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# Strategic Leadership and the “Fourth” Army War College

By RICHARD A. CHILCOAT *and*  
RODERICK R. MAGEE II



U.S. Army (Richard Ward)

Students discussing  
“hot spot” during  
exercise.

Scholars have long maintained that the military is a bona fide profession, standing shoulder to shoulder with other fields such as medicine, law, and education.<sup>1</sup> The task of keeping current in the profession of arms, however, is unique. Doctors, attorneys, and teachers practice their skills daily, whereas soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen apply their talent—war-fighting—only sporadically, often with years or even decades between conflicts.

This represents no small problem in the preparation of senior leaders. How competent would we expect a heart surgeon to be who performed coronary balloon angioplasty only once or twice in his career? What level of jurisprudence could we expect from a trial lawyer who tried his first case 28 years after law school? Both Dwight Eisenhower and Omar Bradley were graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1915 yet did not experience combat or wartime command for another quarter century. Military leaders who are exposed to two or three wars in a career are considered unusually experienced. While the frequency of military operations has increased since the Vietnam War, their duration has decreased, so that traditional limits on cumulative experience still apply.

The Armed Forces—and indeed the militaries of all peace-bent Western democracies—thus face a paradox: to the extent they deter war they deny themselves the combat experience to continue to deter war. It has thus been the task of U.S. military education and training to impart to individuals and units the actual skills demanded by their wartime roles within a realistic combat-simulated environment. More specifically, it has been the dream of educators and trainers to replicate the psychological and physical experience of war, short of actually shedding blood, in arranged encounters with a hostile sparring partner. We have fallen far short of this over the years, though at times training is realistic, particularly at the individual and tactical levels.

The complexity of the interplay among many factors and actors on the operational, strategic, and policy levels, however, has made it impracticable until recently to exercise staff and

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Major General Richard A. Chilcoat, USA, is 43<sup>rd</sup> commandant of the U.S. Army War College and Lieutenant Colonel Roderick R. Magee II, USA, is assigned to the Center for Strategic Leadership, U.S. Army War College.

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command functions in a simulated wartime setting with authenticity. With the microchip, military educators and trainers have—or soon will have—the ability to practice strategic leaders with such fidelity to the combat ideal that they can step from classroom to command post and barely tell the difference. Technology creates this virtual reality. Warfare on these levels is predominantly intellectual rather than physical, and information technology today enables the mind much as industrial technology once did the muscle. Exciting possibilities for senior leader development thus come into view.

The U.S. Army War College (USAWC)—the preeminent military institution for teaching the application of landpower within a joint and multinational framework—is capitalizing on recent technological advances to prepare strategic leaders. The intent here is not to tout USAWC successes but to promote an understanding among all services of emerging potentialities. As the President of National Defense University, Lieutenant General Ervin Rokke, USAF, has pointed out in these pages, “The stakes have clearly changed . . . in the context of professional military education (PME). . . . Adapting [to changes of the post-Cold War era] is the basic challenge confronting the war colleges today.” He cited updating pedagogical concepts, approaches, and technologies as among the ways PME must adapt.<sup>2</sup>

### **A Glance Back**

Since its establishment in 1903 by Secretary of War Elihu Root, the Army War College has evolved through three stages and is now well into a fourth.<sup>3</sup> In establishing the college Root used terms that remain applicable today: “Not to promote war, but to preserve peace by intelligent and adequate preparation to repel aggression.” In his vision, future leaders could “study and confer on the great problems of national defense, military science, and responsible command.” These three immutable elements have lent continuity to the curriculum since 1903.

The college’s first incarnation, which lasted until World War I, was animated largely by the felt need to improve senior level command and staff performance, which had been notably poor during the Spanish-American War. Located in Washington, it was organic to the War Department General Staff, actually serving as a war planning element. Initially, there was no formal academic instruction. Only gradually did the idea take hold that the program should include not only on-the-job training but theoretical study.

The second college emerged following 1918. Just as the Spanish-American War prodded reform of senior education, so too did the Great War by revealing glaring weaknesses in the ability of the defense establishment to plan and execute a national mobilization. The role of instruction was recognized, a course in command was introduced, and by the time the tenure of the second college drew to a close in 1940 political, economic, and social considerations had begun to appear in the curriculum, as did a greater emphasis on history.

Janus-like, the third college commenced in 1950, following a 10-year interregnum imposed by World War II, one face transfixed on that conflict and the other turned to the Cold War. Nearly every USAWC instructional and research entity matured during that period. Institutionalization of joint and multinational warfare led the college to go beyond field army tactics to operational art, theater strategy, and alliance protocol.

The main focus of instruction—student seminars—crystallized into a form that promised to endure. With 16 students representing a mix of services, branches, components, foreign services, and government agencies, each seminar was a microcosm of the joint, combined, interagency force sanctioned by doctrine. Immersion in an authentic heterogeneous environment modeling a typical strategic headquarters shaped leaders who, while expertly qualified in their own service domains, were conditioned to think and act jointly.

The fourth college, which dates from about 1990, is the product of two geostrategic events, the demise of the Cold War and the dawn of the information age. The former led to a revolution in grand strategy, replacing a clear unitary threat with more nebulous and sundered ones just as dangerous in the long term. The latter introduced a revolution in the conduct of war, information-based techniques that extend force effectiveness exponentially. Advanced computer technology, to cite one example, can digitize battlespace, deploying an array of sensors and surveillance devices that provide a real-time picture of friendly and enemy situations while enabling commanders to act before an enemy can knowledgeably react.

The fourth college is assimilating these revolutionary developments and learning pedagogy to produce more educated and practiced strategic leaders. Serendipitously, the information-based technology which is revolutionizing warfare has also helped achieve a degree of realism that meets the most demanding vision of educators and practitioners alike.

## Managing Change

To assure that all institutional efforts were harnessed to a common goal, we initially had to decide what we wanted in a fourth USAWC. The vision—as determined by a deliberate process of institutional self-discovery—is to be “the Nation’s preeminent center for strategic leadership and landpower . . . a learning institution . . . preparing today’s leaders for tomorrow’s challenges . . . pursuing mastery of the strategic art through education, research, and outreach.”

The terms *strategic art* and *strategic leadership* as institutionalized in the vision also demanded explanation.<sup>4</sup> Deceptive in their apparent simplicity, both concepts in fact required considerable scrutiny. Strategic art—the counterpart to the much more widely discussed operational art—was accorded a brief, functional definition. It is the skillful formulation, coordination, and application of *ends* (national security goals and objectives), *ways* (courses of action for achieving them), and *means* (resources for pursuing courses of action) to promote or defend national interests. Strategic art is thus not a purely military activity but rather is permeated with political implications.

A definition of strategic leadership followed. It is the act of influencing people and organizations to systematically employ strategic art—and ends, ways, and means at hand—in defense of the Nation or theater interests. It is not the sole province of the military commander. It must be

exercised by all staff members of joint, unified, and combined commands, as well as by civilians within DOD, the National Security Council, alliance structures, and even on the country-team level. The mission was then refined,

placing special emphasis on preparing students for strategic leadership positions as part of a joint, unified, or multinational force.

Finally, it became clear that we must specify and teach special competencies beyond those we have traditionally required (but must continue to demand). Fluency in the strategic art in the information age must include capabilities such as orchestrating multiple simultaneous battles across a vast three-dimensional space, leading in learning organizations, managing massive flows of data, responding to new information and circumstances, maintaining flexibility in the empowerment of subordinate commands, psychological and physical stamina, hands-on computer skill, and literacy in joint and service doctrine.

The staff and faculty must assure that future evolution of the college hews to the established path, thus realizing its vision. In brief, we aim to produce jointly qualified strategic leaders who

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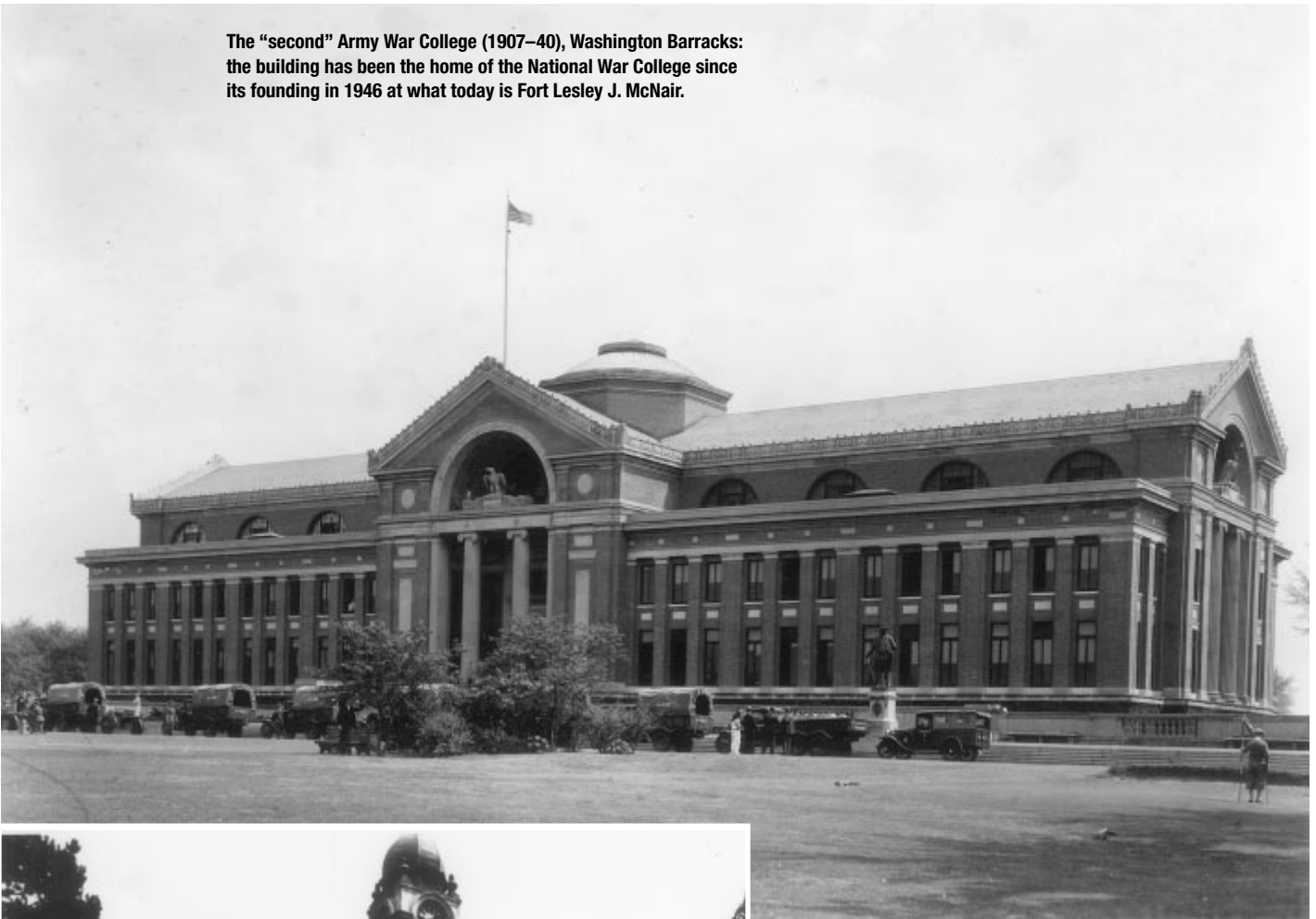
The “first” Army War College (1902–07) located at 22 Jackson Place in Washington: the Army War Board and then the college occupied a brownstone (far right) facing Lafayette Square across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House.

can implement national military strategy. They must practice their craft in a politico-military climate more *volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous* than in the past (dubbed VUCA by students). To develop the requisite mental agility, we employ an adult active-learning process, with emphasis on how to think as opposed to what to think. In small seminars, augmented by guest lectures and question-and-answer periods, students probe tough issues, mastering the art of strategic thinking, which includes a concurrent appeal to historical mindedness (past), conceptual and critical thinking (present), and creative and visionary thinking (future). Students are then ready for Collins Hall.

## Strategic Training

Key to activities at USAWC is the recently completed Collins Hall which houses the Center for Strategic Leadership. The center has a dual mission of supporting the college in its educational role and defense leaders in their decision-making role. The hall is a secure learning, conferencing, and gaming facility with a conference

The “second” Army War College (1907–40), Washington Barracks: the building has been the home of the National War College since its founding in 1946 at what today is Fort Lesley J. McNair.



Courtesy of Special Collections, NDU Library.



U.S. Army

The “third” Army War College, Fort Leavenworth (1950–51): for one year the college was reestablished in Grant Hall (above) at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

hall; video teleconference center; classrooms; state-of-the-art automation, computer, communications, and gaming assets; and access to the defense simulation internet and the global command and control system.

In academe, laboratory periods, practicums, and internships provide frequent opportunities to apply expertise, theories, and techniques. As discussed earlier, however, the military often falls short of the civilian academic model since opportunities for realistic on-the-job education as well as training in war are rare. What makes Collins Hall unique among simulation and gaming centers, aside from unrivaled communications capabilities, is the capacity of its gaming tools and facilities to incorporate more players, more transactions, and more third- and fourth-order effects. Strategic leaders of the future can verify their expertise under conditions of virtual reality. With students seated before computer terminals just as they would be in wartime joint headquarters, the stimuli of strategic war—down to fatigue and



The “fourth” Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 1951–present: Collins Hall (shown here) is a recent USAWC addition which houses the Strategic Leadership Center.

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stress—can be replicated so faithfully that participants are able to suspend their disbelief and accept the virtual as real. We call it experiential learning.<sup>5</sup>

Collins Hall is the Army’s strategic “combat training center,” a laboratory where students can put ideas into action. Just as combat training centers (such as the National Training Center, Red Flag, Twentynine Palms, and Joint Readiness Training Center) train “virtual veterans,” we educate “virtual strategic leaders.”

### Crisis Exercise

The strategic crisis exercise (SCE) is an annual ten-day politico-military exercise/wargame conducted at USAWC under the crisis action guidance found in Joint Pub 5–03.1, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System*. The 1996 iteration of this exercise took place March 13–26, two-thirds of the way through the academic year, which permitted students to draw on the core courses in term I and regional appraisals and advanced courses in term II. Term III advanced courses were scheduled after SCE so students could pick electives to strengthen their professional development based on weaknesses revealed by the exercise.

Initiated in 1995, SCE is a joint multinational exercise that applies joint and service doctrine in 11 realistic regionally-based crisis scenarios. It involves all 320 students, 150 faculty members, and guests who play designated roles. The diversified student body provides an ideal pool from which to constitute staff and command teams for national and unified command headquarters.

The exercise embraces political, military, and economic play at the operational and strategic levels. To increase the intensity and diversity for each student cell, the class is divided into three groups, each playing the 11 scenarios independently. Operational fortunes among the groups vary since the same scenarios unfold according to differing student analyses and recommendations and contrasting decisions by key actors.

Roles played by students include members of the National Security Council; Departments of State, Defense, Treasury, and Commerce; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Joint Staff; country teams; service chiefs and staffs; geographic commanders in chief and liaisons to functional supporting commands; and public affairs. Major officials—the President, Secretaries of

State and Defense, and others—are played by staff and faculty or outside experts.

For each scenario students must systematically address the following planning issues:

- What are the national interests in the region of conflict?
- What are the interests and likely reactions of regional actors and those outside the region?
- If U.S. forces are committed, what strategic guidance will be given to CINCs? That is, what are the criteria for success? The desired exit strategy? The criteria for conflict termination? The desired end state? Post-conflict activities and responsibilities?

When answers to these questions are completed and staffed, students draft a presidential decision directive for each scenario.

The exercise design follows the standard crisis action planning (CAP) process as set forth in Joint Pub 5-03.1:

- phase I—situation development
- phase II—crisis assessment (major or lesser regional contingency)
- phase III—course of action development
- phase IV—course of action selection
- phase V—campaign execution planning
- phase VI—campaign execution and achievement of desired end state.

USAWC has added a phase VII (redeployment and force reallocation) to address troop and lift-juggling requirements under a multiple-crisis environment and a phase VIII (exercise review) to complement the learning process.<sup>6</sup> Student performance is based on the universal joint task list, together with added reallocation and redeployment of forces. The analysis, planning,

staffing, and execution procedures students use during the 11 scenarios precisely mirror those they may employ as strategic leaders. This is the epitome of experiential learning and is made even more meaningful when used with after action reviews designed for analyses, synthesis, evaluation, and diagnosis of the learning itself.

Scenario development ensures that all player cells are involved and all organic phases of an operation are played, from strategic policy decisions to campaign execution. Scenario events and controller interplay exercise the interagency process, including negotiations with both governmental and international agencies. Media coverage and its political effects are also heavily played. The students are even required to testify before mock crisis-centered congressional panels. The scenarios involve the spectrum from general war to operations other than war. They are time-phased

into a simulated 210-day period in order to stretch force and strategic lift resources.

The scenarios were developed from a locally prepared futures document, a study resource depicting a plausible international environment for 2006 and not intended to be predictive. All five unified commands were assigned scenarios.

U.S. Southern Command faces two scenarios. A hurricane in a Central American nation necessitates a U.S. humanitarian assistance operation. Antigovernment guerrillas then exploit the situation, which leads to American involvement in counterinsurgency operations. Later, a border war among three South American countries results in the United States joining a multinational peace operation while a permanent political settlement is negotiated.

U.S. European Command confronts two scenarios. One remains the Balkan fragmentation of 1992. A U.N. force—with a U.S. contingent—keeps a precarious peace. But the situation is deteriorating as pressure grows to divert U.S. forces to other areas. Meanwhile, a major regional contingency has developed in northwest Africa, where one Maghreb state has attacked another. Washington must decide whether to commit forces to defend the victim. Another scenario involves a water crisis among three nations in the Middle East within the EUCOM area of responsibility. A major geostrategic issue is whether to assign this crisis to U.S. Central Command.

U.S. Central Command has its own hands full. Although a diplomatic solution to a water crisis is negotiated, the command must deal with a dispute among three states on the southeastern Arabian peninsula. Internal unrest in one raises the possibility of a noncombatant evacuation of U.S. citizens. The most pressing scenario, however, is an invasion of an oil-producing Gulf state by a powerful neighbor. This forces the national command authorities to deal with a second major regional contingency while the one in northwest Africa continues.

The Asia-Pacific region offers little respite for beleaguered decisionmakers. U.S. Pacific Command deals with three scenarios at roughly the same time. In the first, oil and gas discoveries in the South China Sea become the focus of a long-simmering dispute among several neighboring states, forcing Washington to abandon a policy of benign neglect. In the second, friction develops between a major Asian power, on one hand, and a smaller neighbor and the United States on the other. Further complicating the situation, an earthquake-induced tidal wave strikes a regional port,

### scenario events exercise the interagency process, including governmental and international agencies

leading to noncombatant evacuation of foreign nationals. The third scenario has intensified piracy in the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca leading to growing requests for U.S. assistance by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Even the continental United States gives rise to an operation. As a geographic command as well as force provider for other commands, U.S. Atlantic Command has regional responsibilities. When an earthquake, with its epicenter near a large metropolitan area, devastates the south central part of the Nation, ACOM must provide massive aid. The scenario exercises a Federal response when forces designated for such emergencies have been diverted overseas.

In sum, these scenarios enable students to practice strategic leadership in major and lesser regional contingencies, natural disaster relief, noncombatant evacuations, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, counterinsurgency, low-intensity conflict, and freedom-of-navigation disputes. Thus the modus operandi resembles what students would do in actual operations.

The annual SCE, having gone through only two iterations, is still developing. Indeed, as the technology of war simulation improves, USAWC staff and faculty must exploit such enhanced capabilities to produce ever more realistically practiced leaders.

More particularly, as SCE evolves we can introduce progressively more distributed play. This refers to participation of distant players through military communications links as opposed to simulating involvement locally. Such a capability is within the technical capability of Collins Hall and will be extended to the Department of the Army staff in 1997, Joint Staff in 1998, and Office of the Secretary of Defense and unified commands in 1999 or 2000. The challenge lies in organizing participation by busy, far-flung actors who face pressing operational distractions.

In any event, the improving capabilities of Collins Hall and incorporation of distant players will open the possibility in the near future of involving the highest level defense officials (serving or retired) in gaming and testing endeavors.

Some will remember when company training was no more realistic than playing cops and robbers. Senior NCOs in those days, hearkening back to a time when "real" soldiers bestrode the battlefield, enjoyed shocking us by saying "We need to get this outfit bloodied every month or so to keep it in fighting trim!" Today there is a similar challenge—to exercise troops in war without

actually fighting—but we do it more successfully. If those sergeants of old could visit the National Training Center or a similar facility they would be astonished by how much today's tactical training resembles the real thing. SCE, capitalizing on the capabilities inherent in the Collins Hall complex, enables us to practice, educate, and develop strategic leaders with comparable realism. Senior level PME is on the right track. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 7–18; and Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 3–5.

<sup>2</sup> Ervin J. Rokke, "Military Education for the New Age," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 9 (Autumn 1995), pp. 18–23.

<sup>3</sup> Based on Richard A. Chilcoat, "The 'Fourth' Army War College: Preparing Strategic Leaders for the Next Century," *Parameters*, vol. 25, no. 4 (Winter 1995–96), pp. 3–17.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard A. Chilcoat, *Strategic Art: The New Art for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, October 10, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> The active learning spiral is a model for experiential learning. Students bring a vast "experience" base to USAWC where they spend time "reflecting" in both individual efforts and the seminar, then "learning" from their reflections, and finally "acting" in varied roles during SCE. In this way they gain experience and the cycle continues. See Executive Development Roundtable, *Building Individual and Organizational Capacity Through Action Learning* (Boston: Boston University School of Management, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Russell F. Weigley, who observed SCE in 1996, remarked: "Learning [really] takes place after the exercise," when students can reflect.