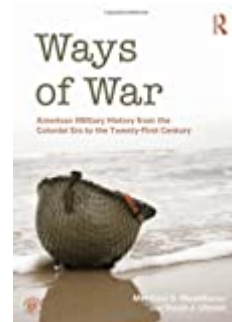


Matthew S. Muehlbauer, David J. Ulbrich. *Ways of War: American Military History from the Colonial Era to the Twenty-First Century.* New York: Routledge, 2013. Illustrations, maps. 560 pp. \$160.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-88676-5; \$64.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-88677-2.



Reviewed by Wayne Lee (University of North Carolina)

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Revisiting the American Way of War—Textbook Style

Matthew Muehlbauer and David Ulbrich, both younger scholars on the rise within the military history community, ambitiously present a new textbook on American military history, from its colonial beginnings to the very recent past. The main title, *Ways of War*, is an explicit attempt to both honor and riff on the influence of Russell Weigley's 1973 classic *The American Way of War*. As the authors point out in the introduction, Weigley argued for a particularly American approach to war from the late Civil War to his own time, a way that sought to annihilate and overwhelm the enemy, often through an emphasis on firepower rather than manpower. Weigley contrasted this strategy of annihilation to other strategies that might rely on attrition, exhaustion, limited territorial seizure and negotiation, and so on; all strategies that a more resource-poor United States had followed in conflicts prior to the Civil War. A primary function of Weigley's argument was to show continuity in strategic thinking from at least 1863 to 1973, a continuity that in fact undermined real thought. Annihilation became the default answer as well as the underlying assumption

behind weapons procurement programs and doctrinal production. None of those, Weigley argued, served the United States well in Vietnam. As the authors note, this paradigm has suffered under critics' pens for some time, but nevertheless has been, and continues to be, enormously influential.

Ways of War does not attempt to argue a consistent thesis revising or refuting Weigley, but Muehlbauer and Ulbrich have wisely used his work as a tool to remind themselves to portray the full variety of the American military experience. This is after all, a textbook, and a single thesis would be inappropriate. The authors begin at the Anglophone beginning in Jamestown in 1607. They provide a brief excursus on pre-contact Native American warfare, but other than that, there is no real nod here or elsewhere to the non-Anglo experience, most notably the Spanish (or Indians) of the Southwest. Although in many ways this is perfectly understandable, it is regrettable in that it does not keep up with the trends in the broader field of American history to treat the continent as a more contiguous whole, whether referring to

the Comanche Empire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Spanish presidio system, or the spread of smallpox around the continent in the eighteenth century. These too, were part of the military history of what would become the United States.

The authors do, however, give a chapter-by-chapter, clearly narrated, historiographically updated version of the usual events taught in a U.S. military history course (emphasis on the U.S.), and that is something that the field has needed. The chapters recapitulate a fairly standard chronology and periodization based on the major wars. They perhaps skate too briefly through the influence of nuclear weapons on U.S. force development and strategy during the Cold War, but they do bring their narrative up into the presidency of Barack Obama and the killing of Osama bin Laden.

The authors are well aware of trends in military history to include far more than narrations of battles and campaigns, and each chapter is replete with context, both political and social. Mobilization is a particular concern, whether of the militia, the volunteers, or the conscripted/drafted. A good example is the discussion of the draft in World War I that provides the usual statistics, but also a sense of the system and the controversies therein (pp. 298-299). Also regularly highlighted are the lives and experiences of soldiers and sailors, often through inset source or issue “boxes.” Conveniently for instructors, each chapter also opens with a list of learning objectives for that era. Also of use in the classroom, the introduction defines terms too often assumed to be understood in military history texts, like “war,” “battle,” “strategy,” and so on.

To repeat: these are individually strong chapters, and

they are well suited to the classroom. The authors are up-to-date; the old stories and the newer slightly revised versions are all there. At times, again I think wisely, they insert themselves ever so slightly into the older narratives to point out relevance to the present. For example, in discussing early twentieth-century hopes to spread democracy around the world, the authors briefly editorialize about the long history of “presidents’ overestimations of the ability of American military force to solve crises” continuing to reverberate in the present (p. 288). On that same page, moreover, the authors also demonstrate their commitment to the plural in *Ways of War*. American use of force was not always about annihilation. American soldiers and marines were sent to an assortment of Latin American and Caribbean countries, for example, with highly dubious but also highly delimited missions in the 1910s, 20s, and 30s. This shifting back and forth between the older war-based narrative, the war and society, concern with mobilization, integration, and the home front, and the inclusion of the many other missions for American armed forces, makes for a strong, integrated classroom tool.

This is a very solid textbook. It is well illustrated (although one regrets the uncritical use of nineteenth-century images of seventeenth-century Indians), well organized, and designed to get students to think critically about the use of force and the strategies behind that use. On the other hand, the authors, presumably at the instigation of the publisher, do not provide footnotes, even when directly citing a particular historian’s argument. Students are provided with a “further reading” section, but they will not easily be able to use this text to pursue specific issues. Some will consider it expensive, although in the current environment of rising textbook costs, it is on the high end of reasonable.

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