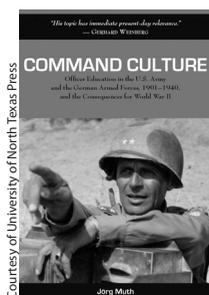


society and among its leaders. By extension, those afflicted by cancer or other debilitating illnesses who survive (with the assistance of the medical profession, luck, and personal fortitude) are held in high esteem and the subject of many inspirational biographies.

Similarly, for the military, our wounded warriors demonstrate toughness and perseverance under formidable circumstance with afflictions not of their doing or choosing. Illness and injury—physical or mental—may serve as the crucible experience that develops character and builds confidence in the ability to meet and overcome obstacles. We have seen this with contemporary military leaders such as amputee Generals Fred Franks and Eric Shinseki from the Vietnam era to those in the post-9/11 era who acknowledge their post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) like serving Generals Carter Ham, David Blackledge, and Gary Patton. It would seem imprudent to exclude a proven leader, regardless of disability, from the opportunity to continue to serve others.



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## **Command Culture: Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901-1940, and the Consequences for World War II**

by Jörg Muth

**Reviewed by Henry G. Gole**, author of *General William E. DePuy, Preparing the Army for Modern War* and the biography of Colonel Truman Smith, US Military Attaché in Hitler's Germany, to be published by the University Press of Kentucky

**C**ommand Culture is a provocative book. It will probably elicit shrieks of outrage from some readers and grudging praise from others intimately familiar with both the US Army and the German Armed Forces. In brief—*kurz um*, as Muth would say in his native German—compares the German and American systems of selecting, educating, and promoting military officers from 1901 to World War II and finds the German system superior. He is particularly critical of American cadet training at West Point and officer education at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He much prefers the German emphasis on acculturation resulting in bonding called *Kameradschaft*.

This reviewer's initial impression was that Muth is a brash young German academic freely and happily tossing intellectual hand grenades into the American Officers' Mess. As one carefully studies his thesis and sources, however, it becomes apparent that Muth has done his homework. His impressive research ranged widely and plunged deeply into German and American archives and secondary sources. His 217-page narrative is supported at every turn by 95 pages with 977 endnotes.

His research included interviews with American scholars Edward M. Coffman and Dennis Showalter, who suggested that he address the possible charge of bias for the German system. He took that advice and explains in an Afterword his lifelong fascination with the US Army begun as American soldiers allowed “the enthusiastic German kid” to climb on military equipment in the training area near the small town where he grew up. A later highpoint was his participation in the 2005 West Point Summer Seminar in Military History. He praises the teaching and dedication he experienced, calling West Point “a magical place.” Gratitude, however, did not soften objectivity as he reminds us: “History is by its very nature a harsh profession.”

Indeed! He writes, “The US Army did not have good officers because of West Point but in spite of it. During these first decades of the twentieth century, the Academy presents the spectacle of a monstrous waste of youthful enthusiasm.” And despite the lack of evidence supporting the utility of such monstrous waste, the institution consistently resisted change. He is particularly critical of the hazing of plebes (first-year cadets) by other cadets, pointing to the immaturity of those doing the hazing, the cruel and mindless practices, and the memorization of nonsense plebe “knowledge” (instead of useful military information). He has a similarly sceptical view of the relationship between the tactical officers and the cadets in their charge, regarding it as martinet to tin soldiers.

His point is that neither the harassment by other cadets nor the nagging by tactical officers (some soldiers would properly identify both as chickenshit), promotes what the Germans prize most in the acculturation of German cadets and junior officers: *Kameradschaft*. They attach great value to *Nachwuchs*, new blood or the rising generation. Certainly there is substantial challenge and rigorous discipline in the German system of training and educating. But fraternal trust is cultivated and nurtured at every stage of an officer's professional life by methods akin to that of big brother to cadet and uncle to junior officer. Muth wonders why a US Army that celebrates *Band of Brothers* employed harassment and nagging suitable for the eighteenth century rather than a brotherly or avuncular style to bond fellow professionals in the twentieth.

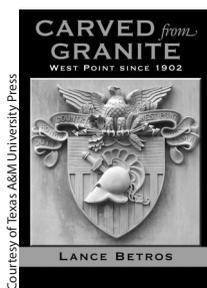
Muth takes his cudgel to Kansas to thump the CGSC as soundly as he whacked the United States Military Academy. What was a virtue, “a common professional language and shared military value system and common assumptions,” became a vice, “uniformity in judgment that stifles creative thinking.” Citing George S. Patton, “no one is thinking if everyone is thinking alike,” he damns the “school solution” that discouraged challenging the instructors at Leavenworth, “if an officer student wanted to leave the school with a respectable grade. Just as at West Point, the motto was ‘cooperate and graduate’ instead of ‘question and challenge.’ This was not a learning atmosphere for adults at all, especially not for officers who had by then considerable professional experience of their own to offer.”

In sharp contrast to milthink, at the *Kriegsakademie*, Erwin Rommel, Heinz Guderian—even Clausewitz—who were considered mavericks by their peers, were free to teach their ideas without restriction. Other experts in their

fields, who were also war veterans who had displayed an aptitude for instructing, taught their courses on a *primus inter pare* basis. In the course of map problems and war games, students would be asked to take over. The real point is that alternative student solutions were actively sought in the realization that insistence upon an approved or school solution might inhibit creativity and imagination. Muth says, “The heritage and idea of the officer remained the same until 1942.”

Albert Wedemeyer, who attended the *Kriegsakademie* in the 1930s, said that even on a bus with students returning to Berlin from a field exercise, the officer in charge would suddenly say, “Wedemeyer, *Lagebeurteilung!*” That is, what is your estimate of the situation? Recently one hears that called situational awareness. Muth points out that in the US Army before World War II, only at George C. Marshall’s Infantry School at Fort Benning were such methods used.

The book is based upon Muth’s Ph.D. dissertation submitted at the University of Utah in 2010. Writing in his second language, he is blunt and absolutely lucid in his conclusions. The source of his doctorate and incendiary style suggest that he did not find the German academic community congenial. American military professionals may be offended by the bluntness, but your reviewer strongly recommends the careful study of *Command Culture*.



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## ***Carved from Granite: West Point Since 1902***

by Lance Betros

**Reviewed by Cole C. Kingseed, COL (USA Retired)**

**I**n a popular vignette surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of West Point’s fabled Class of 1915, General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower turned to his classmate Omar Bradley and reportedly stated that West Point had not changed in the half century since their graduation. Ike was wrong. West Point had changed and it had changed significantly in the fifty years since he and Brad had graduated. Changes in virtually every area of cadet development had transformed the institution in ways that “the class the stars fell on” would never have envisioned.

After two centuries of existence, the mission of the United States Military Academy remains fixed and foremost—to prepare leaders of character for service as commissioned officers in the United States Army. Since its founding in 1802, thousands of West Point graduates have secured the Military Academy’s reputation as one of the foremost leader development institutions in the world. In *Carved from Granite*, BG Lance Betros (USA Retired) takes on a formidable challenge—to determine how effectively West Point has accomplished this mission of developing leaders of character over the course of the last century. Though his observations may run counter to the prevailing wisdom surrounding the Military Academy’s senior leadership, both past and