The Importance of Professional Military Education

*It is the man who is afraid of the enemy’s General Staff who is a coward: the man who is afraid of his own is merely an old soldier.*

“The Duke of Gallodoro” by Menen

— Quoted in *Canadian Army Staff College Course 1953 “Students Guide to Staff Duties Series”*

If one wishes to understand a nation’s interpretation of war and other conflict one must understand the professional education of that nation’s military. A firm grasp of the professional education of the military is vital because this learning shapes the activities of a nation’s military through providing paradigms to interpret war and other conflict. The composition and provenance of such education plays an important role in the formation of specialized military competencies that permit the profession of arms to perform its primary function - the structured use of violence on behalf of the state. Canada’s military, particularly its Army, has adopted three discernable paradigms in its professional military education. These have been derived from national and international influences and experiences beginning in the nineteenth century. The creation and manifestation of these differing ideas –British, then Canadian and, more recently, American.

Central to any examination of professional military education is an understanding of the knowledge that comprises the core competencies specific to the profession of arms. These proficiencies are included in the curriculums of advanced professional military education. This

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1 Adapted from Howard G. Coombs, “In Search of Minerva’s Owl: Canada’s Army and Staff Education” (1946-1995) (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen’s University, 2009).
2 Directorate of Heritage and History (DHH) Archives, Canadian Land Force Command and Staff College (CLFCS) Fonds 80/71, 1953 Course, *Volume 6: Staff Duties; Training*, “Students Guide to Staff Duties Series,” Box 28, Folio 75 (henceforth *CLFCS Fonds*).
material pertains to interpreting war and other types of conflict, as well as comprehending the linkages of these military activities to the state. In a related fashion it is necessary to grasp the manner in which military activities are arranged throughout the breadth and depth of these forces to achieve overarching goals. Also, of great importance is the role of the military as part of a multi-disciplinary national effort that would include other activities, such as diplomacy, informational and economic initiatives. 4

To appreciate fully the importance of this neglected topic one must examine some broader considerations or perspectives pertaining to use of the profession of arms in the application of military force. For most countries the use of such force is normally a choice of last resort. The decision to use that option, at least hypothetically, is made in a deliberate and measured fashion as an *in extremis* national response when politics and diplomacy have failed. In the words of the military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz from almost two centuries past, “...war is not merely an act of policy, but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.” 5 The more commonly used paraphrasing of this idea is that war is an “extension of politics by other means.” But Clausewitz continued with the important notion that: “The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and the means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.” 6 These ideas reflect a rational connection between policy and military activities that is generally accepted by countries like Canada, in theory, if not always in practice. 7 In this process it is important to understand the roles

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6 Ibid.
7 While from a Canadian perspective the clarity of the relationship between policy and military strategy has not always been well defined the need for policy to guide military activities has been part of the legacy of the Canadian civil-military relationship. Ph.d candidate, Major-General Daniel (Retired) Gosselin (who occupied the position of
played by senior military commanders and their staffs, as well as the professional culture and intellectual influences that have shaped the manner in which Canada’s military organizes war on behalf of its nation. Education is the manner in which these competencies are passed.

Central to any understanding of a professional military is an awareness of the role of the staff officer in devising solutions to military problems on behalf of a nation. Staffs have existed since ancient times and assist senior commanders in carrying out national direction. In its most rudimentary form the staff can consist of personal assistants to a commander, however, in modern times staffs have become large and highly specialized organizations. The staff forms the intellectual core of any military organization. Staffs have continually evolved since the Napoleonic Wars, when nations mobilized in order to meet the threat imposed on Europe by the armies of post-revolutionary France. Since that time the scope and complexity of conflict has expanded. Staffs have developed to deal with all aspects of military activities from operations to administration. In essence, staff officers prepare armed forces for what they have to do. The Mathematician Gerald J. Whitrow wrote “The primary function of mental activity is to face the future and anticipate the event which is to happen.”8 In this way staff officers look ahead, attempt to foresee what is to come and organize their services for the roles that they will be assigned by government. In this fashion they remove the burden of minutia from military commanders in order to allow those leaders to guide and manage their forces.9 The earliest iteration of the British Army staff manual from 1912 exhorted staff officers to act in concert with the wishes of their commander and:

...be unsparing in their endeavours to help the troops by every possible means in carrying out their difficult task; foreseeing and providing for obstacles and dangers that may arise; making clear what is required without ambiguity or possibility of misunderstanding; and ever careful to attend to the comfort of those under their General’s command before attending to their own.\textsuperscript{10}

This directive also made sure that staff officers understood that they had no \emph{de jure} power outside that vested in them by the person in charge, theirs was an intellectual role:

Staff officers, as such, have no authority over the troops or services and departments, and though they are responsible for the issue of orders, it is essential that they should remember that every order given by them is given by the authority and on the responsibility of the authorized commander.\textsuperscript{11}

In order to become a member of a military staff, officers must demonstrate that they are proficient in their \emph{métier}. They must also successfully complete rigorous programmes of studies that provide them with specific intellectual competencies. The institutions that offer these courses of study are called “staff colleges.”

It would be inaccurate to conceptualize staff colleges merely as military technical institutions. Rather, staff colleges are holistic in their curriculum and reinforce the professional aspects of the profession of arms; empiricism, administration and specialized knowledge.\textsuperscript{12} Staff colleges also provide students the opportunity to form relationships with other military practitioners, both instructors and students. The professional relationships created in this fashion also include alliance and coalition partners who send instructors and students to each other’s institutions. This transnational\textsuperscript{13} community has bonds that facilitate the transmission of professional knowledge between connected militaries and in extreme cases sometimes has influence on armed forces greater than national authorities.

\textsuperscript{10} United Kingdom, War Office, \textit{Staff Manual War Provisional 1912} (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1912), 7.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{12} See Kahn, “Note.”

\textsuperscript{13} “Transnational” is used in the sense of operating between or outside national borders.
Despite these demanding requirements and responsibilities, the staff officer in popular culture is a much maligned member of the military profession. The enduring image of the staff is one of bumbling, uncaring or even dangerous individuals who are an impediment to fighting personnel. In the aftermath of the First World War, this representation of military leaders and their staffs as insulated and out of touch from the realities of horrific violence took firm root in the public consciousness through popular literature like Charles Yale Harrison’s *Generals Die in Bed*.\(^{14}\) Even professional works, like Major-General J.F.C. Fuller’s *Generalship Its Diseases and Their Cure: A Study of the Personal Factor in Command* perpetuated this depiction of the staff officer as negligent, uncaring or both.\(^{15}\) This poem written by a Canadian Army officer and veteran of the Korean War, Captain Brian F. Simons, in the early 1950s summarizes this perspective:

**PORTRAIT OF A STAFF OFFICER**

What species stands before us bold,  
With codfish eyes, furtive and cold,  
Past middle life, wrinkled and lean,  
Polite in contact but cool, serene.

Damnably composed, a concrete post,  
Lacking in charm, a friendless ghost,  
Minus his bowels, a human stone,  
No sense of humour, passionless, unknown.

What species stands before us tell,  
We hear that he winds up in hell,  
Just spare him from undue abuse  
And hope he doesn’t reproduce.\(^{16}\)

Unfortunately, these commonly held sentiments of disdain ignore the importance of staff officers as intellectual custodians, who act as protectors and creators of knowledge associated

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with the profession of arms. Additionally, staff officers provide a critical role in the orderly
cconduct of military activities. They not only create directives in response to superior direction,
but more importantly provide rigor to the orders, instructions and plans that are prepared prior to
and during operations. Ideas flow from commanders, but are given substance and form by their
staffs who then disseminate these concepts in the form of orders and instructions. Given the
central and vital role they fulfil, the importance of staff officers and the educational system that
produces them has been highlighted to the Canadian military time and time again during war and
peace.

The need for professional military education is especially pronounced in the Army, which
to a greater extent than the other services, traditionally relies on the understanding and
application of a common body of knowledge, or in modern terms, doctrine, to conduct effective
military operations. It can be argued that this is due to the difficulty of the physical
environment in which land forces operate. Armies fight in exceedingly complex surroundings,
navies in less complicated settings and air forces in the most straightforward milieu. Common
understanding allows practitioners to view military problems from a shared perspective despite
any complicating factors that might occur. In many ways this is analogous to the corporate body
of knowledge required by other specialized professions, like law and medicine.

This shared knowledge imbues concepts contained in warfare theories, which are
developed from the experience of history, to provide a body of professional literature. This
material creates amongst practitioners a collective understanding of how a specific military or its
components are intended to operate in a chaotic world. In the twentieth century some of this

17 For discussion of Canadian military culture see Allan English, Understanding Canadian Military Culture
material has been formally codified and referred to as “doctrine,” which will be explored later in this thesis. Staff colleges and the education they provide are crucial to creating, implementing, refining and preserving this aspect of specialized professional knowledge. The importance of the Army staff education system has been particularly pronounced in Canada since the Second World War when the need for Army staff officers was dire and the institutional capability to produce competent practitioners was decidedly lacking. \(^{19}\) This requirement has not decreased since 1945 as most military operations pursued by Canada since then have been primarily land-based. One can argue that trend, despite the involvement of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), has continued into the twenty-first century.

This requirement for staff education might lead one to assume that the professional knowledge created through repeated use of the Canadian military in the violent conflicts of the past century would be mostly national in origin. On the contrary, an examination of the body of knowledge taught to Canadian Army officers throughout recent history demonstrates that its provenance is not always Canadian, but has been determined by other sources. The intellectual development of Canada’s Army, \(^{20}\) within the larger context of the Canadian military, has mostly rested within the arms, or army, of an empire, be it British or of the United States. Scrutinizing the education of the Canadian Army staff officer provides evidence of transnational influences on the profession of arms in Canada particularly during the tensions of the Cold War. The RCN and RCAF show similar trends. Consequently, in order to understand the preparation of staff officers and its significance to contemporary Canada it is necessary to study staff education, its intellectual provenance and form as it evolved in the mid to late twentieth century.

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\(^{20}\) Canada’s Army is a generic expression not coupled to a specific point in time.
The Canadian staff college system of today was born during the Second World War and given shape during the Cold War. That conflagration drew attention to the need for a reliable system to educate Canadian army officers in the competencies of advanced military arts and sciences, especially those required to organize large scale conflict and to connect it to national direction. Tracing the evolution of this professional knowledge and its instruction, as part of the staff college curriculum, will show that there were numerous outside influences on the military profession in Canada. These external pressures and their effects demonstrate continual military interdependence between Canada and other nations that continues in the twenty-first century.

Prior to the Second World War, a limited number of Canadian officers had attended Imperial staff colleges and larger numbers had taken truncated forms of staff education in Canada. In 1940 the shortage of vacancies on British courses prompted the Canadian Army to create a short wartime course to educate officers in the knowledge needed to function as staff and leaders in an expanding military organization. The first iteration was conducted in England, with the remainder of these courses being conducted in Canada, at the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC). During the same period some officers attended British and other courses. After the war the Canadian Army Staff College (CASC) was established at Fort Frontenac in Kingston, Ontario and continues to this day as the Canadian Land Forces Command and Staff College (CLFCSC). Over time the duration of the CASC courses varied but prior to unification the bulk of the education was offered over ten months, with three courses of two years in length from 1959-1965. The CASC and its successor attempted to ensure that junior and mid-level officers were educated in the competencies required to command and administer army organizations, in

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war and peace. Prominent Canadian military historian Jack English has affirmed that this army staff college was of vital importance to the maintenance of the army’s military expertise. In a similar fashion to the post-war establishment of the CASC, the RCAF War Staff College was renamed the RCAF Staff College in October 1945 and commenced the first peacetime programs. Initially only six months in duration, this staff education was in 1948 extended to ten months. These ten-month RCAF courses continued until 1966, with unification.

In the early 1960s discussions began over combining the three services and their professional education systems. At this time, only the Canadian Army and the RCAF had maintained separate staff colleges. The RCN addressed its need for staff officers by sending a small number of students to the CASC and the RCAF Staff College. However, despite that, unification would create mixed staffs of naval, army and air force officers, who all needed an understanding of integrated or joint operations. Thus, a joint education system was of concern to all. Accordingly, in December 1964 the Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) directed that a study be conducted “to determine the staff officer training requirements for the services with the object of introducing an integrated staff course in September 1966.”

In 1966 the Canadian Forces College (CFC) in Toronto was established as an amalgamated Canadian staff education institution. The creation of the CFC was precursor to the

22 In his monograph Lament For An Army, John English states, “Like the British Staff College, after which it was modelled, the CASC was the nursery of the General Staff and the single most important educational institution in the army.” English, Lament For An Army, 6; and see also Coombs, “In Search of Minerva’s Owl.”
unification the Canadian military in 1968 from distinct services to a single entity, the Canadian Forces (CF). As a result, the new CFC took on custodianship of the professional education of the RCN, Canadian Army and RCAF, as well as became responsible for the education and training of future staff officers of the CF.

For Canadian Army officers, specifically, this meant that the CFC took ownership of CF curriculum pertaining to large scale military activities, including the organization of military operations in pursuit of national goals during conflict. This new institution was founded on the grounds of the former RCAF College, in Toronto. While other allied learning institutions existed, it was these colleges, the CASC/CLFCSC, RCAF Staff College and the CFC, which provided Canadian officers the education to deal with both the dilemmas of military employment and organizing warfare after the Second World War.

In addition to these institutions, the National Defence College (NDC) was established at Fort Frontenac in 1948. It was an organization analogous to the British Imperial Defence College, created in 1927 to study the high level interface between national objectives and military policy. The curriculum of the NDC was more wide ranging then that the other Canadian senior officer education institutions and focussed on not only the military, but also on the social, political, industrial, economic, and diplomatic aspects of national defence. This college was closed in 1994 due to fiscal constraints.

Events such as that which occurred during Canadian deployments to Somalia in 1993 and Bacovici, in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, during 1993 - 1994 created a great deal of


28 For information concerning the formation of the Imperial Defence College see Brevet-Major A.R. Godwin-Austin, The Staff and the Staff College, with a forward by General Sir George F. Milne (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1927), 285-86.

29 English, Lament For An Army, 82.

public and private introspection regarding the nature of the profession of arms in Canada. There were public boards of inquiry in addition to a number of reports, which in turn prompted governmental supervision, through the Minister of National Defence, to deal with the most pertinent recommendations of these cases, particularly that arising from the Somalia Inquiry. Following on from that were projects like *the Report to the Prime Minister on the Leadership and Management of the Canadian Forces* (1997), *A Strategy for 2020* (1999) and *Officership 2020* (2001), which rejuvenated efforts to make both education and professional education relevant to Canadian military professionals. Also, in order to provide institutional support to these recommendations the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA), was created in 2002 and in 2004 was given an official mandate “to act as the institutional champion of Canadian Forces professional development.”

However, not long after the closure of the NDC, two shorter courses were instituted at the CFC to replace the longer single course. The Advanced Military Studies Course (AMSC) commenced in 1998 and the National Security Studies Course (NSSC) was started in 1999. In 2006 these latter courses were renamed the Advanced Military Studies Program (AMSP) and the National Strategic Studies Program (NSSP). Like the NDC that they replaced, these courses aspired to teach not only the military, but also the non-military aspects of defence. At the time of writing, these programmes have been superseded by the National Security Program (NSP), amalgamating the AMSP and NSSP into one course of study, which commenced in September 2008. While highly interesting in their own right, study of the NDC and its successors are not within the scope of this work. This exclusion has been made because only very limited numbers of officers attended NDC, AMSC/AMSP and NSSC/NSSP, with the bulk of staff education for army officers taking place earlier in their careers. Also there was some doubt regarding the
effectiveness of the original NDC in fulfilling its mandate.\textsuperscript{31} For both of these reasons, albeit primarily the former, little mention will be made of NDC, AMSC/AMSP and NSSC/NSSP.

The learning environment of the staff colleges was shaped by the instructors. They tended to be senior officers who had commanded military organizations in their respective specialties, and they were assigned a small group or “syndicate” of students to mentor. Most instruction was conducted through instructor-guided discussion in order to allow the participants to share experiences and understanding in order to educate themselves. Other instruction consisted of lectures, field problems using the local countryside to provide realism to tactical questions and “war games,” with students acting in the capacity of commanders and staffs to solve military problems.\textsuperscript{32} The fraternal relationships formed during the staff college experience were based on scholarship and knowledge. This atmosphere of collegiality hearkens back to the learning fraternities established by Prussia in the early nineteenth century and, through the study of curriculum changes, can be seen to have extended itself far beyond the limited geographical area of individual colleges.\textsuperscript{33}

In this sense, as professional learning institutions with instructors and students from allied militaries staff colleges have assisted in the establishment and solidifying of transnational links between these allies and Canada’s military. Consequently, examining the pedagogy associated with staff education permits one to discern the intellectual influences produced by these relationships over time. Utilising social theories concerning the transmission of knowledge to interpret the evolution of learning will enable delineation of these relationships. Although,


\textsuperscript{32} English, \textit{Lament For An Army}, 48-49; and Macdonald, 134-141.

Theories of epistemic communities are derived from research pertaining to knowledge transmission in scientific communities, those professional groups, amongst others, are analogous to the military in terms of having a distinct body of knowledge and separate organization.

The intellectual dimensions of a military profession are an outgrowth of its particular culture and history. This dimension is expressed through curricula which are taught in staff colleges. Logically, these elements should exist as a coherent body of knowledge and over time demonstrate a progressive, relative evolution. However, an examination of staff education in Canada belies this supposition through the manner in which various educational approaches that were adopted. The paradigm shifts that were produced over time demonstrate that the intellectual history of the profession of arms in Canada has sometimes been shaped more by the demands of maintaining relevancy to major allies than by self-regulation and awareness. A thorough study of these topics demonstrates that the professional education, and competencies, of the officers of the Canadian military have often been extra national and in the arms of an empire. In the final analysis, without paying attention to the development and current evolution of professional thought in Canada’s military through professional military education, there will be a void in Canadian comprehension of its military and their use in war and peace. Volumes such as this are a positive attempt to assist with building the body of research and analysis that addresses this gap. In a similar fashion to Georges Clemenceau, who served as Prime Minister of France during the First World War, and is popularly believed to have said that “War is too important to be left to the generals,” professional military education is too vital to the functioning of the Canadian military as an instrument of national power to not have the oversight and engagement of Canadian scholars in its construction and practice.