

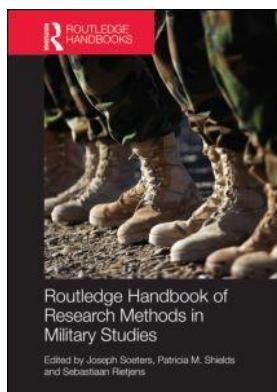
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PART II

Qualitative methods

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7

HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN THE MILITARY DOMAIN

Floribert Baudet and Eric A. Sibul¹

Thucydides (1881) *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated into English, to which is prefixed an Essay on Inscriptions and a Note on the Geography of Thucydides, Volume 1. B. Jowett translator. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Some time during the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) exiled Athenian general Thucydides (c.460–395) decided to write the history of this fratricidal war between Athens, Sparta (Lacedaemon) and their allies. His work is notable not only for its exploration of human nature as such (exemplified in the Athenian treatment of the Melians) but also for its attempt to establish strict standards in evidence-finding and analysis. As such his work may be considered the first scholarly book on (military) history, although some of his methodology – notably his decision to include fictionalized speeches (expressing what the actor may have said or even should have said) – differs dramatically from what is customary today.

[1.20] Such are the results of my enquiries, though the early history of Hellas is of a kind which forbids implicit reliance on every particular of the evidence. Men do not discriminate, and are too ready to receive ancient traditions about their own as well as about other countries. (. . .) [3] There are many other matters, not obscured by time, but contemporary, about which the other Hellenes are equally mistaken. For example, they imagine that the kings of Lacedaemon in their council have not one but two votes each, and that in the army of the Lacedaemonians there is a division called the Pitonate division; whereas they never had anything of the sort. So little trouble do men take in the search after truth; so readily do they accept whatever comes first to hand.

[1.21] Yet any one who upon the grounds which I have given arrives at some such conclusion as my own about those ancient times, would not be far wrong. He must not be misled by the exaggerated fancies of the poets, or by the tales of chroniclers who seek to please the ear rather than to speak the truth. Their accounts cannot be tested by him; and most of the facts in the lapse of ages have passed into the region of romance. At such a distance of time he must make up his mind to be satisfied with conclusions resting upon the clearest evidence which can be had . . .

(continued)

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[1.22] As to the speeches which were made either before or during the war, it was hard for me, and for others who reported them to me, to recollect the exact words. I have therefore put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion, expressed as I thought he would be likely to express them, while at the same time I endeavoured, as nearly as I could, to give the general purport of what was actually said. [2] Of the events of the war I have not ventured to speak from any chance information, nor according to any notion of my own; I have described nothing but what I either saw myself, or learned from others of whom I made the most careful and particular enquiry. [3] The task was a laborious one, because eye-witnesses of the same occurrences gave different accounts of them, as they remembered or were interested in the actions of one side or the other. [4] And very likely the strictly historical character of my narrative may be disappointing to the ear. But if he who desires to have before his eyes a true picture of the events which have happened, and of the like events which may be expected to happen hereafter in the order of human things, shall pronounce what I have written to be useful, then I shall be satisfied. My history is an everlasting possession, not a prize composition which is heard and forgotten.'

As transpires from the preceding quotes from what is arguably the first scholarly book on military history, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, since time immemorial soldiers have turned to history to understand war. It is the original discipline to conduct systematic study of military affairs. But, dealing with past events of any type history as a discipline is also inherently broader, and more diverse than the study of any other area of human activity. As such it is different from other fields of military studies and it has developed several peculiarities, methodological and other. These will be the focus of this chapter.

Although other approaches to military affairs have developed since Thucydides wrote his book, military history has endured in value and importance. It serves a broad group of needs and interests that at times may be contradictory. Among other things it forms the foundation for military theory and military doctrine; doctrine is rooted both in theory and history (Vego 2011: 61). While history serves as a foundation for military theory and doctrine guiding future military operations, it does not and cannot predict the future. However, it does provide a methodology for military lessons learned and serves to help understand probable future trends in the warfare and operating environment. The US Joint Force Command's study *Joint Operating Environment 2010* notes, 'As war at its essence is a human endeavor, then it follows that one of the most effective ways to understand human nature is by a close consideration of history. As such, rather than futuristic vignettes, the *Joint Operating Environment* uses history as a principal way to gain insight into the future' (US Joint Forces Command 2010: 5). Historical analysis is useful on all levels of the conflict spectrum from high-intensity conventional war to low intensity stability operations. When faced with a growing insurgency in Iraq, the United States and its coalition partners began to look at 'best practices' in counterinsurgency in order to understand the nature and continuities of insurgencies and what could be judiciously and appropriately applied from historical experiences to defeat the insurgency in Iraq (Sepp 2005: 8).

As military history provides insight into the enduring nature of war as well changes in its character, it is the bedrock of professional military education and professional development for the profession of arms. This is self-evident: physics is not studied without an awareness

of Newton, Faraday and Einstein, and the psychologist needs to know who Freud and Jung were and what they thought and did. Advanced professional military education uses historical case studies in much the way that business case studies are used in graduate business education, that is, as a decision-making exercise to build professional judgement (Wyly 1993: 259). After all, 'the human mind is not designed to learn from lists of characteristics, traits, and attributes. Rather, it was designed to learn from experience' (Gudmundsson 1984: 29).

Experience, however, is a unique problem for the profession of arms. A military officer may be called to exercise his or her central duties such as command in wartime, only once in a lifetime. Sir Michael Howard gives the analogy of Olympic athletes who spend their life practising on for an Olympic championship on which the fortune of his or her entire nation depends. Moreover, with the complex problem of running a military unit in peacetime with its administration, discipline, maintenance and supply of an organization the size of a fair-sized town, it is easy to forget what the unit is being run for – the conduct of war. Therefore if there are no wars at present, a military practitioner is almost compelled to study past wars, that is, to study military history (Howard 1961: 6–7).

Military history also serves to further unit cohesion and helps in developing and placing into context professional concepts. The study of history enables military practitioners to see how military affairs have related to the larger concerns of their nations throughout the ages. Military history allows them understand the interaction of the various forces that have shaped their profession and permits the practitioner to view current problems in the perspective of decades and centuries rather than months and years (Van Riper 1994: 51).

As war affects society broadly, the greater value of military history is to society as a whole. The availability of good military history may even help the common citizen think intelligently about military affairs. It has even been argued that 'the better educated we are historically, the less likely we are as a country to make stupid mistakes' (US and World News Report 2008). However, not only when working towards the realm of general civilian education and popular culture, the military history researcher must guard against an excess of what Michael Howard describes as 'myth-making' or the creation of an image of the past, through careful selection and interpretation, to encourage patriotic feeling, or to create support for a political regime (Howard 1961: 3). Others have argued against 'camouflaged history' – history that makes you look good, but is at odds with historical reality (Liddell Hart 1972: 27). Then what is history, past events – or a record of what happened in the past?

History and historiographical trends: Limits to historical knowledge

'History' in popular usage has carried two very different meanings. It has often been used to designate the sum total of human activities in the past. Seemingly important events in contemporary times or even victory of a sports team in a championship are described as 'history being made'. A more focused common usage looks upon this history as a record of events rather than the events themselves. In this vein, history may be regarded as the record of all that has occurred within the realm of human consciousness. The task of the historian can be considered as reconstructing as far as may be possible, the past thoughts and activities of humanity (Barnes 1963: 3). However, the historian cannot possibly hope to cover all human activity in any degree of success and hence the study of history involves the selection of a topic and a somewhat arbitrary elimination of its borders cutting off connections with the universal. Within these arbitrarily established borders there is a selection and organization of information in a systematic approach. This selection is influenced by the historian's frame of reference. The frame may be a narrow sectional, national, or limited group conception of history or it may be broadly influenced by

the prevailing social, political and intellectual trends of the contemporary time. Whatever the nature of the frame, it is there and exists in the mind of the historian. It may inadvertently lead him or her to turn a blind eye on some aspects or to exaggerate the importance of others.

History writing on war and the deployment of armed forces also often reflects the peculiarities of a given military culture or establishment. Though war is widely and long recognized as an utterly messy and chaotic activity, militaries as institutions attempt to maintain a 'culture of order' (Lind et al. 1989: 26). That culture, embodied in ranks, saluting, uniforms and drill, is largely a product of style of warfare that reached its apex in the eighteenth-century 'column and line' infantry with armies having centralized command under a single general, king or aristocrat. From the time of the Napoleonic Wars to 1945 the Prussian–German way of dealing with this contradiction of military order versus battlefield chaos has been outwardly maintaining the traditional culture of order while developing a decentralized command system and education for leaders to adapt to a disorderly battlefield. Other powers went different routes to maintain the culture of order on the battlefield, for instance by attempting to make war a science and postulating that there were immutable laws or principles of war governed by Marxism–Leninism, as the Soviets did. The United States Armed Forces during the First World War began treating the conduct of war as an industrial process as in a large automobile assembly plant. Decision-making was centralized as it was in a large manufacturing plant and the complex phenomenon of war was broken down into interchangeable parts, much like an assembly line, where military commanders could make decisions based on standard principles and achieve statistically predictable results (Vandergriff 2002: 41–44). Appointed in 1899, Secretary of War Elihu Root, an early devotee of scientific management ideas of Frederick Taylor and Harrison Emerson, paved the way for their introduction to the US Army. However, it was Major General William Crozier, Chief of Ordnance from 1901 to 1918, and for a time the President of the Army War College, who introduced scientific management in earnest to the US Army. In the interwar year the army became steeped in the theory and practice of scientific management (Sibul 2012: 160). After the military reform movement in the late 1970s and 1980s in the United States in the wake of the Vietnam War, the US moved away from the industrial process approach and towards the Prussian–German approach of decentralized command and treating war as a complex and chaotic phenomena where those who are able to best adapt in the chaotic atmosphere are successful (Kiszely 2005: 41).

All these different approaches to war affect and have affected the military historians' frame of reference. Soviet military historians operated under the guidance of Soviet military science while American military historians often framed military history studies within terms of standard principles of war and saw military success in terms of superior firepower and defeating enemies through attrition by using superior materiel resources. Even if the outlook of the society and of military establishments has changed, old habits tend to linger on (Muth 2011).

This being said, military history as a scholarly endeavour has changed much in scope since the Napoleonic Wars when it was indistinguishable from general history. Nowadays, it can be divided into three general strains: the study of operational affairs, the study of administrative and technical issues, and the study of the relation between the military and society. The study of operational or combat aspects includes military strategy and tactics, logistics and leadership including campaign studies and operationally oriented biography. Administrative and technical studies focus on the functional and professional activities of the armed forces, organization and doctrine, education and training, procurement and materiel development in peacetime and in war. The military and society approach looks at the broadest spectrum of military affairs throughout the cycle of war and peace, including the military's relationship to society as a whole, addressing such themes as culture, politics, the civilian economy, women and war and

minorities in military service and on social histories of elements of the enlisted ranks and the non-commissioned and commissioned officer corps. To the extent civilian universities take an interest in military history, the 'war and society' approach, as opposed to the other two more traditional branches in military history, has acquired some academic standing (Chambers 1991: 405–406; Yerxa 2008: 5). In terms of basic methodology the varieties are quite similar though.

Whatever the scholarly and historiographical preferences and whatever the nature of the frame of reference, these two guide the attempts of the historian to put history in a smaller manageable slice and to put chaotic events into a systematic order. But as Charles A. Beard, perhaps the greatest of American historians, cautioned, 'History is chaos and every attempt to interpret it otherwise is an illusion' (Beard 1934: 228). Even though the ultimate goal is to tell history 'as it really was', historians and their readers should be aware that it is historians that order and structure the past.

For the military historian this structuring presents a special challenge as war in essence is the most chaotic of activities and still the historian must reduce it and systemize it to make the study of it useable. On this, Howard notes, 'Some attempt must be made to sort order out of chaos; that is what historians are for. But we would do well says the sceptical academic, not to take this orderly account even for an approximation to what really happened; much less base any conclusions on it for the future' (Howard 1961: 5).

Pursuing historical research: Methodological considerations

Central to any successful historiographical endeavour is of course the formulation of a research question. This question may be inspired by the needs of today, or by an interest in past events as such. In any case, in formulating a research question the researcher will have to take into account the historiography on the matter, which will serve both as a body of reference and, through the gaps, shortcomings and inconsistencies in it, as a justification for further research. Historians may also turn to a theory and apply this to a historical subject. Unlike political and social scientists, in many if not most cases historians do so implicitly and one can only distil their frame of reference, or the theory they subscribe to, from the way they construct their narrative and from their conclusions. The decision of whether or not to explicitly use theory as an analytic device also has consequences with regard to the way historical researchers present their findings. We will get back to that later on.

The first step after formulating a research question is to decide on a research strategy. The researcher may want to limit himself to books and articles only, or may want to interview witnesses (assuming they're still around), or use a combination of both. He or she will also have to decide on the advisability of conducting research in archives. Since archival research is time-consuming, this decision involves a trade-off between the time available and the possible gains to be expected from spending it in an archive, i.e. novel and unexpected findings that shed a fundamentally different light on the subject: archival research offers the possibility of correcting well-established but erroneous views. Of course it may also confirm earlier hypotheses. This is the main reward of conducting archival research, apart from getting 'the feel' of a certain period or issue.

By necessity the decision to conduct archival research is somewhat of an educated guess, based on both past experience and a thorough analysis of what has been written on the subject before. Before embarking on archival research, the researcher will have to identify gaps and inconsistencies in the existing body of literature that may warrant additional research in archives. This said, time constraints generally advise against large-scale archival research. The researcher normally ends up combining and challenging insights of other scholars. This may produce valuable new views but there is some sterility in this approach given that researchers comment on analyses of primary

sources that they haven't studied for themselves. Arguably, archival research produces a greater familiarity with the subject leading to a more fruitful contribution to the academic debate and even present-day practices or decision-making, but time constraints often makes this impractical.

As part of this first step – and this applies to any historical enquiry that involves archival research – the researcher is to identify the main institutional bodies involved, locate their paper trail (the written remains of their activity), establish its size and the way in which it is organized. He should also try and locate whatever private archives have been left by persons involved – these may contain documents that are no longer in public archives or that offer a more personal view. He may also want to find out whether persons involved in the matter are still living. Interviewing them involves another set of methodological challenges that will be discussed elsewhere in this volume.

Then – but partly coinciding with the first step – the researcher is to find out which regulations pertain (as to access and right to publish) and obtain the required permissions if any. It is advisable to build good relations with the officials (in public archives) or relatives (when conducting research in private archives) especially since in the case of the latter, access is granted on the basis of trust or interest, rather than on the basis of any formal regulation. This also poses a risk – access may be withdrawn at any time and accordingly the researcher may end up as a hostage of sorts.

Having met the conditions outlined above, the researcher who decides to conduct archival research will have to work through the material in an organized systematic way. What we know about the past is based on sources that do not simply list all that happened. Instead, they are rife with conjecture, interpretations, (un)intentional simplifications and hidden agendas. Historians, nonetheless, must base their accounts on those sources since they have nothing else to go by. This requires the mastering of the heuristic tools of the historian – the application of criteria to establish the veracity of the sources. One may think of such methods as close reading and textual analysis, but also of specific abilities such as the ability to read hand-written documents and foreign languages. In any case it requires knowledge about the functioning of the organization under scrutiny (Tosh 2009).

A well-formulated question, i.e. one that not only defines topic and time-span but also clearly specifies what the researcher wants to know, channels his or her efforts. Still, it may sometimes be advisable to apply a broad sweep instead of a narrow one. Depending on the nature of the research question, a random start though highly costly in terms of time and effort, may produce interesting finds and, because of the fact that it cuts across the hierarchical logic of the institution, surprising insights as well. It is costly because it takes considerable time to master the material and develop a coherent view. At the same time, one of its benefits may be that the researcher is not adopting the reasoning of the institution. He or she may wander off the well-trodden paths to find amazing sights.

This wandering off is also one of the main pitfalls involved in archival research. Given that most scholars will have deadlines of sorts even when there *is* time, time is limited. The danger is that the researcher unknowingly may get carried away without any prospect of finding this true gem. He or she will end up with a pile of notes on a variety of subjects but nothing truly useful. A challenge of a different nature is the assumption that all that was done and thought is recorded. The challenge is twofold: it will lead the researcher to continue looking for material that in fact doesn't exist, and poses the risk of attempting an in-depth analysis to the point of becoming irrelevant. Knowing when to stop looking and start writing may therefore be the most daunting task for a historian.

Writing history

Perhaps more so than any other discipline history seems deceptively simple, but writing good history is difficult. The explanatory force of historians' accounts is not rooted in theory, but in

the ability to convincingly present a story. Writing history is about narrative skills as much as it is about conducting research and analysing the findings. Still, there are a few demands every historian is expected to live up to. Some national historical associations have developed ethical codes that are to ensure this, and in recent years appeals were made to further expand the professional standards these codes contain (De Baets 2008). Basically, the historian is required to present a truthful interpretation of past events based on *verifiable* sources. It is inexcusable to invent sources, as much as it is to quietly ignore sources that contradict the historian's view. But within these parameters historians are found to have considerable leeway – it is perfectly admissible to downplay the importance of such sources, albeit on the basis of valid arguments.

There are no clear limits as to what is considered acceptable 'poetic licence', which hasn't really solved the problem as to how far a historian may go in interpreting thoughts, acts and ideas. On what grounds do we conclude that there is a causality between two thoughts or events? As a result scholarly debates in history are not only about historical events but even more so about interpretation. Theory may provide well-needed help, although in most cases historians do not make their assumptions explicit.

A related challenge is how to know that an interpretation actually is truthful. Not only will every historian be confronted with the methodological questions of the admissibility of filling the gaps and reading between the lines, they also face the risk of anachronism and bias. Anachronism involves a linear projection of modern conceptions on past actors. Since modern historians are convinced that change, especially in mindsets, is the essence of history, anachronism is considered a deadly sin. Both anachronism and a lack of awareness of it may reduce the value of (military) history for military organizations. Bias may also obscure a fruitful analysis. It may be the result of existing historiography (as discussed above) and its existence may be shown through archival research, but archives being the product of human activity, they themselves also contain bias.

Knowing about the risk of anachronism and bias is not the same as acting on it. It takes hard thinking to understand the past. Professional (operational) military historians analysing armed conflict and the decisions taken in it, often combine two mutually exclusive epistemological theories. They do so perhaps unwittingly, as many historians do not address the theoretical fundamentals of their craft on a daily basis. Historians hope to experience and then evoke in others a so-called 'historical sensation', an epiphany-like phenomenon that instils a deeper, intuitive, understanding of the true nature of past events, that was first defined by historian Johan Huizinga in the early 1900s (Ankersmit 2005). By and large they also apply R.G. Collingwood's theory of re-enactment. Collingwood's main concern was causality and his theory was based on the fundamental rationality of man. Actions imply thought, and thought underlies action. The historian's 'main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent' (Collingwood 1994; Helgeby 2005: 10). In Collingwood's view thought is the only element of the past that leaves identifiable traces of some sort. It is thus the only element that can be retrieved – all else is lost forever. 'The history of thought, and therefore all history, is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind' (Collingwood 1994: 215). This re-enactment requires hard thinking (Inglis 2009: 215–216).

The idea of the fundamental rationality of man is somewhat awkward, and may already be hard to sustain when analysing peacetime decisions, or decisions made during stabilization operations. It is outright misleading when analysing battles, where there is an interplay of intentions, chance, and fear, of rational and irrational, even subconscious, factors. While it may be true that intuitive and impulsive actions cannot be re-enacted the way rational decisions might, limiting ourselves to only Collingwood's theory would preclude the possibility of fruitfully analysing these vital ingredients in warfare. To leave them out is inadmissible, however. To take an

example, the ability to intuitively ‘read’ a battlefield, or a situation, is a vital asset for commanders at every level. Such an intuitive understanding is equally invaluable for a historian, however problematic this may be from a rationalist epistemological point of view.

Actual and potential pressures

When analysing history, certain pressures may occur. People who witnessed the events under discussion may be approached for an interview, which offers a *couleur locale* that is often absent from the more sterile and formal documents in public archives. Oral history, i.e. talking to witnesses, may also enhance the credibility of the analysis, but problems will arise when witnesses argue that their personal recollection is correct and the researcher’s analysis is not (Moore 2014, Chapter 11 this volume). Unfortunately, recollections do not simply depict events as they unfolded, but are also influenced by their outcomes. The brain is also not a running CCTV recorder; it tends to forget, misplace, distort, ignore and deny, but individual or even collective memory and scholarly analysis may and in fact do coexist. The historian offers an analysis at a higher level of aggregation while the benefit of hindsight gives him the opportunity to access sources such as records of the adversary that were not available to witnesses. It does mean, though, that the historian should be able to provide documentary evidence for every statement he or she makes.

This last demand may be problematic in view of changes in technology. For example, in current operations, hard copy paper orders and reports no longer predominate. In Iraq and Afghanistan coalition commands have tended to conduct the majority of their planning and communications via the Internet (often by chat and email), resulting in a large number of operational documents being temporarily stored on computer servers. If historians have access to computer systems this actually presents some advantages, with some planning and the right software, historians now can data-mine the servers and storage media for key documents describing any and all aspects of the operation studied (Visconage 2006: 35–36). These servers are accessible to security-vetted historians, but historians outside the chain of command will have to wait until this material is declassified. As the archival protocols for electronic material are still work in progress in most countries, future historians may find considerable gaps in information if and when key documents, presentations and messages have been deleted.

The wider issue of how the development of digital humanities will affect the way today’s and tomorrow’s military historians work will not be addressed in this contribution. It has been argued that practitioners of digital humanities place too much emphasis on tools and data, and that the tendency towards ‘technological determinism’ needs to be balanced by more attention to methodological and epistemological considerations (Zaagsma 2013). In view of this, these developments deserve more space than can be offered in the context of the present volume.

In recent years there has been an interesting development in that the historian may actually be on locale and gather material largely as events are taking place; this is the case for instance of field historians of the US Army and Marine Corps. This is a clear indication of the value accorded to historical enquiry. Historians thus employed are expected to operate independently and to do their job without getting in the way of the units or operations, whatever their nature, they are documenting (Visconage 2006: 35). The most important for the field historian is gaining the trust and support of the commander as the commanders set the tone and facilitate the ability of the historian to gather information to tell the unit’s history. Through the commander the historian can gain access to key subordinates and primary staff officers, and be allowed to attend staff meetings, conference calls and other historically significant events. Of course, such a historian is bound by operational security and his or her work might be used only on command

level for analyses and declassified at a later time. In order to have the trust of commanders, operational understanding and ability to accomplish the task in a hazardous environment, field historians are usually serving military personnel or retired officers with academic credentials. For armed forces using purely academic historians or ones with minimal military background to chronicle and analyse contemporary operations, the challenge of gaining trust of field commanders is even more difficult and can be accomplished by only the most talented of individuals.

There are some complications. Even for a historian in the chain of command or a retired trusted old military hand, the work produced often is dependent on the outlook of the commander towards the field of history. Some commanders will be action-oriented and time-pressed in their demands on the historian wanting rapid reporting of lessons identified in time for next phase of the operation, while other commanders see history largely as a public-relations exercise to build the historical ‘myth’ of his unit or command being flawlessly efficient and effective. The pressure is more for press-release type stories of the unit’s accomplishments and material for the next chapter of the official history. In this case the effect can be what Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart described as ‘camouflaged history’. Such history can engender a false military confidence – leading to greater operational failures (Liddell Hart 1972: 27).

Concluding remarks

Arguably a historian working for a military or defence organization is not at freedom to be fully critical of its leadership, especially of officers who are still serving under current doctrine and policy. However, the historian can still write critical history. Helmuth Von Moltke the Elder under whose supervision the German General Staff produced an official history of the Franco-Prussian War, gave the following advice on that work which is still relevant today for writing and using official histories: ‘We must be able to read between the lines. The History produced by our General Staff is the best that has been written of the last war. It is valuable for all to study and requires to be read between the lines, seeing that criticism of persons are always expressed in it with finest tact, while the historical truth, as far as it can be ascertained, is always there’ (quoted in [Anonymous] ‘War as a Teacher of War’ 1902: 607).

While military institutions, as discussed earlier, have a culture of order, it is, however, largely a myth that civilian academics have far more academic freedom than historians in a military chain of command. On many North American and European university campuses, academics have the ‘political correctness Sword of Damocles’ hanging over them (Sibul 2011: 78–80), and ‘army historians, of course, can point out that there are prevailing trends and fashions that academic historians up for tenure violate at their professional peril’ (Sandler 2001). Misuse of history occurs in both worlds. William S. Lind, a historian who was a key figure in the post-Vietnam military reform movement, records several instances where elements in the US Army senior leadership exerted pressure on historians to attack the emerging maneuver warfare concepts, or critical studies as such (Lind 2005).

Political pressures, debates on reforms and changes in concepts, doctrine and technology can put special pressures on the historian within a military bureaucracy, because he or she can become involved in encouraging and resisting change based on historical evidence. As history is a storehouse from where ‘the number of possibly relevant “facts” is infinite’, they can be ‘cherry picked’ and arranged to argue for whatever is in some faction’s self-interest (Howard 1961: 7). The risk is of course that such enquiries will be utterly one-sided and won’t offer real guidance.

While methodology has made great moves forward, and we would no longer consider as adequate some of the methods he applied, Thucydides’ ambition is as relevant as it was 2,500 years ago, ‘But if he who desires to have before his eyes a true picture of the events which have

happened . . . shall pronounce what I have written to be useful, then I shall be satisfied. My history is an everlasting possession, not a prize composition which is heard and forgotten.' The ideal of the historian is to conduct historical analysis clear of prejudice and preconceptions no matter what bureaucratic and political pressures are (Baudet 2013). Ultimately it is also the best interest of the institution, which he or she serves.

Note

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