Winter 2012

Review of *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II* by Peter J. Schifferle

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In America’s School for War, Peter J. Schifferle examines the role of professional military education at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, notably through the Command and General Staff College (CGSC), in preparing officers for likely responsibilities as staff officers and leaders in future wars. Focusing on the period between the two world wars, he emphasizes continuity in thinking and doctrine and, related to both, in the rationale for the curriculum at CGSC. Whatever the number of students (which expanded as U.S. involvement in World War II loomed) or the structure of the curriculum
(which went from two years to one in length), the cultivation of officers’ competence to enable them to bring together the wherewithal to conduct warfare quickly and decisively, as well as to impart an appreciation for elements of leadership and command, was consistently central.

Unlike many earlier historians, Schifferle emphasizes the continuity of Americans’ experience in World War I and their thinking and training afterward. In fact, he claims, “The most significant, and frequently overlooked, conclusion is the overwhelming influence that World War I had on the interwar army officers.” This pervasive influence becomes an essential element of his comprehensive argument, since only some officers serving during World War II had Leavenworth schooling, and Schifferle needs to explain the general success of the Army’s officer corps by other means as well. In addition to formal schooling at Leavenworth, Schifferle credits the success to various officers’ actual experience in World War I, how they perceived their profession and the need to master skills, and their expectations concerning future war, including an awareness of the interplay of “penetration” (Blitzkrieg to the Germans) and positional warfare along with the essential nature of combined arms coordination.

One of the most lively sections, late in the work, features Major General Ernest N. Harmon during the German offensive in the Ardennes late in 1944. Schifferle convincingly shows Harmon to have been quick, clear, and effective in helping to blunt and reverse the Germans. But as evidence of the effectiveness of professional military education at Leavenworth, this is ultimately only anecdotal. His explanation of Leavenworth’s influence as part of a composite leaves no sure way to determine the weight of each element.

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