



Peter J. Schifferle. *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010. 295 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1714-2.



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Pedagogy in the U.S. Army: Fort Leavenworth and the Applicatory Method

Historians of U.S. success in World War II often credit the genius of the nation's armed forces logisticians for supplying beans and bullets to men, and women, engaged in simultaneous wars in Europe and the Pacific. Another frequently mentioned advantage of the United States over its antagonists is the industrial might the country possessed at the war's beginning, and which grew as the war progressed to the defeat of the Axis powers by the Allied nations. An often overlooked critical factor in the U.S. Army's battlefield victories is the intellectual and educational development of regular army officers (p. 1). Peter J. Schifferle makes the case that the U.S. Army officer's professional education during the interwar years of 1919 to 1940 and the war years of 1941 to 1945 was at least as important as the armed forces' ability to sustain long lines of communication and supply across two oceans, and the ability of the U.S. manufacturing sector to shift quickly from the satisfaction of civilian wants and needs to war materiel production. The applicatory method, the application of a set of principles to solve a given problem, was how the Leavenworth

schools taught their interwar students to hone their problem solving skills and to gain confidence in their ability to apply those principles to a broad range of situations.

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The applicatory method, the use of practical exercises to teach problem solving skills and the confidence to know both when to make a decision and the best de-

cision to make, was developed by Prussian officers in the nineteenth century. This instruction method, the application of a set of principles to solve a given problem, was how the Leavenworth schools honed their interwar students' problem solving skills and instilled confidence in their ability to apply those principles to a broad range of situations. The success of the Leavenworth schools in educating the interwar U.S. Army officer corps to prevail against their World War II enemies is best expressed by a remark made by German field marshal Gerd von Rundstedt upon his capture: "We cannot understand the difference in your leadership in the last war and in this. We could understand it if you had produced one superior corps commander, but now we find all of your corps commanders good and of equal superiority" (p. 195).

Discussing the Leavenworth schools' pedagogy during the interwar period, Schifferle differentiates between the education of practitioners and the education of academicians. Remarking on the different methods needed to teach those two student groups, Schifferle writes, "Professions that are expected to solve problems, apply techniques to seemingly unique situations, and provide solutions that actually work need a different kind of education than those whose primary assignment is the acquisition of knowledge" (p. 64). The professional education of military officers, practitioners of war, requires a different method than that of historians who describe and analyze the war after its end. The applicatory method combined large lectures, small-group seminars with instructors, committees of students and instructors, and "graded problem solving exercises" (p. 100). The graded problem solving exercises, called "pay problems" by the students, included "map maneuvers, map exercises, terrain exercises, and tactical rides" (p. 107).

The applicatory method was not without its interwar critics. U.S. Army professional journals carried articles whose writers criticized the method for failings familiar to any post-secondary education instructor, as well as more weighty concerns. One writer complained that the instructors were "insufferably boring" and that he counted a third of the officer-students who were "frankly and openly asleep" before the writer "himself succumbed" (p. 118). A more serious criticism appeared in a 1937 *Infantry Journal* issue. The writer pointed out that the practical problems might last "two or three hours" but in combat the decision-maker might have only minutes to reach and communicate a solution (p. 118). Students and journal writers criticized the "school solution" as a basis for grading the important pay problems. The school solution was the solution to a map

exercise, or a tactical problem, considered best by the instructors, and was applied to the student solutions. The school solution grading method inhibited students from presenting innovative solutions to complex problems, and those students complained about the inflexibility of Leavenworth's grading system. The Leavenworth faculty took the complaints about having one right solution, the school solution, seriously. They devised a system of student appeals that recognized that the school solution might not be the only possible solution. The system of appeals and acceptance of innovative solutions resulted in a sharp decline in student dissatisfaction.

Selection for student assignment at the Fort Leavenworth schools was highly sought by regular U.S. Army officers between the two World Wars. The first-year School of the Line and the following General Staff School normally took two years, one year per course, although the course length changed a few times between 1919 and 1940. Officers who completed both years of the Leavenworth schools had stars in their future. They could expect to become general officers before their retirement. The courses were rigorous and students competitive. Only the best officers from the peacetime army became students at the Leavenworth schools. Graduation from both the School of the Line and the following General Staff School was not guaranteed. For a time, U.S. Army policy was that only half of the first-year students would be allowed to proceed to the second-year course. During the interwar years, the army chose about two hundred first-year students for the School of the Line and about a hundred were left at the end of the first year to enter the second-year General Staff School. That ratio held even after the army abandoned the mandatory 50 percent cut in the first-year class.

The Leavenworth schools were the mid-level professional education for interwar army officers. An officer's education began with a branch course, designed to teach the fundamentals of the infantry, cavalry, artillery, and engineering branches to newly commissioned lieutenants. The branch course was followed by an advanced course in the officer's branch doctrine and tactics. Some graduates of the Leavenworth School of the Line and General Staff School, later known as the Command and General Staff Course, could expect to attend the highest professional educational institution, the Army War College.

The Leavenworth schools' faculty were selected from the exceptional students who survived both years of the Command and General Staff Course. Instructor assign-

ments lasted about three years, ensuring a faculty trained in the latest doctrine and tactics. Instructor assignments also involved writing the field manuals that explained the army's war-fighting doctrine, and writing the books and manuals the Leavenworth students studied. While the faculty did not choose the curriculum, they could influence the curriculum and the doctrine through essays and articles published in the army's professional journals. The debate that took place in the branch journals helped to keep alive the lessons learned during the American Expeditionary Forces' European war and to incorporate new technology and techniques into the army's doctrine.

Graduates of both Leavenworth courses learned three essential elements: skills in problem solving, the principles and techniques of handling large formations in combat, and the confidence that they could manage these large-formation command and staff tasks (p. 190). Problem solving skills could be taught, and the Leavenworth schools excelled in inculcating their graduates with a skill set that enabled both commanders and staff officers to analyze a problem and to formulate a workable solution. The handling of large combat formations, corps, and armies was accomplished with map exercises. Most readers are familiar with the phrase "war games," and those serious games were accomplished on maps. Success in problem solving and war-gaming gave the officer students the confidence that they could perform professionally and successfully as staff officers at division, corps, and army levels.

Did the Fort Leavenworth schools produce an army officer who could perform professionally and successfully in division-, corps-, and army-level general staff positions? Field Marshall von Rundstedt's appraisal of the U.S. Army's performance in both world wars indicates that it did. Schifferle notes two other success indicators: the army's management of the national mobilization and the number of interwar Leavenworth graduates who served in general staff positions during World War II. From a small force of 200,000 soldiers, including an officer corps of 14,000, when President Roosevelt declared a limited national emergency on September 8, 1939, the army expanded within 3 years to more than 8.3 million soldiers, including 600,000 officers. The officers who planned and implemented the mobilization of a massive army were graduates of the interwar Leavenworth

courses (p. 188). During the war general staff positions at corps and higher levels were filled by interwar Leavenworth graduates. These officers used their practitioners' education to deploy combat divisions to their greatest effect and to train the officers who had been pulled from civilian life and given little time to learn their jobs at a division level.

The timely delivery of beans and bullets and the ability of U.S. industries to rapidly begin production of war-fighting equipment were certainly key elements in the U.S. Army's performance on World War II battlefields. Leavenworth's creation of a cadre of officers with confidence in their problem solving skills, and the training to manage the largest organizations in the nation's history, is a testament to the effectiveness of the school's pedagogy. The pedagogy of the applicatory method met and overcame the challenges facing the U.S. Army in its successful prosecution of a global war. Warfare practitioners and academicians can agree that a Fort Leavenworth education was a significant element of the U.S. Army's performance in World War II.

Scholars of the history of education might be tempted to pass over a book dealing with a military pedagogy from more than half a century ago. Skipping this book for that reason would be a mistake. Readers researching U.S. professional education will find in this work an excellent description of the applicatory method and how it was used to educate U.S. Army officers who found themselves in charge of massive corps and armies during World War II. Educators and researchers of professional education may compare the effectiveness of the interwar Leavenworth school's instruction to instruction in other professional schools: pharmacy, medicine, engineering, and other professions that require practitioners to apply a set of general principles to problem solving within a complex and technical field. Dr. Schifferle's analysis provides historians of education with a well-researched basis for assessing the applicatory method's use in other teaching institutions. Administrators and faculty of professional and technical educational institutions will find that the results of this method of teaching decision-making may apply in their own schools and colleges. Overall, it is Schifferle's in-depth review of the U.S. Army's use of the applicatory method during the interwar years of 1919-40 that adds forgotten, or overlooked, knowledge to the historiography of education.

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