1) **Width:** an officer must observe the way in which warfare developed over a long historical period;
- 2) **Depth:** an officer must take a single campaign and explore it thoroughly; and
- 3) **Context:** an officer must place the study of campaigns and battles into their environment if they are to make sense.

While history is one of the few methods an officer has to gain competency in their profession in peacetime, Howard recognises that its study is hard work. This is because, as he writes, 'the lessons of history are never clear. Clio is like the Delphic Oracle: it is only in retrospect ... that we understand what she was trying to say.' However, in the waging of war, the consequences of not studying history are potentially worse than those of having to peer through the murkiness of time in order to gain a degree of insight into contemporary situations.

**David Ian Hall, 'The Modern Model of the Battlefield Tour and Staff Ride: Post-1815 Prussian and German Traditions,' *The Relevance and Role of the Battlefield Tour and the Staff Ride for Armed Forces in the 21st Century*, Camberley: Strategic & Combat Studies Institute, 2005.**

David Ian Hall is a member of the faculty of the Joint Services Command and Staff College. In this essay he extends the definition of military history instruction from the traditional focus on book learning to include battlefield tours and staff rides. His essay is one of several in this small themed collection that examine the topic. Other authors in the volume consider the staff ride traditions of the Armies of Britain, Canada, and the United States.

Hall traces the development of the German Army use of battlefield tours and staff rides back to the reign of Frederick the Great up to the onset of the Second World War. Frederick, an educated monarch and product of the Enlightenment, was responsible for their incorporation into the education syllabus of the Prussian Army's (later the German Army's) officer corps. As Hall outlines, there was considerable resistance within the Army to Frederick's reforms by officers

who valued experience above all else. Frederick's retort to these was, 'if experience were all a great general needs, the greatest would be Prince Eugene's mules.'

In this article Hall shows how Prussian officer education was advanced on a broad front. Prussia invested in new officer training schools, mandated the teaching of military history, and spent considerable effort in developing curriculum that included battlefield tours and staff rides. After its defeat by Napoleon in 1806, part of the Prussian Army's reaction was to redouble its efforts towards officer education. Hall ends his article by summarising the adoption of the Prussian staff ride concept by the British and American Armies.

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**'... through rigorous and regular formation drill and field training he [Frederick] ensured that his army achieved tactical mobility, steadfastness under fire ... Equally important to the army's success was the training of commanders.'**

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Hall correctly concludes that battlefield tours and staff rides are not a panacea for officer development. However, he does demonstrate that they played an important part in opening Prussian officers to the benefits of military history, and in distilling the lessons of war in an operational environment. Their continued use by military organisations underscores the ongoing utility of staff rides as an effective tool in the instruction of military history.

**Peter W. Gray (RAF), 'Why Study Military History?' in P. W. Gray, ed. *Military History into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Camberley: Strategic & Combat Studies Institute, 2001.**

This essay was written as part of the Higher Command and Staff Course held at the Joint Services Command and Staff College in 2001. GPCAPT Gray served as the course's assistant director.

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**'... history ... is an indispensable part of everyday military business.'**

**'... the chief utility of history [is] ... to isolate things that need thinking about.'**

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Gray, in fact, sets out to answer two questions. First he asks why anyone should study history at all in any of its many permutations, and, second, Gray asks why military history in particular is worthy of examination. He addresses his questions not just to military professionals but casts a wider net that includes government

officials, public servants and journalists, as well as the wider general audience.

History, for Gray, is the glue that binds a society into a coherent whole. To create effective history, historians must judge the past and distinguish between facts and sentiment. Of particular importance is the recognition of the differences between history and legend, fable and myth. Gray points out that when history is not the result of careful scrutiny it allows unverified stories to gain the status of fact with often tragic results, for example the tortured history of the Balkans.

Having established the importance of history broadly, Gray turns to his second question—the value of military history in particular. Gray observes that in its most general form military history is important for its entertainment value alone. The vast output of popular books on war themes and the existence of television stations dedicated to military topics are testament of the discipline’s wide appeal to the community. However, for military professionals history has other functions more important than amusement. At a minimum Gray suggests that service personnel have a duty to possess some knowledge of military history, even if limited to natural pride in one’s unit. However, true historical inquiry requires more effort. Its goals are to allow the military professional to situate events in their context and to gain the ability to filter out the myths, fables and legends with which leaders will have to contend if they are to make the best decisions.

**Joseph J. Collins, ‘Desert Storm and the Lessons of Learning’, *Parameters*, Vol. XII, Autumn 1992, pp. 83–95.**

Colonel Joseph J. Collins retired from the US Army in 1998. During his career he was Director of International Relations and National Security Studies at the US Military Academy and served on the staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He holds a PhD from Columbia University in international relations and has published on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Collins uses Operations *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm*, the first US war in Iraq, as a mechanism to study the US military’s lesson-learning process. Collins anticipates that these operations will result in the creation of a cottage industry for the generation of lessons, all of which will have to be assessed and evaluated if there is to be any lasting value to the US Army. He makes five observations on how decision-makers should weigh the lessons that have appeared, or will appear, in the aftermath of the first Iraq War. They are:

- 1) first, accurate and timely lessons count, but even concerted effort is no guarantee of success in learning them;
- 2) second, the lessons one learns are influenced by interests, ideology, and perception;
- 3) technology-inspired lessons from a single war are likely to have a short life, and the lessons of a single conflict are seldom of lasting utility;
- 4) learning about war is complicated by the human factor including morale, *esprit de corps* and discipline; and
- 5) the outcome of a war is conditioned by the environmental factors in which it took place.

The lessons of past conflicts are one of the few guideposts that planners have in trying to forecast the requirements of future war. However, it is a complicated process made more difficult by intellectual pitfalls. One of the most common that Collins identifies is the tendency of observers to

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**‘... decisionmakers, uniformed and civilian, often fail to learn effectively from experience. Their mistakes range from costly to catastrophic.’**

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draw linear conclusions from war's complexity. In addition, the learning of lessons is made more difficult because lessons are a matter of perspective. Different parties will learn different lessons from the same incident or conflict.

Collins is aware that lesson learning is a fundamental historical process that military organisations undertake as part of their ongoing education. It is subject to the rules of historical methodology and one of his closing suggestions is that lesson analysts should focus not just on the data but also the intricacies of learning from history.

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## FROM THE VAULT

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*This month the LWSC recommends:*

**Cyril Falls, 'The Place of Military History,' which first appeared in the *Australian Army Journal* in Issue 42, November 1952, pp. 44–7.**

Cyril Falls wrote this brief article while he was the Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford University. In it, Falls made a case for the importance of military history. His approach to the matter was direct and concise. The writing and study of military history was a significant undertaking because the waging of war matters. Warfare, he noted, had shaped the course of human events, and Falls had no doubt that conflict remained one of the key methods of dispute resolution between nations. From an officer's viewpoint, Falls's statement may have appeared odd at the time, especially since he was writing in a period of high nuclear tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, his words were not aimed at officers. Instead, the target was his academic peers who had consigned military history to the second tier, if not lower, as a scholarly discipline. His article was a call to increase the prominence of the study of military affairs.

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**'The history of the human race is war.'**

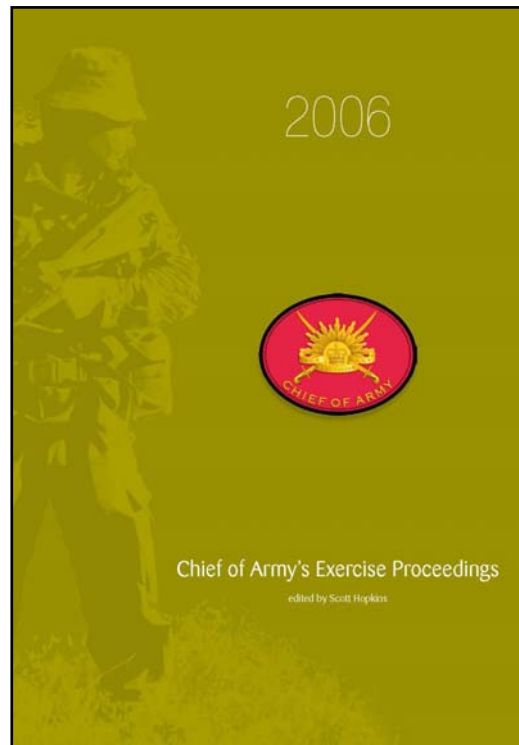
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Falls saw military history as holding a central place in the narrative of human advancement. He wrote, 'we are all heirs of war. It has helped to shape our development and our surroundings.' Moreover, Falls considered it a weakness that some chose to avoid the topic or 'minimise the importance of war on account of moral aversion to it.' Instead of avoidance, Falls called for the greater study of the topic.

***Study Paper Series***

The Land Warfare Studies Centre is pleased to announce the release of its latest volume in its Study Paper Series: *The Proceedings of the 2006 Chief of Army's Exercise*. Lieutenant General Peter Leahy hosted the exercise in October 2006. The Australian Army's biennial conclave of its senior leadership was focused on three themes: Mission Command, A Systems Approach to Problem Solving, and The Land-Air Partnership. This volume contains the presentations of selected key Australian and overseas speakers. Those represented include:

- Huba Wass de Czege, 'Mission Command in the Contemporary Battlespace' and 'Lessons from the Past toward Getting the Army's Doctrine 'Right Enough' Today'
- Joseph F. Weber, 'Mission Command: The United States Marine Corps Perspective'
- Nick Caplin, 'The United Kingdom Perspective on Mission Command in the Contemporary and Future Conflict Environment'
- Roger Noble, 'The Essential Thing—Mission Command and its Practical Application'
- Peter Clay and Warwick Austin, 'Systems Thinking: Considerations for the Australian Army'
- John QuaiFFE, 'Land—Air Integration: The RAAF Perspective'



The *Proceedings of the 2006 Chief of Army's Exercise* is available from the LWSC at [http://www.defence.gov.au/army/lwsc/Publications/SP/SP\\_309.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/army/lwsc/Publications/SP/SP_309.pdf)