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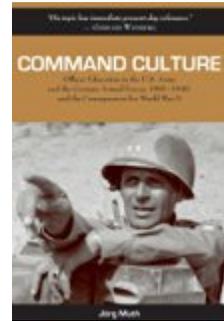
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jörg Muth. *Command Culture: Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901-1940, and the Consequences for World War II*. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2011. 368 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57441-303-8.

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Published on H-German (December, 2013)

Commissioned by Chad Ross



War and Education?

This very interesting and even controversial book takes a comparative look at the two most notable institutions of professional military education during the first half of the twentieth century—US and German armed forces. In an officer's career, two critical phases are the initial commissioning process, by which the cadet (or candidate, depending on the commissioning source), and an officer's intermediate level education, which is normally conducted at a command and staff college. Jörg Muth takes a close look at the respective institutions responsible for both tasks in the United States and Germany, and finds the American institutions, in this case the United States Military Academy (USMA) and the United States Army Command and General Staff School (CGSS), wanting. In Muth's estimation, the German equivalents, the *Kadettenschule* and the *Kriegsakademie*, were far superior. Muth's criticisms, however, are applied in too broad a fashion, resulting in a work that both hits the target in some respects, while missing it in others by a wide margin.

Muth begins with a brief comparison of the USMA and the Prussian *Kadettenschule* in the nineteenth century, and then extends it into the pre-World War I era. To be sure, this is a bit of a fool's errand, as it is comparing apples and broccoli. Muth goes into considerable criticism of the USMA's curriculum, especially its stress on engineering and mathematics, while ignoring the context in which the USMA was created. The founders of this country regarded a standing army as a necessary evil.

Given that, the best thing an inherently evil institution could do was good works. In the context of the early American Republic, this revolved around tasks that involved engineering, such as going on survey expeditions, building coastal fortifications, and so on.

Muth suggests that the Prussian (later German) *Kadettenschule* was much more proficient in producing combat leaders than the USMA. The *Kadettenschule*, however, had a critical advantage in this regard; the Prussian/German state generally had a good idea as to who it would have to fight. A potential conflict with either France, Austria, or Russia was always a possibility. No such question existed for the USMA graduate. The American desire for annexing Canada had been quenched with the War of 1812. After the Mexican War, while relations with Mexico were strained at times, open warfare was not a likely probability. Aside from fighting the Civil War (an unusual occurrence), the army spent most of its time fighting American Indians, a task at which USMA graduates became proficient only by on-the-job training.

Where Muth's criticism of the USMA is well founded is in the period after World War I, when the various belligerents had the opportunity to absorb the hard lessons afforded by the Great War. One of the USMA's greatest faults over time, in Muth's estimation, has been an almost slavish devotion to "tradition," regardless of its applicability in more modern times. This applies in particular here to the USMA's failure to revamp its curriculum, and

the continuation of such backward practices as the hazing of underclassmen and harsh discipline.

Having looked at the initial phase of commissioning, Muth examines the education an officer received after spending some time on active military service. In modern military parlance, this is called professional military education (PME). In this case, Muth turns his examination to the only institutions in the United States and Germany that can be compared, namely, the American CGSS and the German *Kriegsakademie*. The United States Army Infantry School also comes under scrutiny.

Muth comes down hard on the CGSS, and here his criticisms are well founded. His most withering criticism of the CGSS concerns its curriculum and the faculty who taught it. Particularly unfortunate was the “Leavenworth” approach (the CGSS was located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and remains there to this day) to education, which was very regimented. This approach was exemplified by the practice of having students deal with tactical problems, for which there was only one “approved” solution, better known as the “school solution.” In some ways, the education at the CGSS was a continuation of that at the USMA, with its continued emphasis on mathematics. In math, for example, there can be no consensus as to what the correct answer is to a problem; it is either right or it is not. The epitome of this approach to tactics was illustrated in the “school solution.”

The regimented Leavenworth approach comes off very poorly in comparison to the education offered at the *Kriegsakademie*. There students were encouraged to come up with a quick solution to a tactical problem. Each student then presented his concept, which was critiqued by his fellow students and the instructor. Instead of a highly scripted scenario, German exercises were full of surprises, designed to force students to assess a new situation quickly and formulate a new plan to deal with the changed circumstances. Much of this was based on one of the definitions of war provided by Carl von Clausewitz in his magnum opus *On War* (1832). In that work, Clausewitz described war as neither an art nor a science, although it had elements of both. From this idea, the German army later came to define war in its basic command manual as “a free creative activity.” The educational approach fostered by this definition would produce skilled tacticians who would display their skill on the battlefields of World War II.

The process by which an officer attended the CGSS or the *Kriegsakademie* also reflected poorly on the US Army. Officers at the rank of captain or major attended

the CGSS as students, but the matter of selection might best be described as haphazard. Often officers were selected for school at the behest of their patrons, regardless of their qualifications. Thus the academic abilities of the student body varied considerably. The impact of this disparity was heightened when in 1919 the school’s administration decided that courses should be tailored to the weakest student. The result was a curriculum that was “dumbed down,” and certainly not one that encouraged creativity.

The *Kriegsakademie* presented a stark contrast in how officers were selected for admission. The German regimental system paid dividends in this regard. Senior officers were responsible for the intellectual development of their subordinates, and did their best to prepare them for the highly competitive examinations that determined selection for admission to the *Kriegsakademie*. Thus the class attending the *Kriegsakademie* was well prepared for a rigorous and demanding curriculum.

The heart of any school lies in its faculty. Here again the CGSS comes off very poorly in comparison to the *Kriegsakademie*. Officers posted to the *Kriegsakademie* were chosen primarily for their expertise in particular fields. Expertise, however, is no guarantee of teaching ability, and great attention was paid to the quality of instruction provided to the students. Unfortunately, Muth does not go into any great detail on how the *Kriegsakademie* prepared its instructional staff to discharge their pedagogical duties, although he may have been hamstrung by a lack of sources on this topic.

Matters were quite different at the CGSS. Officers selected to fill instructor billets were chosen in a haphazard manner. Omar Bradley recalled that officers were not chosen because of their expertise, but because of their suitability as a fourth for bridge or golf. Even after the Great War, when the CGSS received an influx of instructors with combat experience, the set in stone “Leavenworth approach” and the necessity to tailor the curriculum to the poorest students minimized whatever good the combat experienced instructors might have offered. Finally, there was one big difference between the respective instructional staffs at the CGSS and the *Kriegsakademie*. Service as an instructor at the *Kriegsakademie* was clearly regarded as career enhancing; service in a similar capacity at the CGSS was not.

The one bright spot in American PME that Muth sees in this period is the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. This was largely due to the good work of George Marshall, who instituted educational techniques

that were much closer to those of the *Kriegsakademie* than the CGSS. Critical here was the relationship between Marshall and German Captain Adolf von Schell, who was one of the foreign officers attending the school. The two men became close friends, and resumed their relationship after the war. Muth suggests that Marshall made extensive use of Schell's advice and recommendations regarding how to educate officers.

Muth's discussion of PME is limited to the intermediate level. For more senior field grade officers (lieutenant colonel and colonel), there are what are called "top level" schools. The most notable examples are the various service war colleges, especially the Army War College, then located at Washington Barracks (later renamed Fort McNair) in the capital, and the Navy War College at Newport, Rhode Island. Another top level American PME institution was the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF), also located in Washington, DC. German officers were very much desirous of attending either the Army War College or ICAF.

It is interesting to note that there was no German equivalent of these institutions. Muth omits any discussion of the one attempt by the German military to cre-

ate such a school. The *Wehrmachtakademie*, founded in 1935, was a school whose student body comprised senior officers from the three services, taught by a faculty composed largely of civilian experts drawn from German universities. Topics covered in the curriculum included both joint and coalition operations. The school, however, had enemies in high places, most notably, Adolf Hitler and Hermann Göring. They were able to kill the school, which closed in 1938. This left the German army with a corps of officers who were most skillful at the lower levels of war, tactics, and operations, but who were often absolutely clueless when it came to strategy.

Muth's book raises important issues, many of which are still being hotly debated today in military circles. What is taught, who attends such schools, and who teaches there are all issues that should and do resonate with those who work in the field of PME, the author of this review included. Unfortunately, where Muth's dissection of the subject requires a scalpel, too often his rhetorical instrument of choice is a jackhammer, which thus detracts from the book. Nevertheless, Muth's work is valuable to both academics and military professionals alike. In particular, it should be discussed in American PME institutions at all levels.

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Citation: Richard DiNardo. Review of Muth, Jörg, *Command Culture: Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901-1940, and the Consequences for World War II*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. December, 2013.

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