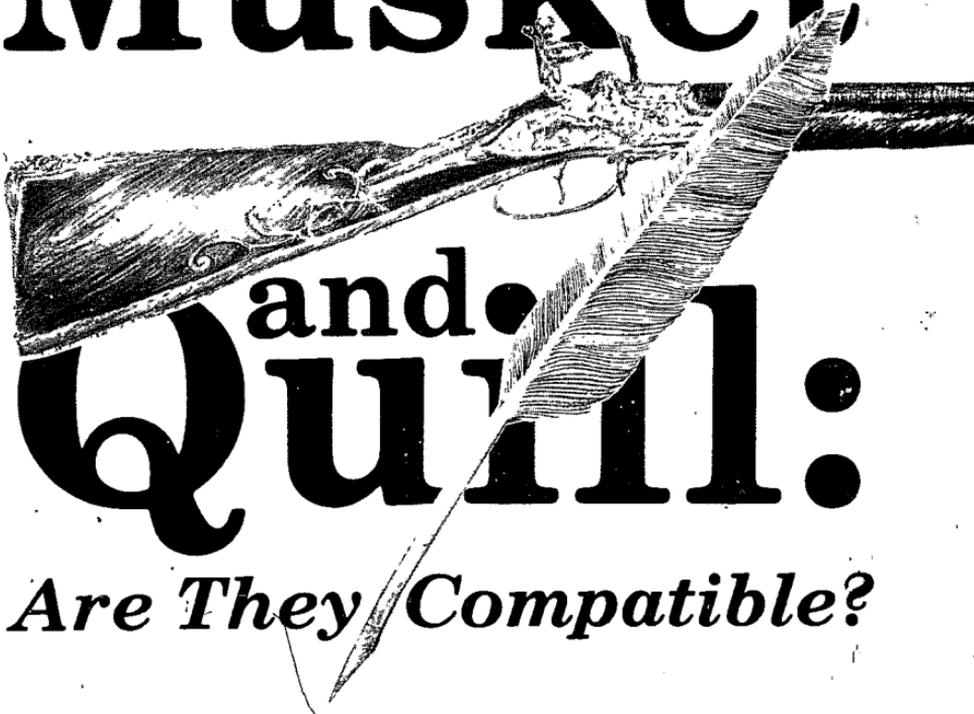


Musket



and Quill:

Are They Compatible?

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In the August 1969 Military Review, General E. C. Meyer, Army chief of staff, highlighted the need for "comprehensive thinking in long-range planning, strategy, and innovative tactics" and encouraged Army members to put their "thoughts in writing and offer them to our professional journals." In this article, the author explains why manuscripts often fail to meet publication standards and offers hints to assist prospective authors in their efforts to "get into print."

MEMBERS of the uniformed services today produce a genuine dearth of influential professional writing.¹ In fact, the military may be the only professional field whose chief published theoreticians and expositors are drawn from

*history, the critique of military operations, and the evaluation of the proper role of the military profession to civilian writers.*⁶

Officials of the Naval War College were embarrassed by the scant scholarly output of its military faculty in contrast to the

other disciplines and professions. Of the years from 1945 to 1960, Samuel P. Huntington remarks that "at best the military were the draftsmen of strategy. The civilian leaders of the administration were always the architects."²

Richard G. Head observes that "most U.S. strategic conceptual innovations are the product of civilians rather than of military officers."³ Bernard Brodie ventures a reason for what he terms the military's "paucity of contributions" to its professional literature:

*Soldiers have always cherished the image of themselves as men of action rather than as intellectuals, and they have not been very much given to writing analytical inquiries into their own art.*⁴

Lest one infer that these are the biased judgments of armchair strategists, he has only to refer to the words of the Army's chief of staff, General Edward C. Meyer, in his Kermit Roosevelt lectures delivered in the United Kingdom in May 1979: "Much of the significant theoretical development of military strategy since World War II has been penned by civilian, not military, theorists."⁵ In a similar vein, General Maxwell D. Taylor has lamented the professional soldier's inclination to:

... entrust the writing of military

"enviable" publishing record of its civilians. Hoping perhaps for the incarnation of another Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, they recently went so far as to *require* its faculty members to "write and have published at least one piece each year."⁷ The present discouraging state of military writing has not always existed, nor is it inevitable in the future. The examples of Karl von Clausewitz, Henri Jomini, J. F. C. Fuller, Emory Upton and Mahan himself—each of whom recorded enduring military thought while in uniform—offer clear testimony that successful military service is not necessarily incompatible with successful professional authorship.

With respect to manuscripts currently being submitted to military journals by Army members, many journal editors would probably agree with the following two propositions:

- The number of manuscripts submitted is relatively small.
- Such manuscripts as are submitted are too often unpublishable.

To investigate why Army members write so little is not the primary aim of this article, but we may glance at the subject briefly because it impinges on our chief concern which is the question of why the writings of Army authors so

often fail to meet the standards of publication. As noted above, Brodie attributes the phenomenon of professional reticence to a calculated anti-intellectualism on the part of men in uniform.

Another frequently advanced explanation is an alleged lack of time. According to this reasoning, soldiering is a full-time occupation, allowing little opportunity for the reflection, research and composition prerequisite to quality writing. Professional reading is, of course, closely linked to informed professional writing. And, in delving into the matter of why Army officers do comparatively little reading in the literature of their trade, Professor Robin Higham records an interesting observation by an officer-student enrolled in a course on the history of military thought:

One of the recent Leavenworth graduates remarked that it was not much use making [military reading] lists because Army officers just would not read the books anyway, unless this was made mandatory. The reason for this, he suggested, was closely related to the fact that the best officers often had demanding jobs with endless interruptions due to the telephone and other technologies.⁸

We might suspect that the best doctors, lawyers and academicians have "demanding jobs" also, but we are entitled to demand of them that they remain conscientiously abreast of their professional literature—literature which is, for the most part, penned by their equally busy fellow professionals. To be fair, it must be acknowledged that many Army jobs do not realistically permit of sustained professional writing: troop command, field duty and certain staff positions in the sweatshops of the Pentagon come readily to mind. But the normal career pattern will include its share of leave, schooling, teaching, and

other activities that are compatible with intellectual self-expression harnessed to professional concerns.

When, with the passage of years, the military professional claims he has not added to the writ of his trade for lack of time, what he really means is that in disposing such discretionary time as he has had, he has accorded professional writing a low priority. And let us be honest. We all do have discretionary time, whether we spend it swinging at little white balls, cultivating the garden, refinishing the furniture, or whatever.

Thus, despite the time strictures facing military writers, the fact is that a modest number of them do persevere in their authorial efforts and do submit manuscripts to journals for publication. Let us examine the main reasons why such submissions so often fail to find their way into the pages of the journals, in the process discussing several means of enhancing an article's publishability. To be sure, the advice below is no prescription for converting a young military thinker to an overnight Clausewitz, but it might strengthen his knack and inclination for breaking into print with professional ideas. Over time, such modest beginnings could lead to important endings.

Problem with no solution. Those articles which eloquently portray a particular problem, and then leave it dangling, rarely charm either editors or readers. Once he has filled his readers' hearts with righteous indignation over the plight of the boat people, the precariousness of the oil supply or the evils of Army careerism, the writer, has a moral obligation to suggest practicable solutions. It is conceivable, of course, that there are hidden timebombs ticking away in our security landscape and that a writer is doing a service merely

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in calling attention to their existence.

But, as a general rule, editors will receive as more constructive those articles which make genuine attempts to supply answers. The following platitudinous "solutions" tend to be no solutions at all: "We must rekindle the American spirit. . ."; "We must redouble the nation's efforts. . ."; "The Army must tackle this problem with renewed vigor. . ."

Argument without a thesis. While one does see some purely narrative and descriptive pieces, it is probably a safe bet that most significant military articles are intended to persuade or convince. That is, they are reasoned appeals for the reader to relinquish his present neutral or contrary view on an issue and adopt instead the view of the author. It seems self-evident that in order to win a reader to your side of an argument, you must clearly set forth the final conclusion you wish him to draw. Yet, paradoxically, one of the most frequent grounds for rejection of an argumentative piece is its failure finally to cohere in support of a discoverable kernel of meaning.

Some authorities call this kernel the thesis, some the central idea, others the summary statement. But all agree that argument is bound to abort if it flails about in all directions, lacking an ordered and logical progression of inferences that converge inexorably in behalf of an intelligible point of view. Order and logical progression imply sound organi-

zation. Occasionally, unclear articles prove on close analysis to have a thesis of sorts, but suffer because that thesis is obscured by faulty organization.

For a writer whose arguments tend to stray, rigid adherence to a prewritten outline is a useful precaution. It is also useful for the writer to state in a simple declarative sentence in the opening paragraph what it is he is attempting to prove and then keep this proposition in the forefront of his thinking as he composes. Furthermore, it seldom hurts to state the proposition again at the conclusion.

The gray glob. Frequently, editors receive manuscripts which have a sound basic idea and well-turned prose yet which are so lacking in concrete particulars that they fail utterly to grasp the reader's imagination, much less win him to the writer's point of view. Those articles tend to be most absorbingly convincing which are studded with pertinent facts, illuminating examples and hard-hitting specifics. Compare the following:

- It has been alleged that a problem developed some time ago with the strategy of massive retaliation.

- General Maxwell Taylor in his book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, argued that the strategy of massive retaliation was no longer credible in an age of essential nuclear parity between the two superpowers. The superpowers were compared to two scorpions in a bottle—each could kill the other, but only at the certain risk of its own life.

The writer of the second passage did his homework, and he will be rewarded by being read whereas the writer of the first has given us little more than an eminently forgettable glob of words. One of the best techniques for avoiding the gray glob can be applied before the writing begins. When, owing to the stimuli of his experiences and reading, one "feels an article coming on," he should immediately begin to compile a folder of relevant clippings, quotations, notes and thoughts. Later, when the time comes for him to put pen to paper, he will have the specifics at his fingertips and can thus escape the tone of drab generality that inevitably marks papers woven from memory alone.

This technique has the added virtue of contributing to factual accuracy, lack of which frequently disqualifies for publication. A Walter Lippmann or Raymond C. Aron can negotiate successfully in the realm of lofty abstraction, but most mortals must ground their prose in the bedrock of specificity.

The grammatical abortion. I speak here of articles whose grammar, syntax and word choice are so abysmally substandard that the material is beyond editorial repair. There are at least three antidotes to such writing: revise, revise, revise. Isaac Singer claims that a writer's best friend is the wastepaper basket. He is speaking not only of ruthlessly stripping out one's less felicitous prose, but, more particularly, of the repetitive process of preparing and refining successive drafts until lucidity and concision are finally won.

Good writing ensues from equal parts of talent and hard work, with the edge probably going to the latter. A complement to tireless revision is reliance upon outside help. This is an essential step, even for the most skilled writer. No writer should attempt to venture into print until

his manuscript has received the benefit of critical scrutiny from other eyes, preferably informed eyes. If such a precaution is a threat to his ego, he should consider how much more bruising would be an editor's candid letter of rejection.

Warmed-over term paper. A writer should not submit to an editor an unrevised copy of that term paper in International Relations 404, of which he is so proud, even if it was awarded an A plus. In a term paper, one is addressing a single professor, a specialist in the subject presumably, but in any event one *who must* read the paper if for no other reason than to grade it.

In a journal article, however, the writer has no captive audience. He is soliciting the attention of readers having wide disparities of interest and background, readers who can and probably will thumb right past the article if a summary glance shows it to be too formidable for their tastes. Term papers—and the same applies to theses and military staff studies—often do contain the kernel of something publishable, but they must first be thoroughly adapted.

Adaptation ordinarily entails winnowing out the lumps of specialized jargon, cutting down the length, enlivening the style, removing the stilted organizational subheadings and substituting narrative transitions, eliminating the bibliography and drastically reducing the number of notes. Some magazines and popular journals do not print notes at all, but may provide for informal documentation within the text.

Jargon run amuck. I noted above that articles often require adaptation before publishing for removal of the author-specialists' disciplinary jargon. In this manner, the content becomes intelligible to a more general readership. ("Jargon," as used here, refers to technical

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discourse, often affected and pseudo-scientific, peculiar to particular vocational or professional groups.)

In many cases when adaptation is contemplated, however, we find the jargon so pervasive, so deeply woven into the fabric of the prose, as to defy removal. Such prose is not fit for publication in its unadapted state (unless deemed to be so by the mercifully rare journal editor who thrives on this sort of thing), and yet it cannot be adapted. These cases are disturbing, possibly even tragic in some instances, because hidden beneath the impenetrable jargon conceivably could be a message of genuine significance to the military community.

Disciplinary and professional jargon, including the Army's own, has always constituted a bar to effective communication, but something relatively new is at work here. Over the past 25 years, increasing numbers of military members have been sent to graduate schools for advanced degrees in such disciplines as the behavioral and social sciences—psychology, sociology, economics, political science and international relations. Though otherwise stout breeds to be sure, many behavioral and social scientists tend to write in a decidedly odious jargon—though, to be truthful, no discipline is without sin in this respect—with the result that thousands of service members have now been infected with the disease.

An idea of the kind of prose that many

Army personnel in graduate school are exposed to and expected to emulate can be gained from this symptomatic excerpt from a sociological study that actually—I swear!—made its way into print:

There is a need for the American military structure to redevelop corporate ties and change its values away from those characteristic of entrepreneurial structures . . . The variables in the model [suggested] are linked to a larger conceptual schematic which demonstrates how such variables might interact in a modular fashion to effect change in the value structures of military bureaucracies.

It is no wonder that the language mechanisms of so many Army members go awry in graduate school and that they return to us writing a dialect resembling South Venusian. If the author of the passage above were asked why he writes that way, he would doubtless reply to the following effect:

As a scientist, I must rigorously insulate my prose from the least hint of emotive content that could deflect my pursuit of verifiably objective truth. Further, I must use technical language having a precise and universally-agreed-upon meaning among the entire community of my fellow scientists.

This explanation will not wash. Such prose does not facilitate the pursuit of truth—it stifles it. Furthermore, it is not necessary to resort to an esoteric idiom to communicate precisely with one's professional brethren. Plain language,

carefully selected and judiciously qualified, will do it. If one checks the reader commentaries in a typical academic journal, he will see that controversy among the specialists turns as often on semantic and linguistic misunderstandings as on differences concerning substance, this despite (or rather because of) the undiminished presence of disciplinary jargon.

The attraction of writers to jargon-infected discourse is a function of misguided exhibitionism and a fatal indifference to the readers' problems of understanding. Regardless of the models of disciplinary jargonese one might have encountered in graduate school, they should be avoided in articles submitted for publication—avoided like a case of the descending mumps!

The diatribe. It seems a fact of human nature that nothing bestirs us to take up the pen with greater alacrity than plain anger or resentment. This is not all bad since some of our finest writing has had its germ in a deeply felt grievance. But raw anger transferred directly to paper rarely makes for publishable prose. The epithets, vituperation and intemperate charges have to come out, and the SOB who zaps us on our latest efficiency report must be arraigned in a different court. An article composed in the heat of passion is best set aside for several weeks, certainly until the emotions cool. Later, having been reworked with dispassionate attention to facts, logic and civility, it may very well sell.

Misaimed submission. It is not unusual for an editor to receive a manuscript which appears to merit publishing but which is inappropriate for his particular journal. Before submitting an article to a journal, a writer is well-advised to check a few past issues to assure that his own

article is broadly consonant in type with those usually printed. Many journals include a brief notice in the masthead setting forth length requirements, desired subject areas and level of readership. Still others make available on request an author's guide which describes in greater detail the journal's requirements.

Attention to such house rules can save a writer time and disappointment. No editor of a journal concerned with national and international security affairs, for example, will be overjoyed to receive an article devoted to the nuances of spit shining combat boots. A related problem is the tendency of writers to send manuscripts containing highly perishable material to a quarterly or semiannual periodical. Owing to the lengthy lead time that must precede an article's appearance in such a periodical—six months to a year is not uncommon—the article can easily be overtaken by events.

Article by the faint heart. Few reverses will congeal an apprentice author's blood like a rejection slip, and it is unfortunately true that many writers give up on a manuscript after the first try. They should not. On receiving a rejection, the writer should immediately turn his thoughts to the possibility of revision and resubmission.

There is a saying among editors—"My leaving is your lead"—meaning that what one editor rejects another may choose to feature. Thus, persistence by an author will often pay off. Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, one of the all-time best sellers, was rejected by 14 publishers before eventual acceptance.

Revision prior to resubmission is important: It is astonishing how many warts will materialize on the face of even the most "finished" manuscript after the

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lapse of some three or four months. If the writer is lucky, the editor will accompany the rejection letter with a critique or the referee's comments. In any case, the writer should initiate a methodical process of successive revisions and resubmissions to promising journals until lightning at last strikes.

A writer's optimism in eventually placing his article should be bolstered by the realization that there exist today literally scores of defense-oriented magazines and journals, each thirsting for quality fare. Within the Army alone, there are 43 authorized periodicals. The number grows still larger when one considers the dozens of military journals published by the civilian sector—*Army*, *Military Affairs*, *Strategic Review* and *International Security* to name only a few. Add to these such prestigious journals as *Foreign Affairs* and *Orbis* whose focus on foreign relations is indivisible from attention to international security affairs. Finally, one must take into account the sizable number of foreign military periodicals which print English-language articles.

Numerous fine bibliographic tools exist to assist writers in identifying those journals most appropriate for their particular manuscripts. A brochure titled *1977 Markets for the Military Writer*, prepared by the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, Department of the Army (DA), tabulates 67 journals and magazines (both military and civilian) along with pertinent data. An updated edition

of *Markets for the Military Writer*, featuring greatly expanded coverage, is due off the press in 1980.

Similarly useful are the history, military and politics and world affairs sections of *Writer's Market*, published annually by *Writer's Digest Books*. To find potential markets, both foreign and domestic, for articles dealing with military history, one can survey the journal titles listed in "Recent Journal Articles," a comprehensive bibliographical series appearing in the quarterly *Military Affairs*. The foregoing survey provides only the barest glimpse of the publishing aids readily available through many military and civilian libraries.

Manuscript denied clearance. Under the provisions of Chapter 4, Army Regulation, 360-5, *Army Public Affairs Public Information*, manuscripts by any active duty Army member or DA civilian employee must be submitted for prior clearance if they treat "matters of national interest" or "topics dealing with military matters or foreign policy." Applications for clearance, which are directed to the DA Office for the Freedom of Information, can be initiated by the editor himself if his is a DA periodical.

When the writer intends to submit his manuscript instead to a non-DA periodical, he should seek clearance through his unit public affairs officer. Manuscripts are reviewed for "security, accuracy, propriety, and conformance with policy." It is not unusual for the clearance authority to recommend or

require specified changes. On rare occasions, clearance is denied outright. This latter case—the categorical withholding of authority to publish—can cause particular anguish for editors and authors alike. It should be some consolation to know that the regulation does permit official appeals of adverse clearance decisions.

Collectively, the common authorial lapses described in the preceding paragraphs account for the bulk of manuscript rejections by military journals, and many of these lapses would apply as well to more ambitious writing projects such as books and monographs. To the extent that such deficiencies become

less prevalent in the future, we should witness in the printed media an increased appearance of seminal thought on the military art—by practitioners of that art.

Within the ranks of today's military brotherhood resides an uncommonly high order of professional competence as well as the creative capacity to shape and articulate the governing literature of military endeavor. The soldier must reflect on whether he can long remain a worthy guarantor of his nation's liberty without, in fact, becoming such a shaper and articulator, thus resuming the role of chief architect of his own professional canon.

NOTES

1 Good discussions of the relatively meager output of professional writing by service members are those of Edward B. Atkeson, *Army's Military Arts Gap*, *Few Artists in the House*, *Army*, March 1975, pp. 10-12, and William L. Hauser, *Professional Writing: A Professional Obligation*, *Military Review*, August 1974, pp. 41-48.

2 Samuel P. Huntington, *Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics*, Columbia University Press, Irvington, N.Y., 1961, p. 115.

3 Colonel Richard G. Head, *Soviet Military Education*, *Air University Review*, November-December 1978, pp. 54-55.

4 Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics*, The Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1973, p. 436.

5 General Edward C. Meyer, *Toward a More Perfect Union in Civil-Military Relations*, *Parameters*, June 1979, p. 81. Perhaps the most perfect embodiment of the chief of staff's concern over the lack of professional writing can be found in his recent letter to the Army's senior leaders (US Army War College Memorandum, dated 11 August 1980).

Subject: CSA Letter Dated 30 July 1980. A central theme in my dialogue with you has been the need to escape the "in-box mentality" and to get our management and thinking out on the horizon. Daily requirements, demands, and obligations often result in long, mind-numbing days that capture us and our subordinates totally, unless

we fight back through judicious delegation and disciplined time management. The principal casualties of the "in-box mentality" are creative thinking, innovative application, and reasoned discourse. The assumption that someone out there is doing the thinking and writing is not necessarily correct since subordinates tend to follow leaders' priorities and emphases in vital areas such as national interests and priorities, strategy, and even planning and operations; we hand over the initiative to less qualified writers and thinkers and then find ourselves defending our positions or refuting simplistic solutions. I encourage you to get yourself and your subordinates out in front of the Army's problems and to nurture the development of original thought and active discourse on the issues we face. The Army's professional journals need and welcome the results of innovative thinking and unorthodox applications at all levels. Reward the original thinker.

6 General Maxwell D. Taylor, "A Do It Yourself Professional Code for the Military," *Parameters*, December 1980.

7 W. A. Platte and F. H. Hartmann, *Naval War College Issues of Current Interest*, *Naval War College Review*, May-June 1979, pp. 107-13.

8 Robin Higham, "If You Don't Read History, You'll Repeat It," *Military Review*, May 1973, pp. 28-34.

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