



# SOLDIERS AND CIVILIZATION

How the Profession of Arms Thought and  
Fought the Modern World into Existence

REED ROBERT BONADONNA





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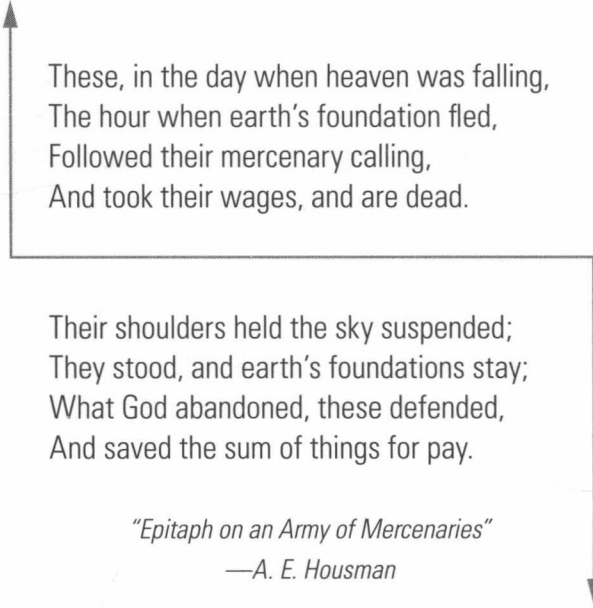
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*For Sue, Luke, Devon, and Erik,  
who mean more and more to me every day*



These, in the day when heaven was falling,  
The hour when earth's foundation fled,  
Followed their mercenary calling,  
And took their wages, and are dead.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;  
They stood, and earth's foundations stay;  
What God abandoned, these defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay.

*"Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries"*

—A. E. Housman

## Acknowledgments

This work evolved over a period of years from a draft for a single article spreading over the centuries of military history and gathering to itself the results of years of reading, experience, teaching, and conversation. I decided to write this book when, designing and teaching a course on military professionalism, I realized that no such work existed and that my own understanding of the evolution and impact of military professionalism was incomplete. The research, teaching, and writing all fed one another. I want to thank a number of people who have been very helpful. Dr. Jeffrey Forgeng, formerly curator of the Higgins Armory Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts, read the chapter on medieval military professionalism, making valuable comments on writing and sources. Dr. Elizabeth K. Holmes, Captain, USN (Ret.) encouraged me to submit a draft manuscript to a publisher. Dr. Clifford J. Rogers, History Department, U.S. Military Academy, read the draft on early modern military professionalism and made valuable suggestions. The staff of the Bland Memorial Library at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy library were unfailingly friendly and helpful, especially head librarian Dr. George Billy and Mr. Donald Gill. My students among the midshipmen at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy cheered me up and prevented me from getting too sure of myself.

My students of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College Distance Education Program were my comrades in arms and among the most admirable group of individuals I've ever met. Most of them were majors in the Marine Corps Reserve, although the active component, other branches, and greater and lesser grades were also represented. Many had considerable deployed and "gun time" in addition to impressive educational and civilian credentials. Often our discussions turned to a consideration of the nature and essentials of military professionalism, and more of their observations have made it into this work than I can ever enumerate. In particular, an understanding of the relationship between the profession of arms and the humanities grew out of conversations I had with my Command and Staff students. The rest of my brothers and sisters in arms in the U.S. Marine Corps bequeathed to me an understanding of the profession of arms that words alone cannot convey. *Semper Fidelis.*

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## HISTORY AND MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM

The life of man is a soldier's service, and that long and various.

—*Epictetus*

**T**he soldier is both the least civilized and the most civilized of persons. Soldiers walk the weird wall at the edge of civilization, but they are prepared to serve their civilization and society without stint or limit.<sup>1</sup> As the French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari remark, soldiers are constantly in danger of forsaking that which they serve and of forgetting the nature of what they do. That paradox of the soldier's profession is the central concern of this book. The soldier has played a vital, inescapable, and neglected role in the formation of human civilization, and must have a part in its future survival. One of the constitutive aspects of Western civilization has been its distinctive tradition of military professionalism. Western civilization has been significant both for its own diverse member nations, cultures, and peoples and for the rest of humankind. Not all of this influence has been for the good, but much of it has been and is. I side with Niall Ferguson in his conclusion that the West has tended to more of the positive attributes of civilization than have those cultures outside the Western tradition. This may be attributable to a variety of reasons, and it is likely not the product of innate capacities or necessarily superior wisdom. Civilization may be largely a matter of luck, climate, natural resources, and the catastrophes of plague and extreme weather.<sup>2</sup> As Victor Davis Hanson frequently and persuasively argues, however, the civilization of the West could not have flourished had it not created a uniquely effective style of war fighting. This Western way of war has been primarily the creation of professional militaries in a tradition beginning with the Greeks and Romans. In this book, I want to argue that, while the creation of war-fighting principles and practices contributing to the defense of Western civilization has been an important and traceable achievement of Western military professionals, the contribution of these professionals has gone beyond war fighting. It has also been cognitive, cultural, ethical, and even ontological.<sup>3</sup> The Western

military profession has not only allowed the West to flourish, it has also contributed to the goods for which Western civilization is responsible and of which it remains an important repository. In some significant ways, however, the modern military profession is only partially equipped to fulfill its civilizing role in an unstable and uncertain present and future. In order to meet its challenges, the military profession must engage in a thoughtful and focused reconsideration of its own past. This history, properly considered, contains important knowledge on the role of the military profession in the times ahead.

## A Soldier's Story

For me, soldiering has always meant reading. I was a late but avid reader, and for as long as I can remember I have read books about soldiers. I remember one book in particular, a series of historical fiction vignettes by Ernest Tucker called *The Story of Knights and Armor*. For years, until I finally reacquired a copy, I could summon up much of the book from memory. As a boy I had tried to copy the illustrations of knights and legionaries with pencil. In a sense, those childish artistic efforts were among my first attempts to fashion myself as a soldier, to put myself in the place of a Roman legionary or medieval knight. I felt a kinship with these men. I wanted to be someone like them. Unlike some other youthful enthusiasms, this one never left me, but it was words rather than pictures that proved the deeper and more durable form of connection to the soldiers of the past. As a teen I graduated to more grown-up books. *Stilwell and the American Experience in China* by Barbara Tuchman, *The Swordbearers* by Corelli Barnett, Robert Leckie's *The Wars of America* series, and Winston Churchill's biography of his ancestor John Churchill, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, were favorites. When the time came for me to choose a college and branch of the service, I attended Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and then joined the U.S. Marine Corps, choices I made largely because I had been inspired by biographies of George S. Patton and Marine general Lewis "Chesty" Puller. I also read Patton's poem "Through a Glass Darkly," a haunting if fanciful account of his military reincarnation throughout the ages, and an extended metaphor for the soldier's sense of military history. Both VMI and the Marine Corps were and are institutions in love with their own past. Attending the institute and serving in the Corps was like living with history every day. I chose to serve

in the infantry, the military branch least affected by technological change and therefore the most continuous with the past. Not only do VMI and the Marine Corps recall and respect their own histories, they also see themselves as preserving a venerable narrative of military excellence. In terms coined by literary critic Harold Bloom, these institutions may be said to create a strong poetics of leadership, discipline, esprit de corps, and physical vigor, each generation adding new verses in varying cadences but returning to common themes as old as the fives of the Spartans.

As a cadet and Marine I kept on reading: books in my rooms in barracks, in my pack in the field, maybe especially in my bunkroom on the amphibious ships where Marines spend much unoccupied time. Army combat historian S. L. A. Marshall's writings on small-unit combat were great favorites in my days as a junior infantry officer. I was honored to meet Eugene Sledge after reading his memoir, *With the Old Breed*, while I was stationed on Parris Island. While still on active duty, I wrote my master's thesis on the World War I poets Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon.

Young adult restlessness and a desire for a doctorate led me to leave the active-duty ranks of the Marine Corps as a captain, but (in a sense that will resonate within this work) I never left the military profession. I stayed in the Marine Corps Reserve for another twenty years. I had participated in one small war on active duty (the 1982 U.S. intervention in Lebanon), and as an activated reservist I was in one big one (the 2003 invasion of Iraq). By the time of the Iraq campaign, I had come full circle, serving as a field historian with an infantry brigade—a chronicler of and participant in war at once. Even apart from my duties as a reserve officer, my interests continued along military lines. I wrote my doctoral dissertation on war literature, taught for the Marine Corps Command and Staff College as a civilian adjunct, and eventually became the director of ethics and character development at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, a federal service academy that educates both maritime and military officers. I taught an elective course at the academy called "Leadership in Action: War and the Military Profession" and another (in collaboration with colleague Dr. Melanie Ross) called "Pen, Cutlass, and Sword: Humanities and Officership," both of which provided me with the opportunity to develop ideas that have found their way into this book.

My job at the academy has thrown me into close contact with representatives from the other four federal service academies, and from some of

them I learned about the scholarly work being done on the nature of military professionalism. This was of considerable interest to me as a presumptive professional who teaches professional leaders in embryo, but the contemporary writings on military professionalism seemed to me to lack the depth, historical rootedness, narrative, and poetic quality of my early reading experience. This book is an attempt to fuse modern ideas on professionalism and culture with an earlier, humanist tradition on the subject. It is even perhaps a rewriting of the book by Ernest Tucker that I first read long ago in that it is a work of military history told as collective biography. One thing that this biography reveals is that to be a soldier is both more and less than to be a member of a profession. Ernest Hemingway once said of bullfighting that it is not a sport but a tragedy. It might be said that war is too much a tragedy, and one of historic, even metaphysical dimensions, to be confined within the definition of a profession. At a minimum, a consideration of the military profession needs a broad canvas and wide context in the history of events, arts, and ideas. The need for a thorough appreciation of the military profession, its place in history, and its relationship to society strikes me as especially relevant in our time, for reasons that may be obvious but that I will discuss in greater details in the pages that follow.

## **The Military Profession Today**

The U.S. armed forces are the most formidable and versatile on the face of the earth and in the history of humankind. In the past decade they have acquired valuable experience and expertise across a wide spectrum of military operations. Standards once expected only of special forces have become the norm, and special forces units regularly achieve wonders only dreamed of by the special operators of the twentieth century. The American armed forces also set the standard of professional education and training, schooling thousands of foreign soldiers on their own ground and in American military bases. However, a number of discouraging details dim this bright picture. Since 9/11, the American military has expended resources, effort, and lives in pursuit of uncertain objectives and still-unconfirmed outcomes. The utility of military force as an answer to problems of strategy and policy has sometimes seemed dubious. The American military finds itself up against unfamiliar, asymmetric adversaries and allied with strange partners. “The American Way of War” is not what it once was.<sup>4</sup> At home, as noted by

former chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen, the military is respected but little known or understood; and it is increasingly isolated geographically, demographically, and perhaps culturally.<sup>5</sup> This state of affairs offers particular challenges to the American military profession, which is both triumphant and uncertain, confident but uncomfortably self-conscious. The twenty-first-century military professional may feel at times like a champion boxer who steps into the ring expecting to see a similar opponent but instead finds the ring empty, with ominous noises in the remote corners of a large arena hidden behind bright lights. For soldiers—not only American soldiers but those all over the developed and developing world too—the present situation is disorienting, and the future is more than usually obscure.

Some writers have seen the challenges to the armed forces of today as characteristic of postmodernity. Jeff Geraghty, writing on the work of military sociologist Charles Moskos, identifies five aspects of the postmodern military. First, the postmodern military increasingly blends civilian and military spheres. Second, it diminishes differences that are based on branch of service, rank, and combat versus support roles. Third, it changes its primary use from fighting wars to performing missions other than major combat operations. Fourth, it is used more often than before in internationally authorized or legitimized missions. The fifth and final change is the multinationalization of armed forces, such as the Eurocorps and the multinational divisions within some North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries.<sup>6</sup>



In this work I will argue that the current situation of the military profession is far from unprecedented, that the past contains clues and guidelines to its current state of affairs, and that an enlightened reconsideration of the nature of historical military professionalism is required in order to understand the challenges of the twenty-first-century military profession. I am not the first to suggest that postmodernity recapitulates the premodern and early modern. The wider one's historical perspective, the more the current situation can be seen as representing, in varying degrees, a return or revival of some past trend, of facts and challenges soldiers have faced many times in the past. In this work I will argue for a broadly historical and humanist approach to the military profession. Before I do so I will briefly discuss sociological and

previous historical works on this subject, in order both to acknowledge my debt to them and to show where my ideas build on and synthesize with those of previous writers on the subject.

## **The Sociologists**

Scholarly consideration of the military profession began in the 1950s with the appearance of seminal works by Morris Janowitz and Samuel Huntington.<sup>7</sup> These social scientists initiated a consideration of the status of soldiers, of officers in particular, as members of a profession. Since then, the U.S. Army and other military branches have adopted the study of military professionalism as a tool to define and refine the education, self-perception, careers, and societal expectations of military leaders. Janowitz and Huntington established the discussion of military professionalism in the terms of sociological studies of other professions that began with the work of Max Weber in the early twentieth century. In purely pragmatic terms, the sociological discourse of military professionalism has not been without its uses. It has enhanced the quality and value of military service for many—for example, helping the armed forces to reclaim some of the idealism and high-mindedness of military service in the wake of the Vietnam War.

Sociologists define professions as groupings of persons who earn their professional status through lengthy advanced (undergraduate) and professional (graduate) education. This extensive education arguably grants members of a profession the ability both to reason abstractly and to exercise focused expertise. Professionals are supposed to be motivated by a sense of public duty, to be regarded by society with a considerable degree of trust and respect, and to retain control over the standards for entry and advancement within their own ranks. Medical doctors probably constitute the best fit for the sociologists' definition of a professional, with lawyers and clergy second and third. Engineers and architects qualify, as do most teachers. The idea of "a profession" is sometimes distinguished from that of "professionalism." While some workers who are lower on the ladder of occupational qualifications may not qualify as "members of a profession" according to the sociologists' definition, they are still capable of acting with "professionalism"—that is, in a manner that would do credit to a member of a profession. It may even be that some workers outside the strict professional ranks have a better claim to be called professionals than some of those who are nominally members

but lacking in experience, expertise, commitment, understanding, or public spirit. The idea of professionalism has broad significance in that it seems to denote an attitude about work—perhaps any worthwhile work—that is pursued with a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Despite the efforts of the military sociologists, the status of the military as a profession is more often acknowledged within the armed forces than without. Some have argued that since military professionals are employed to “kill people and blow things up,” the social benefit of their activities is much less clear than that of people who heal the sick or build useful structures. Military professionals cannot claim to control or predict outcomes to the degree expected of a civilian professional. Operations in war regularly go awry; one side of a war (not always the side with the less able or professional military) typically loses, and even victory often has unintended, unforeseen consequences and broad effects. As I have suggested, the military vocation may stretch past, as well as fall short of, the outlines of professionalism. It arguably possesses elements of the historical, tragic, and sublime that transcend the sociologists’ professional model.

One difficulty with the social science model is that it stresses the nominal aspects of a profession, inclining the definition more in the direction of careerism and neglecting the inner and essential aspects of professionalism. Most sociologists would deny professional status to enlisted members because of their lack of advanced education. In the armed forces themselves the debate goes on as to whether at least some enlisted members qualify as professionals or the title is limited to officers, and perhaps only to career officers of the active components, omitting both reserve officers and short-service junior officers. This study generally will reflect a broad and flexible definition of military professionalism, one that might admit some enlisted members and reservists and omit some career officers. It will treat as the *sine qua non* of military professionalism a deep understanding of armed conflict. The military professional knows war.

By defining military professionalism in terms created with civilian professionalism in mind, the social science model of professionalism may also omit distinctive or special aspects of the profession of arms. The *professional* status of the military professional is not the esoteric specialist knowledge of a surgeon or physicist, but rather a combination of knowledge, experience, ethos, outlook, personal example, and character.



Another limitation of the social science perspective is that it seems not merely to omit but to block off the historical past. The soldiers of history did not meet all of the social science criteria for professionalism. Before the nineteenth century few of them had higher education. The standards for professional membership and advancement were not always written down. Although military orders and communities existed, they did not function in the same way as do modern professional associations. By other measurements, however, such as degree and duration of commitment, the soldiers of history sometimes rate very high.

Historian David J. Ulbrich defines the debate between the main camps of American military sociologists in terms of the contrasting views expressed by Huntington and Janowitz.<sup>8</sup> Huntington sees the military profession (at least in America) as developing in isolation from the rest of society. Janowitz (and also historian Walter Mills) thinks that civil and military societies are interdependent. The complete answer may lie in between, or in both. The lethal skills practiced in an atmosphere of maximum stress and friction—the “how” of the military profession—make the military a thing apart. No one else does this, or should. On the other hand, in order that it not forsake the thing it serves, the “why” of the military profession must remain strongly connected to the rest of society and to the idea of civilization itself.

## The Historians

Several historians have written on military professionalism, among them Russell Weigley, coauthors Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, William B. Skelton, and (for early American naval officers) Christopher McKee.<sup>9</sup> If a social science approach to professionalism has the virtues of clarity and categorization, a historical approach may be said to add depth and inclusiveness. History provides examples and exceptions, richness and complexity. A historical consideration of the military profession can provide scope for scholars and professionals to study an ancient calling. It permits both a focus on essentials and the rediscovery of neglected but still useful ideas and imagery, perhaps especially in an era of change and uncertainty. A historical consideration of military professionalism also allows us to trace the genealogy of these ideas and to critique the modern conception of professionalism itself. The work of the historians has largely focused on specific historical periods. This book will take a broader view in an effort to paint the



trends and tendencies that have defined the nature of the military profession in its long history. Military history has demonstrated the role of soldiers and armies in state formation, especially in the years leading up to and following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which marks the emergence of the modern nation-state and state system. By taking a broader perspective I will be able to indicate the role of armies, not just in the formation of particular nation-states, or even of nation-states in aggregate, but in the idea of civilization as it has developed. The military profession may fall under the consideration of social scientists, but in essence it is a branch of the humanities. It is the least specialized of all professions. Risqué examples aside, it is also perhaps the oldest. Since the military profession is connected to an extent that is unique among professions to the narrative of history, to the rise and fall of states and their causes, and to the idea of civilization, only a comprehensive view of human experience and knowledge will suffice for complete military professionalism. At the core of military professionalism is the humanist's comprehension of human nature, relationships, culture, values, and language. Only words, narrative, even a poetics can take in the totality of what the soldier does. When Kipling wrote in "The Young British Soldier," "Now all you recruits what's drafted to-day, / You shut up your rag-box an' 'ark to my lay. / An' I'll sing you a soldier as fair as I may," he understood that it takes words to make a soldier—in fact, that a soldier is made of the words of history, poetry, and the laws and language of the calling.<sup>10</sup> The challenges facing the military profession require professional soldiers to be artists and narrators as well as warriors, and, by instinct, more creative than destructive. This may be true now more than ever, although, as I hope this book will illustrate, it was ever so.

### **"Paid Professionals"**

All professions are vexed by the paradox that to be a professional is to be paid, while to be a professional is also to be someone who is not motivated primarily by pay. The question of remuneration—"the money motive"—and its relative importance is a problem for military professionals on a number of levels. Soldiers who desire monetary gain may be unlikely to restrain themselves given the opportunity for plunder in wartime. Soldiers are expected to risk life and limb, and a soldier who is motivated mostly by a desire for money probably wants to live to enjoy that wealth (as noted, although perhaps with