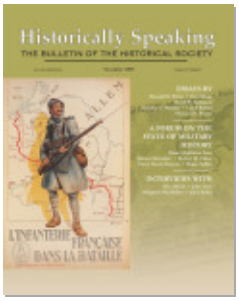
Response to Linn and Showalter

Robert M. Citino



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that people with advanced training in military history actually do.

AMU and Norwich depend essentially on increasingly sophisticated electronic systems that enable ongoing student discussion both in on-line classes and informally among themselves, systematic and detailed student-faculty contact, and administrative oversight that sustains cohesion without interfering with "freedom to learn and freedom to teach." The technical aspects of the programs will only grow more effective.

The essential element of these on-line military history programs, however, is their faculties. Both institutions have a changing mix of full-time and part-time instructors. The military history community's relatively small size and the generally cordial relations among its members mean that civilians, military personnel, and government employees are mutually acquainted. The newly engaged part-timer at AMU or Norwich is almost certain to find a half-dozen old friends on the faculty rolls. Along with retired officers and government historians, there are retired professors who wish to remain involved in higher education, and recent Ph.D.s whose credentials and achievements eminently qualify them for nonexistent jobs in history departments.

A legitimate question for this forum is whether on-line degrees are in practice terminal. Norwich and AMU do not regard or present themselves as feeders for doctoral programs, and to date the number of crossovers has not been enough to encourage facile optimism. But technology is on the side of convergence. The ease and comprehensiveness of interlibrary loan has already created a quiet revolution in the historical profession by facilitating access to source material in military history and making research travel far more efficient. The proliferation of archival material on the Internet is only likely to increase; so is the sophistication of communication. We are not there yet—but a major next step will involve expanding perspectives and unstuffing shirts.

AMU and Norwich reflect a comprehensive movement toward market-based educational reform, which is unlikely to spare the universities. Nontraditional conditions call for flexibility, situational awareness, and not least a thick skin. But how does that differ from the current situation confronting the military historian in the traditional academic system?

Apocalyptic predictions of a general academic implosion or some kind of external socio-economic crisis that will restore military history's position because of its relative cost-effectiveness and profitability hardly merit serious consideration, particularly for scholars of war making. But military history has solid prospects of comprehensive development outside the conventional academy.

Dennis Showalter is professor of history at Colorado College. He is an expert in German military history. Among his books are Patton and Rommel: Men of War in the 20th Century *(Berkeley Publishing, 2005);* The Wars of German Unification *(Arnold, 2004); and* Tannenberg: Clash of Empires *(Archon, 1991), winner of the American Historical Association's Paul Birdsall Prize. He is a past president of the Society for Military History and in 2005 he received the SMH's Samuel Eliot Morison Achievement Award for his many contributions to military history.*

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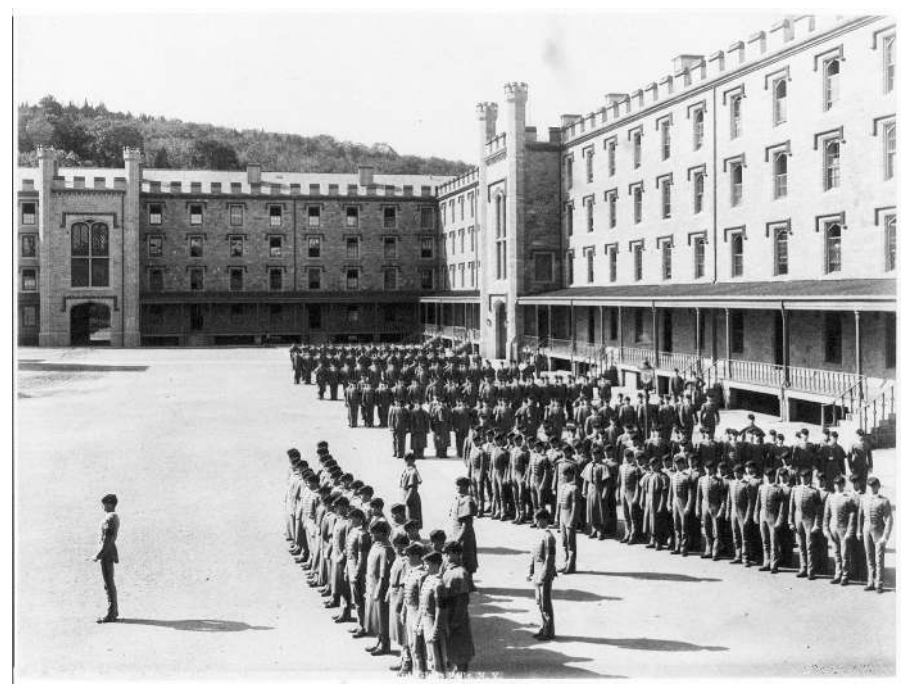
Back in 2005 the *American Historical Review* approached me and, to my astonishment, asked me to write an article for the journal on the current state of military history. In the course of the next few months, when my colleagues found out about my assignment, there was no lack of advice about how to proceed. This was the time to "let them have it," to tell "our story," to rescue military history from the obscurity to which the academy had exiled it. I tried to resist that approach, explaining to my friends that I felt like a man who had finally been invited to a very exclusive party and who did not want to complain about the ambience or the silverware the first moment that he walked into the room. I simply tried to put our best foot forward, arguing that military history is serious history, and that military historians are serious scholars who are doing work as important as those in any other historical subfield. The resulting article may have lacked fireworks, but I thought—and still think—that the approach had merit.



West Point, ca. 1889. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [reproduction number, LC-USZ62-62092].

That is why the analyses and recommendations of my friends Dennis Showalter and Brian Linn had me nodding in agreement. Neither one is especially disgruntled. Neither spent a great deal of time whining about the plight of military history, grinding axes about the leftward lean of the profession, or asking "Why do they hate us?" Neither fired salvoes in the culture wars or complained about their colleagues' politics. Best of all, both seem to view the current situation in military history more in terms of opportunity than of crisis.

Showalter, for example, argues that military historians who are marginalized within the academy need to reach out to different constituencies. His *tour d'horizon* takes us to readers of popular magazines like those published by the Weider Group, to "nontraditional students" whom he describes as the "occupationally retired but intellectually alert," and finally to the "thousands of students enrolled in online MA programs in military history," especially those at the American Military University (AMU) and Norwich University. Indeed, it is hard to argue with this. Showalter's own impressive publishing career has followed a trajectory from the strictly scholarly (*Railroads and Rifles*) to the increas-

ingly popular (*Patton and Rommel*), all without the sacrifice of a single jot of scholarly rigor. Indeed, as one who has followed his writings passionately and obsessively, I can say that there is no difference at all between the "early Dennis" and the "later." He has proved that there is an enormous appetite among the general reading population for hard thinking and good writing about war. Likewise, there is no arguing with the success of AMU—seventy on-line programs, 40,000 students—or Norwich's impressive reconception of the traditional MA for the digital age.

Nor does Linn see this as a time for tears. Despite the relegation of military history to the margins of academe—a marginalization he is not all that unhappy about, given the current state of the profession!—he notes that opportunities abound, opportunities far greater than those found in any other historical subfield. There are fellowships, grants, and programs funded by military and civilian institutes, from the Guggenheim and Verville Fellowships to the West Point Summer Seminar to the Harold K. Johnson Visiting Professorship at the U.S. Army War College; there are real possibilities of wielding influence on government policy (with the "surge" in Iraq being the best example and with military historians Eliot Cohen and Fred Kagan as the exemplars); there are the fellowship and networking that come with membership in the Society for Military History, perhaps the best specialized organization of professional historians in the world; and finally, there is a huge number of job opportunities for civilian historians within the military itself.

In evaluating the truth of what Showalter and Linn have written, I need only look to my own career. I've written the usual scholarly books and articles, yes, but I've also been lucky enough to make appearances on TV's History Channel and I am currently blogging for *World War II* magazine (per Showalter). Earlier in my career I served as a civilian historian for the U.S. Army, and I was recently honored to serve as the Charles Boal Ewing Chair visiting professor at the U.S. Military Academy in 2008-09 (per Linn). I mention these items not to appear exceptional, but to make the point that virtually every academic military historian of my generation has had similar experiences. Showalter's and Linn's description of a profession that reaches beyond the traditional history department is more than a vision, it is already a reality, and it should go far toward reducing the military historian's self-perception of being relegated to the margins.

As much as I am heartened to read accounts of professional military history that accentuate the positive, however, I do feel it necessary to supplement what has been said here with a few words of caution. As important as it is to pursue the nontraditional and nonacademic paths recommended above, I am slightly uneasy about the notion of military history deemphasizing its links to the traditional academy, accepting its current marginalization, and settling for things the way they are.

With all its faults and foibles, the brick and mortar school is still the way most students experience higher education today, and it will be into the foreseeable future. Someday the entire world and all its activities may be wired, but we are still a long way from that prospect. Without falling into the role of culture warrior, one to which I am singularly unsuited by temperament, I would therefore urge military historians to leave no conference unattended, no journal article unsubmitted, no ACLS Fellowship application unsent, and no opportunity to "show the flag" within the broader profession unseized. The results may or may not be satisfactory to us, but we must remember something that those on the academic Left understood long ago: we are engaged on a long march that can bear fruit well after we are gone from the scene. And no matter what the results, we can and should follow the example of St. Paul: we should fight the good fight.

Where will the next generation of military historians come from, if we aren't in college and university classrooms to teach them?

Let me pose a few general questions:

1) Where will the next generation of military historians come from, if we aren't in college and university classrooms to teach them? We must reach out to include the "occupationally retired" in our educational endeavor and staff the civilian historian positions within the army, certainly, but it seems to me that we also have an imperative to reach the thousands of young people interested in military affairs, to inspire them early, and to guide those who are so inclined into careers in military history. And we have to be inside the academy to do so. In a sense, the physical classroom will always be our base, and forays outside it—even lengthy and lucrative ones—must supplement, rather than replace, our traditional activity as classroom teachers.

2) Isn't there a link between classroom teaching and historical research? Our activity in the classroom, facing off against real, live, sometimes bored, sometimes obstreperous students is a key to making us clearer thinkers, better researchers, and more dynamic writers. I have certainly taken part in exciting intellectual fights on email and blogs; I am not posing here as some sort of Luddite. But once again, even the most digitally aware people in the world still leave the house to go to work, they still shop at stores, and they still go to college in a classroom building. Trained military historians need to be in that building to greet them.

3) Don't most of the extra-academic opportunities discussed in the two essays tend to go to those with a college or university affiliation? Anyone can write military history, as Linn points out, and so-called "amateurs" and "buffs" have had a major impact on our profession and on the way we view war. There are advantages, however, and clear ones, that come with being part of the faculty at an actual institution of higher learning: the name recognition of the school; the number and strength of the local, regional, and national alumni; and the large number of in-house funding opportunities that exists even at smaller schools.

For all these reasons, we need to do everything that Showalter and Linn recommend, but we also need to keep pounding away at the gates of academe, even if it might seem hopeless from time to time. Military history may no longer be well represented at our elite schools. I live up the street from the University of Michigan, for example, which used to have a fine military history program, but no longer has a single military historian on its permanent staff. So, we may not be working at the Harvards and Yales of the world as often as we would like. But we live in a big country with thousands of colleges and universities. I still agree with something that John Lynn said in his article "'Rally Once Again': The Embattled Future of Military History," *Journal of Military History* 61 (1997): graduate students interested in military history must write dissertations broad enough in their subject matter and sophisticated enough in their methodology to get them hired somewhere. They are then free to develop themselves as scholars and teachers as they see fit.

May I suggest a new motto for our profession? How about "We Cede No Territory"?

Robert M. Citino teaches at the University of North Texas. His most recent books are Death of the Wehrmacht: The German Campaigns of 1942 *(University of Kansas Press, 2007) and* The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich *(University of Kansas Press, 2005). His* Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare *(University of Kansas Press, 2004) won both the Paul Birdsall Prize for the best book in military or strategic history from the American Historical Association and the Distinguished Book Award from the Society for Military History.*