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# Literature in the Education of the Military Professional

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from Plato's Cave. Until then Stockdale holds us cheerfully with the lines from Louis MacNeice he quotes:

Good-bye now, Plato and  
Hegel,

The shop is closing down;  
They don't want any philoso-  
pher-kings in England

There ain't no universals in  
this man's town.

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Ahern, Donald and Shenk, Robert. *Literature in the Education of the Military Professional*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: US Air Force Academy, 1982.

This collection of essays is written by officers and civilians who have taught English at the Air Force Academy. It is a catalog of arguments for including the study of literature as an *essential*, rather than a "nice to have" ingredient of military professional education. The polemic is derived from the authors' perception that the present system of professional education rests on an overly narrow foundation and is therefore in danger of producing automaton-technicians who will eventually rise to become unimaginative bureaucrats. The prescription proposed to set this right is a redesign of curriculum to include more of the humanities.

It is forcefully suggested that as modern warriors are exposed to belles-lettres, ranging from Homer and Herodotus to Melville and Mark Twain, they will be better equipped to understand their own humanity,

deal with decisions as the determination of ends rather than mere means, achieve self-confidence, exercise their emotional, intellectual and moral facilities, discern the true nature of combat, develop imagination and insight, apply moral values in stressful situations, experience several lifetimes (rather than just one), unite science with the human condition, understand the value of that which they defend and that which they may be called upon to destroy, and last but not least, be creative.

The strength of this treatise is its practical usefulness as a litany of logic to those who must defend the teaching of literature to prospective or practicing professionals (military and otherwise) or who wish to expand the domain of English Departments in those particular halls of academe that are not friendly to the conception of humane letters as arrows in the quivers of "real world actors." Enlightened Provosts, Chancellors and Presidents of professionally oriented institutions will also find this to be a handy reference as they attempt to generate a philosophy that can stem the omnipresent tide of a post-Sputnik current of misguided pragmatism and anti-intellectualism. Such defenders of the "faith" will find solace in the echo of frustration that pervades these essays, an echo that is captured by the concluding sentence of one contributor. "If literature can really do all of this, why do you teach only one semester of it at the Academy?"

The weakness of this collection is that it is severely limited in its grasp

of the analytical and practical problems confronting those who design and implement military professional education programs. First, it is not at all clear that courses in literature taught to prospective officers would necessarily change the character of the officer corps in the way predicted by these teachers. Social scientists have demonstrated that the predominant personal traits and expectations of young men and women are formed before college age. Those who are drawn to a "life of the mind," who appreciate the complexities of life and of abstract notions about life or who have a distaste for authoritative structures, are generally not attracted to the military profession. The few philosophically minded officers who have demonstrated both a love of literature and a love of a life of action (the MacArthurs and the Stockdales) were prepared to blossom long before they entered college. The vast majority of prospective officers expect to adapt to the military because they value a physically demanding life style, have an aptitude for dealing with technology and value the sort of rationality that can come from the exercise of unquestioned authority. Indeed, prior to acceptance, they are carefully screened for these traits by the use of psychological testing instruments and interviews. Perhaps they might therefore benefit from a massive infusion of the humanities; anything short of this is bound to have only a marginal impact. Even most literature majors at the most high-minded liberal arts schools do not in the

main, turn out to be the MacArthurs and the Stockdales of our society.

Most philosopher-kings were kings long before they were philosophers. In a world where the professional military person must manage the techniques of violence, technology may not be the bottom line for success, yet it is a *sine qua non*. Those who are capable of absorbing an ever expanding body of technical knowledge and of learning all there is to know about the human condition are few and far between. Are there sufficient hours in a curriculum day to teach all that? Are educators wise enough to synthesize the practical requirement for technical understanding and the equally practical requirement to understand humanity? Can they avoid throwing out the "baby with the bath water"? Without the technical capacity to fight, the values that we want to protect may be destroyed regardless of our appreciation of their worth.

No doubt it would be nice to have our cake and eat it. But is this possible? If there is a tragic element in the situation of the military professional it is that he cannot be a person for all seasons, no matter how hard he tries or how hard we try to help him.

Finally, the ultimate source of wisdom with regard to the use of force lies in the hands of the politician-statesman. My Lai's real lesson is that of human frailty, particularly in stressful situations. Human behavior is a function of individual trait and situational factors. It is the civilian that determines the parameters of

the officer's situation as well as the "veil of tears" that covers both domestic and international politics.

The suggestion that programming the minds of military professionals with the wisdom of humane letters can result in the triumph of good, simply overstates (even the potential) impact of literature on national security outcomes. The particular literature that describes Don Quixote tilting at windmills should be required reading for those who would use good ideas to dilute the evil in reality. We already know that needs to be done. We do not know how to do it and this little book fails to give us even the slightest hint.

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Schurman, D.M. *The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867-1914*. Malabar, Fla.: Krieger, 1984. 213pp. \$15.50

Don Schurman's *Education of a Navy* is so well known and so highly regarded by practicing naval historians that the occasion of its reprinting does not require an extensive review, except to draw attention to the fact that it is happily available once more.

Originally published in 1965, it is the pioneer work of scholarship which outlines the intellectual *milieu* in which naval theory took shape. In a series of essays—on the two Colombos, Mahan, Richmond, Laughton, and Corbett—Schurman defines the contributions of

the men who not only changed the study of naval history from an antiquarian and patriotic pastime to a serious academic study, but who also founded the basis for professional thought through the use of history. The book remains an important part of every naval historian's library and should be read by everyone who has an interest in the development of naval theory.

Krieger has reprinted the book without any revision to the text, but important progress has been made in the field with Schurman's own 1981 book, *Julian S. Corbett: Historian of British Maritime Policy from Drake to Jellicoe* and his article, "Mahan Revisited" (*Swedish Journal of Military History*, 1982). In addition, Barry Hunt's study, *Sailor-Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1982) has greatly improved and refined knowledge of Richmond's contribution. The recent appearance of these works makes Schurman's earlier book all the more valuable as the basic study in the area.

Professor Theodore Ropp has written a preface to the Krieger reprint in which he appropriately hails Schurman's book as "the classic study of the intellectual change from sail to steam." Regrettably, the printer omitted five words in Ropp's preface, at the bottom of the first page. It should read: "What the current head of the [Canadian] Royal Military College's History Department was dealing with two decades ago was the policy maker's over-all mentality as he dealt with a glorious