

MILITARY EDUCATION

**By Dr. J.L. Granatstein, OC,
Director, Canadian War Museum**

As a bureaucrat for first time, I now know that the canard about Civil Service doing nothing is wrong. This is first full time job I have ever had, and I say this because I know how hard you work, how the daily grind of command, of committees, of dealing with problems of individuals swallows up time and allows so little time for thought. And I know both that this is true for the military and that this is worse than twenty years ago; smaller numbers with less money, similar roles and increased, and different, responsibilities inevitably means more work. It is very hard to find time to think.

And time for thought is what a senior officer must have. Two weeks ago I read the diary of a relatively recent CDS. Three hundred evening functions in a year; countless meetings of committees; countless meetings with ambitious, disappointed senior officers; countless briefings and inspection tours. How can anyone think in such circumstances?

Thinking is what the Canadian Forces need, and thinking is what the Canadian Forces so frequently have failed to get in recent years. It used to be sixty or more years ago that the highest ambition of an army officer was to get to the British Army Staff College. Entry was achieved after a preparatory course at Kingston and an Empire-wide competition through written exams. The exams for the courses at Camberley and Quetta were difficult: training for war, organization, administration, transportation, history. If you passed, if you went to Staff College, you learned staff work at brigade, division and corps level, and you learned to command on exercises. That was the route to higher command. Less skilled officers had to write promotion examinations that required the mastery of a huge body of material and an ability to write and to resolve tactical problems in the field; this applied even to Militia officers. There was the Imperial Defence College that took brightest senior officers for a year of hard thinking on strategy and international politics in the United Kingdom. There they played at being Prime Minister and Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and learned about imperial defence and the link between politics and war. (It is important to note that this was occurring in a Permanent Force without enough numbers to really be a profession.)

It was okay for a colony to send officers abroad for education, but the postwar Canadian military couldn't do this. So we set up our own staff colleges and our own National Defence College to emulate the UK model. But somehow the lessons--and perhaps the value--of the process was frittered away. The Staff College courses became not a much sought after course, but a place you went because you had to fill a slot. Promotion examinations disappeared. The National Defence College, depending on whom you listen to, turned into a year of flying around the globe and drinking to excess at public expense--or the best year of his life (according to the same former CDS), a chance to read and think. Whatever its worth, the NDC disappeared in the budget cutting of few years back. (There is a genuine irony that civilian bureaucrats at National Defence Headquarters now must pass written and oral examinations for promotion and these are real examinations with real standards. The result, I expect, is that the intelligence gulf between civilians and military at NDHQ will increase.) The professionalism of the Canadian Forces that

had built on the knowledge learned in World War II, and that had been fostered by the great peacetime expansion of the 1950s--the only time Canadians had a large military with real standards, in my view--had been shattered.

The result was that CF became noted for anti-intellectualism. Senior officers argued that officers did not require a degree. After all, they didn't have one and they had become senior officers. Those few with advanced higher education were looked on as strange, and PhDs were forced out (I know of three army PhDs who were effectively driven out). Ours became a military that prided itself on its inability to think. And ours was a military that in the mid-1990s had only half its officers with undergraduate degrees and only seven percent with graduate degrees. This despite the fact that in 1947, Chief of the General Staff Charles Foulkes (one of few officers then with a BA) argued that the technological nature of war required that all officers have a degree.

It is dangerous to play chicken and egg games but I believe that the troubles of the Canadian Forces today come directly from this lack of education. I think the army, which is most militantly anti-education, is in the most trouble; I believe that the navy, which values education most, has produced the best leadership and is as a result the best-equipped, and in least trouble.

Alone among the CF today, the navy seems to me to be a profession, embodying what a profession of any kind must: responsibility; a sense of corporateness; and expertise. Responsibility means accountability. Corporateness means being aware of a separate identity and operating within its rules. And expertise means knowledge.

Knowledge is the key, I think. A professional must master a body of knowledge, yes, but knowledge is never static. To be a professional means that new information is constantly sought and the ideas that prevail are constantly updated. And knowledge, ideas, information are not limited only to the military, but come from all sectors of society. Ideas are discussed, debated, fought about. Openness must prevail so that today the new Captain Guy Simonds and the yet to be commissioned Lieutenant Colonel E.L.M. Burns can debate armoured warfare as the originals did in 1938 in the Canadian Defence Quarterly. No one then wanted to muzzle Simonds for challenging a lieutenant colonel, let alone challenging the orthodoxy of an Army that believed that horses were still useful on the battlefield.

But we have moved away from that ideal, so much so that when Minister of National Defence Young ordered that a professional journal be created, the idea that it should be run independently and be housed away from the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence was defeated. It still hasn't appeared, but it must, and it must be independent, open to all, a forum for free discussion. I don't think this will happen, so frightened these days is the Canadian Forces of the press, of scandal, of ideas that diverge from the party line. The result is that every idea is staffed to death and aborted; the result is that openness to ideas is killed at birth. The ruination of the once proud Canadian Forces goes on.

And yet, we have an example of how a battered military reconstituted itself close at hand. The US forces after Vietnam were in serious disarray. The defeats there had discredited the officer corps, and to have the least educated fighting wars was demonstrated to lead to problems of race, class, fighting capability, and a lack of intellectual flexibility. The US turned itself around in a

few years. It opened its professional journals up to the free flow of ideas; it put its best officers as instructors into its extensive system of military education - Leavenworth, Carlisle, the United States Naval War College - and it sent its best officers there for schooling. And the United States, with ninety percent of its officers with Bachelor's degrees, effectively made a graduate degree a requirement for promotion to major. Thirty-seven percent of the officers in the US forces have Master's degrees. (In the UK, 86% of officer recruits now have BAs.) Education was not a barrier to being a warrior, in other words. Significantly, the US treated military history as important, putting a Brigadier General in as Chief Military Historian and actively writing and thinking about lessons. Staff rides once more returned, with good manuals prepared at Carlisle. The US forces opened up the Internet to debates--today the US military footprint on the Web is huge with bibliographies, debates, and articles all there. Even debriefings of senior officers returning home from major overseas commands are on the Web. If you don't know the past, the Americans have sensibly decided, you can't navigate into the future

All this has worked brilliantly. British (and Canadian) officers still regularly criticize the US military, but they are generally incorrect in so doing. US senior officers in particular, equipped with the poise and confidence their graduate degrees and the technological superiority of their forces, come across superbly. They can speak extemporaneously and think clearly, and US senior officers write books on strategy that are readable and path-breaking. Has any Canadian senior officer since E.L.M. Burns preached nuclear disarmament or Leonard Johnson called for virtual surrender to the Soviets written a book of any kind treating strategic questions? None.

Here, with the notable exception of the Canadian Forces College website, there is little serious military material on the world-wide web. Here the anti-intellectualism of the last fifty years still prevails. Here, the military view remains that education is of little value. When Minister of National Defence Young decreed that officers should have a degree in 1997, what was the response in the Canadian Forces? To figure out how the paper could be secured with least trouble; how credit could be given for on-the-job experience; how the requirement could be satisfied the easiest way. This was not what those--me--who urged this on the Minister wanted--or expected. I was naive. Very simply, the anti-intellectualism of the Canadian Forces was reinforced, not weakened, I fear, by the requirement that officers have a degree. Technical training is OK, we seem to be saying, but education that aims to give an officer a broad perspective is, by definition, still seen as suspect.

Why are we this way? I think it is a combination of things: the colonial tradition that says someone will rescue us or that hopelessly says there's no point in preparing for war because all is lost; the British tradition that still clings to us--that officers are gentlemen amateurs and that professionalism is bourgeois and unworthy; the Militia tradition that professionals are somehow parasites while every Canadian civilian is a Field Marshal in waiting (after all, the militia won the war of 1812 didn't it?); the prevalence of eastern Canadians in the Canadian Forces, the region that (for monetary and historic reasons) has less of a tradition of higher education; the Royal Military College engineering mentality that suggests that a technocratic approach should prevail. This is all fundamentally anti-professional and anti-intellectual, this simply does not want to think about strategic questions or civil-military relations. All these traits combine to give us what we have today--an isolated, ill-educated officer corps that does not read, write, or think. An officer corps that cannot effectively deal with the politicians, bureaucrats or media. An

officer corps that is increasingly backward and isolated from the trends of thought of its Allies - and this is becoming more evident in the five yrs since we pulled out of Europe.

This is particularly dangerous as we enter the era of the Revolution in Military Affairs. What are we, a small country that can't afford to buy the hi-tech approach of the United States, going to do with the revolution? The United States, I understand, already has one division fully digitalized and expects to have a corps digitalized by 2000. But we aren't even started on this road, and some in our political leadership seem to favour distancing Canada from the US.

This is fundamentally silly, and against Canadian interests. If we don't seek close cooperation with the United States, we will be left completely behind in the Revolution in Military Affairs. If we don't develop our thinkers, we won't even understand what "revolution in military affairs" means! And if this occurs, we will have only a limited role to play--as foot soldiers doing grunt work after the fact; as colonials being told about American initiatives after they are carried out.

We can't be involved on high level in all aspects of the Revolution in Military Affairs. We can't afford it. But we can find niches, we can develop expertise in special areas, we can seek every opportunity to work with, train with, liaise with the US so we can keep up. Above all, we can *think* about it. We can think--we have never done this--about strategic questions; we can think about social change and its implications for the Canadian Forces and the profession of arms. We can develop the Canadian Forces' capacity to give good advice to our political masters.

We must do this. Today with no immediate enemy on the horizon, we have the luxury of thinking about our military place in the world. Is anyone doing this? Instead, today we have a military wrestling with the Charter, offering sex change operations to soldiers, training women infanteers, grappling still with bilingualism and multiculturalism. The questions are real enough but they are scarcely cosmic in nature, though they occupy huge amounts of time. Moreover, as the senior leadership responds belatedly, it is evident that it is reactive, not proactive. We need fresh military thinking about these questions too. We are not getting it.

Essentially, the "no thinking necessary" culture of the Canadian Forces has demonstrated that it cannot deal with the challenges it faces. If the Canadian Forces are to survive, they must be able to change. And in no area is change more important than in the "no thinking necessary" culture that afflicts the Canadian military today.