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Professional Reading

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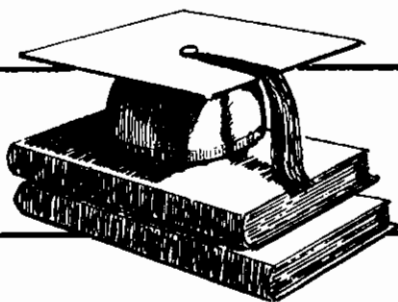
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PROFESSIONAL READING

Barnett, Correlli. *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975. 392pp.

Howard, Michael, ed. *The Theory and Practice of War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975. 374pp.

The Indiana University Press recently entered into the field of military history in an important way. They are republishing a number of excellent books initially issued about 10 years ago, only to go out of print because of financial strains in the publishing world. Here are two of the most recent such volumes.

In republishing *The Swordbearers*, Indiana has done a great favor to students of the First World War as well as to readers of history who appreciate good writing. Barnett's book has "worn well"; although the active scholarship on First World War matters has turned up some minor errors of fact in the volume since its publication, it remains one of the most interesting and useful books in the vast literature of that war. Barnett argues that the character of the supreme commanders—Moltke, Jellicoe, Petain, and Ludendorff—decisively affected their times and the war. There is much irony and some paradox in Barnett's contrasts between the men of conservative profession, shaped in an earlier age, and the conditions of change—social, technological, political—which characterized the turn of the century and the war years. Barnett's approach to the men and their times results in a unique and personal understanding of the meaning and

consequences of the war: "War is the great auditor of institutions. The First World War, for example, pitilessly reveals French economic and social obsolescence, the gulf between German technological sophistication and political primitiveness, British industrial decay. It ended by displaying the dwarfishness of even the strongest of Europe's powers when scaled against America." That is a telling and instructive summation, and the book is filled with such good writing and shrewd judgment.

Indiana Press likewise has done well to reissue Howard's collection of 15 essays in honor of Capt. B.H. Liddell-Hart—works by Kissinger, Paret, General Beaufre, Alastair Buchan, Gen. Yigal Allon, and others. The essays span modern military thought and practice, from the writings of Jomini to the problems of nuclear strategy and Israeli military doctrine. These essays, like Barnett's book, have stood the test of a decade. They all deserve careful reading, and some of them rereading.

In sum, the reissue of these two volumes testifies to the durability of good thinking and writing. It is to Indiana Press's credit and to the advantage of students of military history and affairs that the volumes of such quality now are being republished. Their appearance in these paperbound editions especially makes them easy to own, and they deserve to be put on the bookshelves of many historians and military officers—that is, after reflective reading.

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