

Naval War College Review

Volume 19
Number 1 *January*

Article 6

1966

School of Naval Command and Staff: Four Characteristics of the U.S. Army

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Recommended Citation

Long, William F. Jr. (1966) "School of Naval Command and Staff: Four Characteristics of the U.S. Army," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 19 : No. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol19/iss1/6>

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FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF THE U.S. ARMY

by

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The United States Army is more than the organization, deployments and capabilities which currently capture our interest. It is the tradition of all wars past, a reflection of the historical character of our country and the concepts and philosophies of the current generation of Army leaders. It is true that when all the lines are written and all the words are spoken, it is the ability of the Army to fight on the ground and to ultimately exercise control over people that counts. However, the ideas and ideals that molded and continue to guide the molding of the modern U.S. Army are very much a part of the moral fibre and combat readiness of the source of American land power.

In this respect there are at least four major characteristics of the U.S. Army which merit delineation and development. These are the four "M's": Militia Tradition, Mobilization Miracles, Man-Minded, and Maritime Influence.

1. **Militia Tradition.** The first characteristic of the U.S. Army is that it reflects the militia tradition which has pervaded the concepts and management of the U.S. Army from its inception—and before. The colonial tradition, which initially relied almost exclusively upon the citizen as a military man, gave rise to the present concepts of civilian control. In our folklore, the rifleman occupies a primary place. The realities of our early history required the use of arms, and the organization of civilian life placed emphasis upon the responsibilities and the right of the citizen to bear arms. There was also the tendency for civilian leaders to continue exercising their community control in militia formations. Although it has long since been discovered that professional military qualifications and civilian community leadership is an

inexact equation, the proposition that leaders must have the willing support and confidence of the men in the ranks continues to condition our concepts of discipline and leadership.

One aspect of the militia tradition which has been particularly troublesome is the "fight and come home" ideas based on the concept that civilians become soldiers long enough to fight and win the battle, then return to carry on the civilian pursuits which were interrupted by war. This has continued to be a powerful psychological influence even in modern times when the military and political situations are damaged by it.

The militia tradition also reflects a fundamental American persuasion that professional armies are dangerous. This is because in the formative years of our country the citizens observed the peacetime use of the professional armies to coerce and overawe the people, and there are even constitutional provisions to protect the citizen from the Army. The right of the citizen to bear arms reflects this desire to retain civilian ability to control a professional Army even to the extent of exerting force against it, if necessary. The requirement for Congress to appropriate money annually for the Army also reflects the inherent desire of the people to keep the Army under absolute control.

However, in spite of these basic traditional psychological concepts, there is a strong thread of Yankee practicality running through the militia tradition which will accept a fairly large peacetime Army in the present cold war situation—but it still operates to confine the U.S. Army to a position and size which is certainly no more than commensurate with the absolute threat as discerned by the people and their elected leaders.

II. Mobilization Miracles. Operating inside the restriction of the militia tradition, the U.S. Army has always been called on to perform expansion miracles when a war situation which requires large armies confronts the U.S. The history of the U.S. Army has long since established the pattern of a small peacetime Army which must cope with initial combat situations and attempt to prevent military disasters, while at the same time providing a cadre upon which to build a conscription Army.

The equation:

Cadre + conscription, + education and training, = a fighting Army is by now a stylized and proven approach. This equation

puts a heavy peacetime and wartime burden upon the Army education and training structure. This accounts for the continuing, overriding Army emphasis upon professional education and training, and the development of techniques which can be applied to effectively communicate skills and attitudes to an enormous influx of civilian soldiers. For example, the small pre-World War II Army managed the production of combat forces in excess of 8 million in a period of about 4 years. Winston Churchill had something to say concerning this effort:

I greatly admired the manner in which the American Army was formed. I think it was a prodigy of organization, of improvisation. There have been many occasions when a powerful state has wished to raise great armies, and with money and time, and discipline and loyalty, that can be accomplished. Nevertheless, the rate at which the small American Army of only a few hundred thousand men, not long before the war, created the mighty force of millions of soldiers, is a wonder of military history . . . I saw the creation of this mighty force—this mighty Army—victorious in every theater against the enemy in so short a time and from such a very small parent stock. This is an achievement which the soldiers of every other country will always study with admiration and envy.

But that is not the whole story, nor even the greatest part of the story. To create large armies is one thing; to lead them and to handle them is another. It remains to me a mystery as yet unexplained how the very small staffs which the United States kept during the years of peace were able not only to build up the armies and the Air Force units, but also to find the leaders and vast staffs capable of handling enormous masses and of moving them faster and further than masses have ever been moved in war before . . .

III. **Man-Minded.** Nowhere does the U.S. Army reflect national character to a greater degree than it does in the development of attitudes and techniques aimed at the conservation of our most precious asset—men. The conviction that the life of our citizens is precious is reflected in the continuous, restless search for better techniques in substituting firepower for manpower. This attitude is emphasized and reemphasized and is repeated at every level of Army command and in all levels of military education and training.

This same mind-set accounts for the continued quest for increased mobility, because mobility is a means of economizing on force and thereby requires fewer personnel assets at the expense of money and machines.

There is also the conviction that the high morale resulting from being man-minded is worth the cost. The U.S. Army spends more effort and money in providing medical services, recreational activities, and morale and character-building programs than any other Army in the world. Although frequently misunderstood in the sense of attempting to make combat comfortable in the creature sense, Army leaders understand that taking care of our men is one of the surest ways to reap the irreplaceable rewards of high morale in combat.

IV. Maritime Influence. The U.S. Army staff and student presence at the Naval War College serves as a reminder that the U.S. Army also reflects the influence of the maritime character of the U.S. Having long since disposed of continental threats in North America, the initial ties of our people to the sea have been reinforced throughout our history. Occupying an insular position in the world, U.S. strategy continually reflects the maritime, commercial characteristics of our people. There is no requirement for a large Army to defend the shores of the U.S. against foreign invasion so long as our lines of naval and air defense remain intact. Further, the application of U.S. ground forces in foreign theaters requires the requisite sea and air lines of communication and is limited as much by the ability of the Navy and Air Force to transport and supply the Army as it is by purely Army considerations.

Summary. Taken altogether these characteristics have tended to limit the size of the U.S. Army, particularly in peacetime, and to establish U.S. Army attitudes in such basic areas as leadership, discipline, tactics and training. Operating inside these characteristics it should be a matter of national, as well as Army, pride that the citizen soldier of the U.S. has frequently been molded into formations which have successfully met and defeated the finest professional armies in the world. The U.S. Army confidently anticipates retaining this ability now and in the future.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Colonel William F. Long, Jr., USA (M.A., George Washington University) was Chief, Ground Operations and Operations Analysis Sections, J-3, Headquarters, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, until his recent assignment to the Naval War College as Army Adviser to the School of Naval Command and Staff. He served in Korea as Battalion and Regimental S-3 in 1950-51. Other assignments have been Battalion Commander and Regimental S-3 with the 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division in Germany, and on the staff of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, Headquarters, Department of the Army. Colonel Long is a graduate of the Army Command and General Staff College, the Armed Forces Staff College, and the Naval War College.