

A REJECTION OF THE NEED FOR WARRIOR SCHOLARS?

by Bernd Horn



DND photo IS2010-3031-25 by Corporal Shilo Adamson.

Intuitively, virtually no one would argue that more education is a bad thing. In fact, most would agree that, as a philosophical concept, the more education one has, the richer one is as a person.¹ However, the moment resources or cost enter the equation, the value of education to individuals often changes. Nowhere is this more evident than in the military, where fiscal pressures inevitably prompt ‘innovative ideas’ that often revolve around cutting professional development, specifically, education. Moreover, these same pressures consistently elicit queries with regard to the value of education, specifically undergraduate and graduate degrees, to the military. Questions such as, “Do all officers need degrees?” and “What is the military requirement for graduate degrees?” are frequently ‘floated’ as a precursor to potential program cuts.

Although the military has historically been an anti-intellectual institution, such discourse seems incredulous, considering the contemporary operating environment (COE), which, if anything, will become even more complex in the future. Globalization and persistent conflict, as well as the proliferation of cheap, accessible technology, challenge the conventional understanding of conflict. Moreover, hybrid threats that include diverse combinations of irregular, terrorist, criminal,

and conventional forces employed asymmetrically, all operating within populated centres in a variety of culturally diverse environments, are just some of the challenges that have added complexity to conflict. In order to be effective in this environment, military professionals must be adaptive and agile in both thought and action, as well as adept at critical thinking and sound reasoning - all benefits of education. In short, militaries require warrior scholars who are capable of operating in the complex battlespace of today and tomorrow.

Warrior Scholar

A number of challenges generated in the 1990s forced the CF to examine its anti-intellectual culture and make necessary changes to increase the importance of education to the Canadian profession of arms. In fact, reforms included: ministerial direction that all officers must hold a recognized undergraduate degree; the CDS appointment of a Special Advisor to the Office of the CDS for Professional Development; the creation of a Canadian military journal to allow a forum for professional discourse; the creation of a Canadian ‘war college’ course; and the establishment of a Canadian Defence Academy to provide a centre of excellence for CF professional development, to name a few of the initiatives. In sum, all were indica-

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

tions that the CF apparently recognized its anti-intellectualism and its failure to ensure its personnel received the required education to complement their professional training.

Unfortunately, the long war in Afghanistan, and a return to more fiscally challenging times have resurrected old attitudes. This reality begs the question once again, “Can, or should, a soldier also be scholar?” The apparent predilection for anti-intellectualism in the military, and time and resource constraints aside, there is an intuitive understanding why the military mind would focus on training and experience rather than education. After all, education is not tangible. Unlike training, where quantifiable improvements in behaviour can be physically seen, for instance, marksmanship scores or proficiency in drills, education is less evident in tangible form. It deals with creativity, critical thinking, and reasoning.² These qualities are not always outwardly observable.

In the Canadian Forces, there still appears to be a lack of understanding of the difference between training and education. The traditional stress on training, that is “... a predictable response to a predictable situation,” is often confused with or considered synonymous with education, defined by Professor Ron Haycock as, “... the reasoned response to an unpredictable situation - critical thinking in the face of the unknown.”³ Because of the CF’s excellent training regime and its current success on operations in Afghanistan, it is easy to be lulled into a perception that the institution’s educational needs are quite adequately looked after. What is overlooked, at great peril, is that the prescribed application of ideas and methods, as well as drills and checklists, have a purpose and functional utility, but this methodology is no longer, if, in fact it ever *was*, enough to equip leaders to cope with and function in the complex post-modern world.

Simply put, “... education,” according to Royal Military College of Canada (RMCC) Professor David Last, a former artillery senior officer, “... is the shaping of the mind.”⁴ Education assists in our reasoning ability, which, in turn, is critical in responding to unanticipated circumstances. After all, as the adage goes, you train for certainty and you educate for uncertainty. This is crucial to soldiers and senior NCOs, and particularly, to officers.

Equally important is the need to understand, and ability to place, the CF’s ultimate purpose and its operations within the context of the larger whole and the society it serves. The French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte had already recognized in the 19th Century that: “Tactics, evolutions, artillery and engineer sciences can be learned from a manual, like geometry; but the knowledge of the higher conduct of war can only be acquired by studying the history of wars and battles of great



Bonaparte Crossing the Alps, by Paul Delaroche, 1848.

generals and by one’s own experience.” He understood: “There are no terse and precise rules at all.”⁵ In the end, neither the CF, nor any of its components, exists in and of themselves.⁶

The requirement to comprehend ‘the larger picture’ cannot be overstated.⁷ “Professional officers,” asserts Professor Last, “are managers of violence.” He further explains:

*Their professional education must allow them to understand it. Violence has always been a part of the interconnected human conditions that we label war, conflict, and peace. In the complex world of today and tomorrow, our understanding of these conditions needs to be more comprehensive than in the past. This is more important than technology, doctrine, and strategy, because all are subservient to purpose. There is no purpose without understanding. The officer’s understanding must match that of society - otherwise he or she cannot serve it.*⁸

This societal connection has another, equally important dimension. The Canadian military ethos demands that the CF

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY/ART212640.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

remain rooted in Canadian society and reflect its most important values and attitudes. In this regard, it is critical to understand that, as Ambassador Paul Heinbecker points out: "... we are an extensively educated people."⁹ Of the 33 most industrialized economies surveyed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Canada ranked second behind Russia (Japan was third, and the US, fourth) in the percentage of the population that has attained at least a university or college-level education. The CF must remain very reflective of this leading edge sector of Canadian society if it is to retain the trust, confidence and respect necessary to maintain the essential support of all Canadian citizens.

In addition, the importance of education to the military profession, particularly in the post-modern world, should be self-evident, especially in light of the series of crises that the CF endured during the cataclysmic decade of the 1990s.¹⁰ Paradoxically, this was recognized as early as 1969, by then-CDS General Jean Victor Allard. "It matters little," he wrote, "whether the Forces have their present manpower strength and financial budget, or half of them, or double them; without a properly educated, effectively trained professional officer corps, the Forces would, in the future, be doomed at best to mediocrity, and at the worst, to disaster."¹¹



CEJIC REF88-758.

General Jean Victor Allard as Chief of the Defence Staff.

Intuitively, a professional soldier is better prepared to face the unknown challenges of the ambiguous, complex, and uncertain battlespace by having a broad knowledge of theories that act as a guide to discretionary judgment, rather than a narrow ability in only some of the practical applications of the profession of arms. As one expert concluded: "Strategic effectiveness will increasingly be based on the capacity to think like a networked enemy. Therefore, the military strategist needs to

understand a complex environment and a diverse range of interests, actors and issues while retaining the capacity to "simplify, focus, decide, and execute."¹² Retired American Major-General Robert H. Scales underlined the need for education vice training when he commented: "This new era of war requires soldiers equipped with exceptional cultural awareness and an intuitive sense for the nature and character of war."¹³

The need for education in today's complex security environment is repeatedly stressed by practitioners, who, through the experience with respect to the chaos of conflict, clearly understand that education, rooted in critical thinking, problem solving, and analytical research, better prepares individuals to think, as well as cope, with problems and situations that are unexpected. Education assists individuals to not only *embrace* change, but adapt to and anticipate change. More importantly, it instills the attitude and the ability to constantly learn from one's environment, and to prepare, as well as to react, accordingly. Colonel John Boyd stripped it down to its simplest form. He asserted, "Machines don't fight wars. Terrain doesn't fight wars. Humans fight wars." To that end, he concluded: "You must get in the minds of the humans. That's where the battles are won."¹⁴

And, education is the domain of the human mind. Sir Michael Howard wrote:

*...academic studies can provide the knowledge, insight, and the analytic skills which provide the necessary basis, first for reasoned discussion, and then for action. They provide a forum, and breed the qualities, which enable the student, the teacher, the politician, the civil servant, the moral philosopher, and not least the soldier to reach a common understanding of the problems which confront them, even if inevitably there is disagreement about the solutions. This dialogue is what civilization is all about. Without it societies dissolve.*¹⁵

Similarly, and closer to home, Dr. John Cowan, the former Principal of RMCC, reinforced the necessity of education in relation to the military. "Today, when a young officer may be called upon to be a skilled leader, a technical expert, a diplomat, a warrior, and even an interpreter and an aid expert all at once," he insisted, "... there is no question that good training is not enough. Skills are not enough." He added, "The job calls for judgement, that odd distillate of education, the thing which is left when the memorized facts have either fled or been smoothed into a point of view, the thing that cannot be taught directly, but which must be learned. Without the mature judgement which flows from education, we fall back on reflexes, which are damned fine things for handling known challenges, but which are manifestly unreliable when faced with new ones."¹⁶

Needless to say, as Cowan affirms, there will always be new challenges. This was reinforced by Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, a former deputy commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. "Individuals were sent home [from Afghanistan]," revealed Leslie. "Immaturity and the inability to actually think outside the box made them ineffective ... What they tried to do was bring their usually

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

very limited experience from somewhere else and apply it the same way that it had been done somewhere else and that didn't work ... each mission has got its own unique drivers, cultural conditions, local nuances, relationships with your other allies or other combatants."¹⁷

Leslie's observation is indisputable. Until recently, the common complaint of any deploying body was that they were prepared for the last deployment, and not the situation that they currently faced. But, as the saying goes, 'you don't know what you don't know.' Therefore, a culture absorbed solely by *experience*, whether gained in the former decades with reliance upon the 4 CMBG experience of preparing to beat back the Soviet hordes at the Fulda Gap in Germany; or, more currently, on the Afghanistan experience of fighting the elusive Taliban in Kandahar Province, is oblivious to the *value*, if not the *necessity*, of higher education.

And so, if experience once again becomes the primary discriminator for advancement, and higher education is again deemed inconsequential, the CF will return to a system where emphasis is placed upon progression in a series of key appointments and geographic postings, most notably Afghanistan. As such, successful completion of these tours once again becomes perceived as sufficient to prepare an individual for the next higher rank and responsibilities.

Unfortunately, this type of myopic outlook and inward focused mind-set fails to see the inherent flaw of this model. Experience in itself is valuable and irreplaceable. But it is also constrained by time, geography, and memory. One person's experience, particularly at a specific time and place, does not necessarily represent the knowledge or abilities that are needed for an institution to advance into the future. Moreover, the perspective from a shell-hole, turret, or command post is very limited.

Service needs become defined in and of themselves without being rooted in their proper societal context. But, most of all, a system that values experience as the only true arbitrator of reality suffers from human arrogance and frailty. "We see," wrote Major Seiberg in the mid-1930s, "that the Spanish Civil War has up to now demonstrated nothing really new, and also that men only regard experience as valid when it is their own experience. Otherwise, it would not be possible for the same errors that led to failure in the Great War to be repeated."²² Simply put, those who refuse to open

their minds are doomed to suffer the limitations of their narrow, restricted, and outdated beliefs.

The truth in this condemnation of professional development, based almost exclusively upon the experiential paradigm, settled home in the 1990s. "Undeniably," wrote General J.M.G. Baril, as Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), "... the 1990s represented the first strong test of the contemporary CF Officer Corps and we found that part of it was broken." He concluded, "Experience in and of itself was not enough."²³ He later acknowledged: "... [that] over the past 10 years ... we constantly found ourselves thrown into the unknown. Complex, ambiguous and politically charged operations tested our leadership and confronted us with ethical dilemmas." Baril further conceded, "... here at home we were slow to understand and adapt to the large-scale societal changes associated with the end of the Cold War and therefore were not prepared for these demands."²⁴



DND photo AR2010-0177-34 by Sergeant Daren Kraus.

General David Petraeus.

However, General David Petraeus, accomplished soldier and veteran of years of combat in Iraq, and currently the commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, supports the need for greater education, particularly graduate studies for senior officers. He affirms "... that a stint at graduate school takes military officers out of their intellectual comfort zones." Petraeus believes: "Such experiences are critical to the development of the flexible, adaptable, creative thinkers who are so important to operations in places like Iraq and Afghanistan."¹⁸ He explains that "... through such schooling our officers are often surprised to discover just how diverse and divergent views can be. We only thought we knew the contours of debate on a given subject."¹⁹ Petraeus concluded that graduate studies "... provide a fair amount of general intellectual capital and often provide specific skills and knowledge on which an officer may draw during his or her career."²⁰ Moreover, he argued: "... [that] graduate school inevitably helps U.S. military officers improve their critical thinking skills."²¹



CFEJIC 1151-IMG0074.

General Maurice Baril as Chief of the Defence Staff.

Quite simply, the warning previously articulated by General Allard well over two decades earlier had gone unheeded. As a result, his prophecy came to pass. The predicament was aptly summarized by a former army commander, Lieutenant-General M.K. Jeffery. He believed, "... the lack of intellectual discipline in the past has got us where we are today [1990s]. If we don't change we will die." He added: "The longer we resist it, the harder we make it on someone else."²⁵ One former CDS insisted: "Officers need to have the right mindset to change and evolve the profession." He added, "... knowledge must be valued as a key ingredient to our growth as individuals and as a profession."²⁶ After all, as General Petraeus correctly identified, "The most powerful tool any soldier carries is not his weapon but his mind."²⁷

In the end, every member of the profession of arms must guard against slipping back into old mindsets, and must ensure that they are ready to meet the challenges that face them, not only today, but also into the future. So, can a warrior also be a scholar? The answer is definitely 'yes.' The many tenets of scholarship, namely precision, detailed research, communications, breadth of knowledge, placement events in a proper economic, political, and social context, the drawing of conclusions and trying to discern themes from that, committing them to paper, and then articulating them so that others can understand the argument put forward and learn from it, are all skills that are necessary for a soldier.

Equally important, this type of study provides vicarious experience. As already articulated, experience is seen as sacrosanct, and great emphasis is rightfully placed upon it. But, due to real life limitations, experience is often constrained by time and place. Scholarship, on the other hand, allows its virtual experience to be timeless and to cover a wider breadth of activity and circumstance. It provides soldiers with a greater repertoire of scenarios, possible solutions, and context from which to draw.

The warrior scholar also contributes to academics by providing an intangible element to the understanding of past events. The plight of the soldier, the confusion, desperation, fatigue, fear, and loneliness ..., in short, Clausewitz's friction that is experienced at every level adds to the comprehension of past events. Those who have experienced it first hand can understand and possibly offer a more accurate interpretation of historical events by being able to draw upon their own experiences. Conversely, the study of the past, and a scholarly analysis of why things went wrong may assist the warrior in trying to mitigate a repetition by using intellectual skill to control, correct, or manage as many of those faults as possible.

Furthermore, education arms the warrior with the ability to deal with the ambiguity and complexity that our soldiers face in the battlespace of today and tomorrow. Beyond the practical there is also the intangible. That is to say, a greater breadth of knowledge, tolerance to alternate interpretations and ideas, a comfort with critical debate and discussion, the honing of analytical skills, as well as the exposure to complete new bodies of literature and thought that expand the mind make the warrior that much more capable. In the words of General Petraeus: "The future of the U.S. military requires that we be competent warfighters, but we cannot be competent warfighters unless we are as intelligent and mentally tough as we are aggressive and physically rugged."²⁸ It is no different for the Canadian Forces.

Perhaps Henry Kissinger captured the theme best, especially for operational and strategic commanders and leaders, by using the 'book' as a symbol of a broad and comprehensive education:

We have entered a time of total change in human consciousness of how people look at the world. Reading books requires you to form concepts, to train your mind to relationships. You have to come to grips with who you are. A leader [emphasis added] needs these qualities. But now we are tempted to learn from fragments of facts. A book is a large intellectual construction. You can't hold it all in your mind easily or at once. You have to struggle mentally to internalize it. Now there is no need to internalize because each fact can instantly be called up again on a computer. There is no context, no motive. Information is not knowledge. People are becoming researchers not readers, they float on the surface. This new thinking erases context. It disaggregates everything. All this makes strategic thinking [emphasis added] about world order nearly impossible to achieve.²⁹

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Therefore, is the warrior scholar an irreconcilable divide? Absolutely not. Unfortunately, these two entities have for too long remained divided, when, in fact, they should be fused in order to strengthen both disciplines.

Colonel Bernd Horn, OMM, MSM, CD, PhD, is the Chief of Staff Strategic Education and Training Programs at the Canadian Defence Academy. He is also an Adjunct Professor of History at the Royal Military College of Canada.

NOTES

- 1 I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Bill Bentley on this article. His input made it a more complete work.
- 2 "Creativity is critical requirement for adaptation. We need creativity because: When things change and new information comes into existence, it's no longer possible to solve current problems with yesterday's solutions. Over and over again, people are finding out that what worked two years ago won't work today. This gives them a choice. They can either bemoan the fact that things aren't as easy as they used to be, or they can use their creative abilities to find new answers, new solutions, and new ideas." Richard King, "How Stupid are We?" in *Australian Army Journal* (Summer 2009), p. 186.
- 3 Dr. Ronald Haycock, former Dean of Arts, Royal Military College (RMC), "Clio and Mars in Canada: The Need for Military Education," presentation to the Canadian Club, Kingston, Ontario, 11 November 1999.
- 4 Major David Last, "Educating Officers: Post Modern Professionals to Control and Prevent Violence," in *Contemporary Issues in Officership: A Canadian Perspective*, Lieutenant-Colonel Bernd Horn (ed.), (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2000), p. 26.
- 5 Quoted in Murray Simons, *Professional Military Learning. Next Generation PME in the New Zealand Defence Force* (Canberra: Air Power Development Centre, 2004), p. 43.
- 6 This is why the US military believes, "... [that] successful operational adaptability depends upon educating and developing leaders, training soldiers, and building cohesive teams who are prepared to execute decentralized operations in and among populations in coordination with Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational (JIIMP) partners." United States of America, Department of the Army, *The Army Learning Concepts for 2015*. [DRAFT], 20 April 2010, p. 2.
- 7 Brigadier-General (ret'd) Don McNamara asserted that advanced-military professional education is required "... to get people to think in two ways. One, to think strategically so that they're not commanding a ship anymore, they're commanding a force, and that is a mindset that is not easy for a lot of people to change. The second thing is that they are now thinking in terms of dealing at the highest national levels and not at the level of an individual military formation. These are two major changes that are not easy for people to assume without getting some experience before they actually have to assume it." Don Macnamara, in John Wood (ed.), *Talking Heads Talking Arms: No Life Jackets* (Toronto: Breakout Educational Network, 2003), p. 155.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 9 Paul Heinbecker, *Getting Back in the Game: A Foreign Policy Playbook for Canada* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2010), p. 23.
- 10 For details on the 'decade of darkness,' see Bernd Horn and Bill Bentley, "The Road to Transformation: Ascending from the Decade of Darkness," in R.W. Walker (ed.), *Institutional Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Contemporary Issues* (Kingston: CDA Press, 2007), pp. 1-25; or Bernd Horn and Bill Bentley, "The Road to Transformation. Ascending from the Decade of Darkness," in *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Autumn 2007, pp. 33-44.
- 11 Department of National Defence, *Report on the Officer Development Board* (Rowley Report), Ottawa: March 1969, p. v.
- 12 Colonel Roger Noble, "Beyond Cultural Awareness: Anthropology as an Aid to the Formulation and Execution of Military Strategy in the Twenty-First Century," in *Australian Army Journal*, (Winter 2009), p. 67.
- 13 Emily Spencer, *Solving the People Puzzle: Cultural Intelligence and Special Operations Forces* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), p. 115.
- 14 Colonel John R. Boyd, (USAF ret'd), cited in Major Jason Hayes, "Preparing Our Soldiers for Operations within Complex Human Terrain Environments," in *Australian Army Journal*, (Winter 2009), p. 104.
- 15 Michael Howard, *The Causes of War* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 83. Major-General, the Honourable W.A. Griesbach, stated: "Since wars cannot be arranged in order to merely to train officers, it follows that, after a long period of peace, the officers of an army must get their military education from reading and study." "Military Study: Notes of a Lecture," in *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, October 1931, p. 19.
- 16 Dr. John Scott Cowan, RMC Convocation Address, 4 October 1999, Kingston, Ontario. See also Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes. The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pp. 233-237. Spencer, p. 72.
- 17 David H. Petraeus, "To PhD or not to PhD..." in *The American Interest* (July/August 2007), p. 16.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 18. Petraeus further insists: "This is a very valuable experience in and of itself for those of us in uniform who will work and live in other cultures overseas. If the range of views within our own country is greater than we supposed, that can only help prepare officers for an even wider range beyond our shores."
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 21 Major Sieberg, "Tank or Anti-Tank? Does the Spanish War Show Which is Superior?" Translation of an article appearing in the *Militar-Wochenblatt* of 11 February 1938, National Archives, MG 31, G6, Vol. 9, File: Articles, Papers, Speeches – U.
- 22 Baril, p. 140.
- 23 Canada, *Canadian Officership in the 21st Century (Officership 2020). Strategic Guidance for the Canadian Forces Officer Corps and the Officer Professional Development System* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2001), Foreword, p. iii.
- 24 General Maurice Baril, covering letter, "Canadian Officership in the 21st Century (Officership 2020) Launch Implementation, 2 May 2001, p. 3.
- 25 Lieutenant-General M.K. Jeffery, address to the Commanding Officers Course 2001, 21 June 2001, Fort Frontenac, Kingston, Ontario.
- 26 Petraeus, p. 16.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 28 Quoted in Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft and World Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 298.



DND photo IS2010-3023-06 by Corporal Shilo Adamson.