The American Military

A Narrative History

Brad D. Lookingbill

WILEY Blackwell

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While working, I found inspiration in a framed photograph that shows my father in his ROTC uniform. In 1964, he stood confidently next to my mother. His brother enlisted in the Marine Corps in a time of war, while her brother was drafted into the Army. One of her brothers-in-law joined the Air Force. Another became an Army lieutenant. In other words, all of my uncles a generation ago served in the American military. Because of my father's wanderlust and early death, I never learned why he did not earn his commission. Whatever the reason, the black and white image seems to hint at his unrealized potential.

Perhaps that explains why the slogan “Be All You Can Be” resonated with me as a young man. I recall long conversations with an Army recruiter at my mother's kitchen table, where we weighed my options after graduating from high school. Consequently, I chose to enlist in the Army National Guard and became a “weekend warrior” along with my college roommates. The Montgomery GI Bill enabled me to earn my B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. by 1995. Proud to be an American, I am forever indebted to my Uncle Sam.

In writing this textbook, I owe debts to numerous people. Over the years, a number of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines have spoken with me about their experiences in the armed forces. Several reminded me of the military adage

that professionals talk logistics rather than tactics. I greatly appreciate all of the lessons learned.

I benefited from the contributions of many fine scholars, whose books often appear among my suggested readings with each chapter. Special thanks are due to James C. Bradford, Beth Bailey, G. Kurt Piehler, Judith Hicks Stiehm, Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, William T. Allison, Jeffrey Grey, Janet G. Valentine, Michael D. Doubler, Adrian R. Lewis, Darlene M. Iskra, Robert O. Kirkland, Nicole L. Anslover, and John C. McManus. Beyond their careful attention to scholarship, their arguments and interpretations guided my work.

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In spite of all the help that I received while writing this textbook, I alone am responsible for any errors.

Prologue

Freedom Is Not Free

Second Lieutenant Nicholas Eslinger preferred not to use his night-vision goggles on patrol, because he felt that he could see better with ambient light. A graduate of West Point, the 25-year-old Army officer served with the 327th Infantry Regiment of the 1st Brigade Combat Team in the 101st Airborne Division. On the evening of October 1, 2008, he led his platoon through a hostile neighborhood of Samarra, Iraq.

Suddenly, Eslinger glimpsed something in the darkness. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a hand come over a wall to hurl a grenade. It landed around six feet in front of him. As it rolled into the middle of his formation, he felt an instant rush of adrenaline through his body. He dived on top of it, hoping to shield his platoon by absorbing the explosion with his torso. When it did not explode as anticipated, he grabbed it and threw it back over the wall. The grenade was no dud, though. It exploded on the other side.

Eslinger received the Silver Star for his actions that night, but he sought no special recognition for gallantry. “I think honestly that any leader in that situation would have done the same thing,” he mused. Though grateful for the combat decoration, he insisted that he only did what was expected in the American military.

There are several reasons to study American military history, but the most important one is to understand the role of the armed forces in the United States. Almost everybody knows that Americans went to war to win independence from European empires, to expand national boundaries across the North American continent, and to defend U.S. interests near and far. However, most textbooks

for American history courses downplay the importance of service members. They lack the kind of focus that enables students to question why Americans fought, how different people experienced conflict, and who served and ultimately sacrificed. All too many distort the past by erasing warriors from their pages. Now more than ever, it is time to think anew about American military history.

This undergraduate textbook introduces today's students to over 400 years of American military history. Recognizing a state of almost perpetual conflict, it begins with the clashes between militia and natives in North America and ends with the operations in theaters such as Afghanistan and Iraq. It considers the causes and the effects of wars large and small. Despite the vexing emotions stirred by extreme violence, it offers a sensible look at the human element in warfare.

The human element is evident throughout this textbook, which relates the struggles of people in their own terms. It appreciates not only key individuals but also cultural, social, political, economic, and technological developments. It traces the organization of the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, and the reserve component from the colonial period to the global age. It gives due attention to the patterns of national service, the evolution of civil–military relations, and the advent of all-volunteer forces. The straightforward presentation examines the myriad ways in which military affairs have shaped the history of the U.S.

Generation after generation, a paradox has persisted within military affairs. On the one hand, the armed forces have exercised power in ways that troubled civil society. On the other hand, civil society would have ceased to exist without vigilant guardians moored to warrior traditions. This paradox resonates with the unforgettable words engraved on the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C.: “FREEDOM IS NOT FREE.”

With these words in mind, I tell a story about the American military in the pages that follow. Starting in 1607 and ending in the present, my abridgement of the incredible drama brings the past to life. The fast-paced coverage encompasses the subject content common to most courses on American history, albeit with a martial thrust. Accordingly, the acts of war imparted meaning to those entangled with the constant strife. The development of the U.S. entailed sacrifices in the name of freedom, but often with unexpected twists and turns along the way. Though passionate about peace, no other nation in the world has fought on behalf of freedom for so long and to such an extent. What emerges from a well-rounded survey of the American military is not a polemical or controversial work, but one that focuses upon people first and foremost.

American military history features many different people, who experienced combat in a broad range of threat environments. Since humans began recording history, societies have organized themselves to use force against rivals. At the most basic level, the first populations across the western hemisphere engaged in conflict with knives, swords, shields, and spears. Indigenous ways of war appeared uncivil to European colonists, especially the English invaders of the North American woodlands. Conversely, Indian warriors adapted to the technological edge maintained by their opponents crossing the Atlantic Ocean. From the Virginia tidewater to the Massachusetts Bay, the colonial militia system linked the assumptions of manhood with the strenuous life of soldiering and seafaring. Owing to the proliferation of firearms as weaponry, the shifting borders produced battles of short duration yet high intensity. On the periphery of the British Empire, the wars for America raged for decades.

The War for Independence enabled Americans to organize the armed forces for national defense. Upon the ratification

of the U.S. Constitution, the War Department formed in 1789. A separate Navy Department was established less than a decade later. Whereas military duties varied from community to community, citizens generally left their farms and shops when mobilizing to secure their country. A vast number honored their obligations in principle but not always in practice. Although race and class impacted demographics, the most important determinant of national service remained ideology. The federal government maintained only a small cohort of regulars, who primarily served at territorial outposts or on maritime patrols. Professional military education set officers apart from the rank and file. Nevertheless, state militiamen comprised the bulk of the force structure. Devoted to nation-building, Americans provided for a frontier constabulary across the North American continent.

Time and again, the armed forces advanced the collective interests of an expanding nation. Military power surged not simply with superior armaments but also with significant advantages in organization, command, morale, and initiative. The Industrial Revolution modified campaign logistics, which service members mastered in fits and starts. While fighting the Civil War, they preferred to overwhelm foes with quick but decisive actions. They learned to shoot, move, and communicate in ways that produced massive destruction. Their strategies for attrition redefined combat for generations. To avoid casualties from enemy fire, Americans eventually wanted technological fixes while maximizing force protection. Troops assumed responsibility for less direct applications of military power as well. In other words, countering threats often included the securing of offshore bases, distribution of humanitarian aid, and engineering of non-military infrastructure. Whether on land, at sea, or in air, U.S. forces found themselves in a full spectrum of operations.

The growth of the nation-state continued to alter the composition of U.S. forces. Washington D.C. compelled young males to register for the draft beginning in 1917. The percentage of service members in relation to the total population remained stable through two world wars. An anti-draft movement during the Vietnam War prompted the federal government to abandon the compulsory arrangements, which resulted in major changes to the force structure. Consequently, the brass in the Pentagon integrated the reserve component into the planning and posturing of national defense. By the twenty-first century, the average recruit appeared better educated and more skilled than in the past. Most came from small towns and identified with the middle class. Minority groups comprised a slightly disproportionate part of the recruitment pool. Women found new opportunities across the branches. With higher standards and greater equity, the all-volunteer forces gave Americans confidence in a period of rapid globalization.

Americans made the military one of the nation's most respected institutions. With a long and storied tradition of excellence, the uniformed services reinforced positive characteristics among members. Each branch imparted core values, although the differences between them seemed profound and pervasive. More often than not, officers and enlisted personnel showed drive, energy, determination, discipline, and empathy. Whatever the mission, individuals from all walks of life reported for duty in times of trouble. They understood that great power brought tremendous responsibility. Some became fighting legends, while others grew proficient at handling units, paperwork, and gadgets. From entrenchments to flattops, most took pride in a job well done. Deployments overseas tested their abilities to operate in various theaters. Of course, their adversaries tried to exploit their weaknesses. The tragic blunders of

wartime notwithstanding, Americans in the military strove to become all that they could be.

Through the years, Americans in the military shared a sense of patriotism that many civilians found reassuring. Whenever the armed forces flourished, disparate communities seemed to come together. Courage on the front lines of a struggle depended to a considerable degree on attachments to the home front. Networks of families and friends helped to sustain individuals, who sometimes endured the fog of war under great pressure. Even in the darkest days, they inspired one another to give everything for cause and comrades. Moreover, popular culture left vivid impressions of military life. The mass media shaped public perceptions of the boots on the ground, whether the imagery depicted action heroes or wounded warriors. As the standard bearers for the nation, citizens swore oaths to defend the U.S. Constitution against all enemies – foreign or domestic. Above all else, character counted in uniform.

With men and women in uniform as a focal point, my narrative is written for undergraduates lacking specialized knowledge or military experience. No student can understand the armed forces without first coming to terms with chronological developments. To learn from history, one must see the present emerging from the past. Even cadets in military academies or ROTC programs will be enriched by the breadth and depth of the coverage, as will educators, journalists, diplomats, analysts, and policymakers interested in military affairs. Military professionals seeking insights from historical episodes will discover lessons applicable to future wars. Anyone engaged in peace, conflict, or comparative studies will find sections relevant to their interests.

Each of the 16 chapters opens with an introductory vignette about Americans in the military. The personal story sets the stage for the significant outcomes that unfold in the

chapter. It also will grab the reader's attention before considering the constraints within a historical context. Though brief, colorful, and anecdotal, it puts a human face on the diverse experiences of service members over the years.

As a one-volume synthesis of American military history, my accounting of events is fair and balanced. Short quotes distilled from documents, newspapers, and memoirs mingle with readable prose. A handful of photographs and maps provide illustrations but not distractions. Mindful of a "cultural turn," I mix the concerns of civil society with a penchant for the "full battle rattle." The chapters on the Civil War and World War II are a bit longer than the others, which stir us to imagine a whiff of gun smoke in the air. The pages are unencumbered by jargon and theories, because I believe that story-telling makes the past come alive for the broadest audience possible. Narration of military action glosses over complexity, to be sure, but all histories do so while contemplating subjects that seem immeasurably chaotic and unstable. In other words, my work shows how momentous episodes fit together like the pieces of a puzzle without cluttering passages in needless technicalities. Distinguished by a coherent, unified voice, I blend aspects of "new" military history with the "old."

To facilitate lively classroom discussions, each chapter closes with a few summative remarks. While restating the main themes of the aforementioned content, the culminating passages also allude to myths that inform historical consciousness. They touch upon the military in American memory, thereby pointing toward cultural patterns. Three essential questions appear after the conclusion, which encourage students to think critically about what happened. Each should help active learners to engage in historical thinking as a process of inquiry and discovery. If they wish to investigate a topic further, then I

urge them to turn to the scholarship listed in my suggested readings.

A scan of any scholar's bookshelf reveals innumerable works that consider the role of the armed forces. Military history is as ancient as Herodotus and Thucydides, yet it remains alive and well today. The vast literature includes specialized volumes on subjects like ships, aircraft, artillery, tanks, swords, rifles, and bayonets. Resonating with the “drums and bugles” of battlefields, book after book has been published on innovative tactics and winning strategies. Several delve into leadership and unit cohesion, doctrines and campaign logistics, and the accouterments of different nations. While exploring the world's ways of war, a growing number accentuate the remembrances of ordinary men and women in uniform. The study of the past is forever entangled with what historian Russell F. Weigley once called the “state-organized instruments of mass murder.”

No historian has informed my work more than James C. Bradford, who edited the two-volume anthology, *A Companion to American Military History* (2010). The 67 essays analyze the historiographical issues pertinent to wars, battles, and military institutions. A number address the presence of women and minorities in U.S. forces, while others note military operations other than war. As an essential reference for research, the well-crafted compendium covers a wide range of disciplinary perspectives.

In addition, I previously edited a primary source collection that presents American military history from the “inside out.” With respect for the experiences of those who fought, *American Military History: A Documentary Reader* (2011) contains illuminating, first-person accounts of war. They express what endures at the heart of military affairs, that is, the will to fight for something greater than the self.

For fighting men and women, “freedom is not free” represents more than a catch-phrase. It is a reminder that the freedoms enjoyed in civil society exist largely because of the sacrifices made by service members. For over four centuries, American warriors joined forces to fulfill their calling at home and abroad. Their actions speak far louder than mere words, for they worked together in war and peace. This is their story.

1

An Uncommon Defense (1607–1775)

Introduction

On September 24, 1759, a force of nearly 150 men maneuvered in the marshy woods of North America. They included Indians, provincials, and regulars, although most of them possessed no formal military training. After entering Quebec, they gathered to the northeast of Missisquoi Bay for a “council of war.”

Major Robert Rogers, their commander, addressed the gathering. Clothed in a green-jacket and bonnet, he stood over 6 feet tall. His face was marked by smallpox scars and gunpowder burns. His forehead revealed a line carved into his flesh by a lead bullet. He spoke deliberately with few words, exhibiting a coolness that inspired confidence in the weary men. Their line of retreat was cut off by their enemy, he announced, while an ambush awaited them ahead. Drawing upon his understanding of the terrain, he quickly designed a plan of action. Although the mission that he outlined seemed impossible, they voted to “prosecute our design at all adventures.”

Modifying their route, Rogers guided them through the spruce bogs in the boreal forests. As they stepped into the cold, acidic water, the submerged branches, needles, roots, and logs tore their moccasins to shreds and left many of them barefoot. They marched abreast in a single “Indian file,” so as to prevent their enemy from tracking them. Their

movement through the bogs continued for nine days and culminated near the Saint-Francois River.

The men stood almost 6 miles away from their target, an Abenaki village on the other side of the waterway. They stripped and bundled their clothes inside their packs. While carrying their packs and muskets as high as possible, they cautiously stepped into the river. They waded into the icy, turbulent currents of a channel nearly 5 feet deep and hundreds of yards across. They formed a human chain, sidestepping through the raging water across the slippery rocks. After reaching the northern shoreline, they heard the sounds of the village in the night air.

At dawn on October 4, Rogers divided his forces into three groups for the raid. They readied their muskets, fixed their bayonets, and secured their tomahawks and knives. As they crept to the edge of the village, they held their breath. In an instant, the sudden crackle of the first shot reverberated in their ears.

Figure 1.1 *Robert Rogers – commandeur der Americaner*, 1778. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

The raid on the Abenaki village illustrated how deeply Rogers and his comrades immersed themselves in the martial arts of the woodland Indians. They studied Native American warriors, who possessed great skill in a surprise encounter and used the terrain to their tactical advantage. While maneuvering in a bewildering landscape, they learned to discern unexpected patches of color or movement against the forest hue. They utilized the plants and the animals to orient themselves and to track their foes. Over the decades, they found ways to unite the stealth and mobility of the indigenous cultures with the European appetite for technology and adventure. Their synthesis of the Old and New World modes of fighting evolved into a kind of warfare that would define early America.

Beginning in 1492, European empires waged war against each other and against the first people of the Americas.

During the age of conquest, they forged highly disciplined and powerful military organizations capable of invading and occupying vast territories across the globe. They established outposts in distant corners of North America: the Spanish at St. Augustine and Santa Fe, the French at Quebec, the Dutch at Fort Nassau, and, most significantly for the future United States, the English at Jamestown. Colonization accentuated an exaggerated sense of localism as well as a naive faith in improvisation. Thus, the English colonists devised a militia system to defend the settlements, to police the backcountry, and to extend the borders.

By the time England established a beachhead on the Atlantic seaboard, North America was already a war zone. The bases of the Spanish, French, and Dutch supported the European occupation of the Amerindian homelands, while their search for portable wealth spawned violence at almost every turn. For the English colonists, appropriating land proved more important than extracting tribute or booty. Their outposts on far and distant shores offered refuge to newcomers. The process of empire-building helped to shape the structure and composition of the armed forces. Steeped in ancient tradition and codified into common law, the colonial societies called forth warriors to provide an uncommon defense.

The Militia

The English word “militia” comes from the Latin term *miles*, meaning soldier. In ancient Greece, the city-states required military service from all able-bodied citizens. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the concept of localized militia spread across Europe and migrated to England. Thus, the militia system that the English-speaking people inherited owed much to assumptions about citizen soldiers in antiquity.