Broken Armies or Recovering Armies: The US Army's Road Back From War

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Some years ago I participated in collaborative project to write a book about the last US Army campaign in each of America's wars. With typical academic contrariness, some participants immediately questioned the focus of the project. They argued that the resulting book would be a collection of last battle narratives providing little guidance for military and civil policymakers dealing with the post-Iraq/Afghanistan armed forces. They wanted to focus on the Army's transition from war to peace and explore historical similarities and differences over two centuries of war and recovery. Much of the discussion was informed by the ongoing debate on whether, as retired generals Colin Powell and Barry McCaffrey then asserted, the long, costly, and probably lost wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had "broken" the US Army. Both to the speakers and to the participants, the precise definition of a 'broken army' was vague. Those who argued for a broken army cited worn-out equipment, an exodus of younger soldiers, the declining standards for new recruits, and the high levels of family and personal stress. In contrast, the US Army's senior leaders, such as Chief of Staff George W. Casey, rejected the broken label emphatically, citing their service's high morale, solid discipline, and allegedly low drug abuse problems.

As several of the participants noted, the debate on the broken US Army rested on an intellectual and ideological framework drawn from individuals' understanding of the post-Vietnam era (roughly 1972-1982). Those who argued the Army was broken made

broad comparisons to that era's equipment and maintenance problems, resignation-retention rates, command climate (micromanagement, careerism, endemic criticism of senior leaders), poor civil-military relations, and high instances of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Those who argued the Army was not broken made favorable but narrow comparisons to specific details of the 1970s: racial unrest, narcotics, violence, crime, and widespread disciplinary problems.

Both sides drew their historical evidence from comparatively few sources, much of it anecdotal and subject to much individual interpretation. This is not surprising. For a variety of reasons, the Army's records on both the pre and post-Vietnam eras are fragmentary and incomplete, and tend to be more abundant at the agencies that collect records—senior staffs and the Pentagon bureaucracies--than they do for combat and support units in the field. Following the document trail, the US Army's official histories of the post-Vietnam Army focus almost entirely on top-down reforms generated by the office of the Chief of Staff and the regional and functional commands. Moreover, generals provide the great bulk of the memoirs, personal papers, speeches and interviews available to historians. So it is not surprising that the histories of this period emphasize the personalities who developed and implemented the major organizational, technological, and doctrinal changes that later proved successful in future wars. These official and memoir sources share a common narrative: the Army comes out of Vietnam a broken force, but the dedication of some brilliant officers (William DePuy, Donn Starry), a new doctrine (AirLand Battle), new equipment (Abrams tank), and new organizations (TRADOC, SAMS) allowed it to achieve subsequent great victories in Panama and Iraq. More than that, they share a common suspicion of civilian leadership,

a strong faith in their own military competence, and an exaggerated sense of their personal and service connection to the American public. Unfortunately, in many cases, the authors' thoughtful and nuanced analysis has been taken out of context and reduced to a few bumper-sticker quotations. There are many, both civilian and military who have never read Colin Powell's *An American Journey*, but can quote almost verbatim his comment that: "Many of my generation, the career captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels seasoned in that war, vowed that when our turn came to call the shots, we would not quietly acquiesce in halfhearted warfare for half-baked reasons that the American people could not understand or support." Whether this vow proved true, either for the individual or his generation when it came to debating the fundamental premises and strategies behind the Iraq-Afghanistan wars is still a matter of some debate.

While it may lift morale, the post-Vietnam recovery-redemption narrative is of limited use in anticipating the problems facing the US Army after Iraq-Afghanistan. Written backwards, the narrator and the reader already know that the Big Five, AirLand Battle, the NTC and so forth were proven in Desert Storm—and the story is thus one how these successes were achieved. But today's officers do not know which of the many organizational, doctrinal, or technological options will succeed. They have not yet identified the brilliant officers to lead the future force. They don't know what war they will be fighting. They don't know which historic lessons learned will be helpful to predicting the future, and which ones will turn out to be a positive hindrance. With so many 'unknowns", post-Iraq/Afghanistan military thinkers need a practical historically-based framework to predict the problems they will encounter as they try to create a new model army.

To provide such a useful conceptual framework for today's military intellectuals, historians move beyond the very limited scope of whether the current US Army is or is not as 'broken' as it was after Vietnam and redefine their parameters. Instead of fixating on one broken army in the 1970s, military analysts need to look at many recovering armies. They need a broader database. They need to focus less on specifics and to consider broad historical trends. They need to identify the characteristics of any postwar recovering army. What are its problems? What are its characteristics? How long does it take to recover? Where are the main points of stress? Why might an army not understand the extent of the recovery process? To answer these questions requires a long perspective of fifty or a hundred years, encompassing military recovery after several wars. Thus, this essay looks at the US Army's recovery from the four wars prior to Vietnam: the Spanish-American/Philippine War (1900-1907); World War I (1919-1925); World War II (1945-50); and the Korean War (1953-1958). Because virtually all the characteristics of postwar recovery manifest in the Spanish-American/Philippine conflicts also appear in the Army after the later conflicts, I will discuss the 1900-1907 period in depth and reference them in subsequent post-war Army recovery, either for confirmation or to explain differences.

Increased strategic commitments

The first constant of any army in recovery is greatly expanded postwar military commitments. After defeating Spain in 1898, the US Army still retained its prewar internal security obligations, a duty that appeared increasingly onerous due to industrial and urban unrest. Its responsibility to secure the borders meant policing the turbulent Mexican frontier—the site of significant Army deployments between 1914 and 1916—

and completing a new harbor fortification program. To these historic continental duties were now added international ones. The Army was responsible for ensuring the stability of newly independent Cuba, a commitment that led to the deployment of some 6,000 military personnel between 1906 and 1909. An even greater obligation was Pacific defense. The Philippines were taken from Spain in 1898, but pacifying them required over 100,000 troops and three years of guerrilla warfare to suppress regional insurgents. After the last nationalist guerrillas surrendered in 1902, endemic violence from guerrillas, Muslim tribes, insurgents, bandits, and religious sects continued to roil the archipelago. And even while it battled Filipino rebels, the Army confronted an emerging regional power in Japan. In 1907, tensions between the two countries provoked a serious war scare, prompting the first of the famous "Orange" war plans against Japan. That same year, the Philippine garrison numbered 16,600, roughly one quarter of the US Army. In addition, the Army had to garrison and defend the newly acquired territory of Hawaii, which required only 230 soldiers in 1907—but 7,000 by 1913.

A similar increase in both postwar strategic commitments and the likelihood of new wars has followed this pattern. After the First World War, the Army not only maintained its overseas and continental defense commitments, but also was required to serve as a cadre to train a newly created reserve force. In the immediate years after the Second World War, military planners estimated 770,000 soldiers were needed for occupation duty alone—a force almost four times the size of the entire Army in 1939. The rapid emergence of the Soviet/Communist threat led to further international deployments and to the momentous, and unprecedented decision to authorize peacetime conscription. In 1950, when the Army was still recovering from the Second World War,

the Korean War broke out. That war ended with expanded military obligations, including the permanent stationing of a large force in Germany to deter Soviet attack, a tripwire force in South Korea to contain North Korea and China, a continental air defense program, an increase in overseas military assistance and advice missions, and the creation of a strategic reserve as a rapid deployment force, and the establishment of a general reserve to serve as training cadre in the event of World War III. With the possible exception of preserving the Korean ceasefire and supporting NATO, none of these missions were achieved in the 1950s.

Personnel

Each recovering army's increased strategic commitments have been matched by an increase in its manpower—at least on paper. After the Spanish-American War of 1898, Congress quadrupled the authorized strength of the US Army from 27,000 to 100,000. But establishing the postwar pattern, Congress funded just a fraction of this total: in 1905 US Army manpower numbered 67,000. In 1920 Congress authorized a standing army of 280,000 as well as a substantial increase in reserves. But in the decade after 1922, US Army manpower hovered between 130,000 and 138,000. Following the Second World War, Army manpower increased from 188,000 (1939) to an authorized strength of 1,600,000 (1947). But in June 1950 it was only 600,000. After the Korean War the Army's authorized strength remained at some 1,600,000, but its actual strength in 1956 was 1,100,000. In July 1957, for example, the Department of Defense told the Army it must trim 50,000 personnel (some 5%) by mid-December. In September the Department ordered a second 50,000-man cut effective by June 1958. This consistent pattern of giving the Army only a 'paper' increase in manpower while assigning it

missions that would challenge a fully-manned service has greatly complicated the Army's recovery and made careful planning for recruitment, retention, and training virtually impossible. Based on historical example, it takes about a decade for the postwar army to balance (if not fulfill) its missions with its personnel strength.

Organizational Transformation and the Recovering Army

One constant with the recovering army has been an effort to reorganize the military bureaucracy and force structure. The famous 'Root Reforms" that took place after the Spanish-American War were seen as incorporating the lessons of the last war and setting the Army on the road to wage the next. Most notably, they created the office of Chief of Staff to advise civilian superiors as well as a General Staff to monitor the state of the Army and plan for future conflicts. The force structure was reformed to include a unified coast and field artillery branch, the creation (at least in theory) of a field army, and other significant changes. Following the First World War, the 1920 National Defense Act and other changes increased the importance of both the Chief of Staff and General Staff, divided the service into nine tactical corps for national defense and mobilization, and incorporated the aviation arm. At the end of the Second World War the Army went through a profound reorganization mandated by the 1947 and 1949 national security acts (which created an independent US Air Force, the Department of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and the 1950 Army Organization Act. And in the wake of the Korean War, President Eisenhower's New Look radically restructured the relationship of the Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the services once again.

This historic pattern of restructuring as part of the Army's recovery from war raises the obvious question of just how much change actually occurs. Like the drunk who lost his car key in a dark alley but searched for it under a streetlight because he could see better, historians go where the sources are thickest. Since the great bulk of the Army's data chronicles the activities of high-level administration--and since data on field forces is often fragmentary and unavailable—the tendency is to focus on "the Pentagon Army." And since the upper-level military staff and command agencies are adept at promoting their own role, it is all too easy for a historian to develop an inaccurate view of the service's recovery from war. From the perspective of the Pentagon Army, accepted uncritically by too many historians, the Army's postwar problems have been quickly resolved through radical "transformation" in the administration similar to the Root Reforms. This perspective assumes that the Army is a smoothly functioning machine where an order is no sooner issued than it is implemented. But if each transformation is so successful, why is it replaced after each war? Perhaps instead of radical change, the Pentagon Army simply "moves the ravioli around:" renaming administrative offices on 'flow charts' while leaving the essentials of the organization untouched. And how long does it take any changes actually implemented by the "Pentagon Army" to trickle down to the "Field Army?" In most instances, it takes years.

Personnel Turbulence

Another constant of the US Army's recovery from war is personnel turbulence in both officer and enlisted ranks. Since 1900 the peacetime US Army has acquired its junior officers from either the US Military Academy at West Point or a university commissioning program, with comparatively few 'mavericks' commissioned from the

ranks. Peacetime officers endured a long and slow promotion process, attending a series of schools that educated them for their duties at the next level of staff or command responsibilities—duties they may not have assumed for years. But in wartime this process has been reversed. The junior officer corps expanded rapidly, with the majority of the new officers either mavericks or men commissioned after completing an intensive platoon-leader course (OCS), while the ranks of the field-grade officers are soon swelled by the rapid promotion of peacetime officers. The traditional officers' schools either closed or were converted into crash course factories teaching specific skills.

The Recovering Army inherits an unbalanced officer corps. Most of it junior officers are inexperienced and, by military standards, poorly educated. By the end of the Spanish-Philippine wars in 1902, two out of every three officers in the US Army had been commissioned since 1898. Nearly all were veterans of the Philippine pacification campaign and had extensive service in guerrilla warfare, in local government, and in a myriad of practical duties. But less than 10% were graduates of the military academy and nearly half had no formal military education. In short, they knew virtually nothing about their responsibilities in a battalion or regiment, or about logistics, staff work, coordinating firepower, and all the other skills needed to fight modern warfare. Later wars repeated this pattern. After the First World War the Army brought some 5,200 new officers into the service. In the two years following the end of the Second World War the US Army assimilated some 14,000 lieutenants. After the Korean War the Army relied on short-service Reservists: in 1954 96,000 of the Army's 122,000 officers were Reservists. Six years later, the service's university commissioning program (ROTC), established to

provide temporary officers for the wartime citizen army, had become the Army's main source for career officers.

The Recovering Army is also unbalanced. For one thing, it is top heavy: In 1945 the Army numbered some 8,000,000 and had 15,000 colonels; in 1958 it numbered less than 2,000,000 and still had the same number of colonels. Moreover, the postwar officer corps has extensive command or staff experience, but lacks professional education commensurate with its rank. At the Army's staff college in 1948, the majority of students had been promoted several grades but still lacked the staff training for higher headquarters that the Army so desperately needed. One student, promoted from lieutenant to lieutenant colonel, had spent his entire service knocking out pillboxes as commander of a Chinese tank battalion in Burma. Another student recalled, "I knew how to be a G-3. I had learned it the hard way in battle, and, you know, nobody could tell me very much about being the G-3 of a Corps, but when it came to anything else, you know, that a colonel is supposed to be able to do, I was practically helpless." Historically, it has taken almost a decade for the Army to educate its wartime officer corps for their peacetime (and future wartime) duties. And even then the transition is seldom complete, prompting junior officers in the Recovering Army to complain that their commanders are unprepared and inadequate. During the Korean War the Army's decision to not hold experienced reservist officers in for the duration led to a marked decrease in the quality of command. The best of the remaining officers were often assigned duties several levels above their rank, often at the top staff levels. The result is a deterioration of leadership in the field. One junior officer summed up his unit's commanders in 1956: "Many had entered WWII as teenagers . . . . They didn't receive adequate training, nor understand

what it meant to be a company commander. . . . for the most part, the lieutenants carried the load." It will no doubt be a shock to the current Iraq-Afghanistan generation to hear their subordinates ten years hence complain they are "still stuck in the desert" and can't adapt to the demands of the present.

The recovering army's officer corps was unbalanced in other ways besides its lack of professional education. Each war created a generational "Hump" of officers of roughly the same age and rank, all promoted at roughly the same time. This Hump slowly climbed the Army's career ladder for the next ten or twenty years, in the process blocking advancement for all those who followed. In many cases, the quality of these wartime veterans deteriorates as they as their professional responsibilities increase, a problem that is often unrecognized as thousands of officers are rushed through the school system and shifted from assignment to assignment. The Iraq-Afghanistan Army has seen almost 100% promotions in lieutenants and captains, and some cynics claim the service's motto is "no major left behind." Yet this is only maintaining a century-old tradition. In 1906, for example, of the 346 officers examined for promotion only 9 failed, and two years later the Army's civilian secretary complained that the selection boards "had failed utterly in weeding out unworthy or incompetent officers." This problem persisted: for several years in the 1950s, 99% of the officers were rated as either "excellent" or "superior."

Although the proportion of officers to enlisted ranks has increased after every war, absentee officers, particularly in its field units, often characterize the Recovering Army. In 1906, for example, one out of every four officers in the combat units was on detached duty, and in the cavalry branch almost half were absent. Four decades later, an

officer in an elite airborne division reported that when it mobilized for the Korean War, three out of every five officers were absent on other duties. The absentee rate in other, non-elite units was the same, or worse. The post-Korean War Army suffered from similar absentee rates, particularly at the company level.

The postwar officer corps was also unbalanced as a result of the priorities of the last war: it might have too many infantry captains and not enough majors, too many transportation officers and not enough electronics experts. These imbalances have persisted for many years, greatly complicating the Army's recovery. For example, in the period after the Philippine War there was an abundance of infantry officers and a shortage of coast artillery personnel. In the period between 1949 and 1954 the number of artillery officers expanded by almost 200%, but due to retirements there was still a 20% shortfall of artillery officers in 1955. A year later, the Armor Branch had a serious shortage of majors and captains, but almost twice as many lieutenants as it was authorized. The postwar army is also over-rich in field officers (and generals!) and poor in company commanders.

The postwar Army's inability to retain sufficient junior officers once the wartime generation has been assimilated has created "the valley behind the hump." The Army secured its lieutenants through West Point and (after 1947) by requiring ROTC graduates to fulfill their full two-year obligation. But these lieutenants seldom stay in, the Reservists leave quickly, and in the decade after a war roughly a quarter of the West Pointers resign their commissions after they complete their required service. The quality of the incoming officers is as problematic as that of the wartime veterans. The result is within a decade after the end of a war the US Army has had over-abundance in its upper

levels, a shortage of competent officers in its company ranks, and is lurching towards a true crisis as wartime veterans retire in droves. Army career management agencies should resolve this dysfunctional management pattern, but they have been overwhelmed by the up-and-down cycle of buildup and drawdown, the Hump, the need to secure sufficient officers of sufficient grades and sufficient specialties, and the lack of an effective evaluation tools to purge mediocre personnel.

The turbulence (short assignments, resignations, imbalances, and other problems) in the officer corps is exacerbated by equal, or greater turbulence in the enlisted ranks. At the end of every war from the Philippines to Korea, the US Army witnessed a rapid decline in both the quantity and the quality of its soldiers. Those who enlisted (or were drafted) for wartime service left in droves. Army recruitment fluctuates with the economy, and one constant of the Recovering Army prior to Vietnam (and perhaps afterwards) was that it has to compete with the usual postwar economic boom. Those leaving the service, both officers and enlisted, tended to have the technical skills or the educational background the Army believed it most needs for its peacetime functions. Forced retirement often eliminated the very officers who have experience in higher staff work, leading to a constant demand for such officers—and a resulting pillaging of field and support units. After the Second World War the US Army shrank from 8,000,000 to 600,000 in less than five years. This postwar downsizing is well known, but what is often not realized is that the Recovering Army continues to hemorrhage skilled soldiers for several years. In 1904, for example, the 70,000-man Army lost most of the 30,000 veterans who had enlisted between 1898 and 1901 for the Spanish-American and Philippine wars. After World War II, as an army report of April 1948 noted, due to

expiring enlistments, the Army stood to lose 67% of its enlisted force within eighteen months, and expected only 15% to reenlist.

What of those who remain in uniform or who enlist in the postwar army? It is a constant in the literature that the quality of the enlisted force rapidly declines in the postwar service. Many stay, or join, because they lack the educational, intellectual, and social skills needed for productive lives outside the service. In 1904 the Army Chief of Staff returned from an inspection convinced that the majority of new soldiers were underage "weaklings" and that "evidently the minimums of the standards for admission to the army had been closely observed, if not trespassed on in the enlistment of these unsatisfactory men." Post surgeons inspecting new recruits complained of the high prevalence of teenagers and "morons;" one declared he had never seen such "poor physical specimens" in his entire career. The 8th Army reported in 1949 that 98% of its replacements were in the lowest acceptable mental category. Such soldiers tend to reenlist, but their inability to perform anything but rote tasks confines them to easily trainable occupational specialties. The American political leadership has greatly contributed to these problems by insisting the Army serve as an agency for social engineering. The service has often been forced to accept recruits who lack the moral, mental, or physical ability to be soldiers, and then take resources away from training in order to teach these same substandard recruits vocational skills for their return to the civilian world. Thus despite its combat experience, the Recovering Army was in many respects qualitatively inferior to both its prewar and wartime predecessors, overloaded with long-service cooks, supply depot personnel, clerks, drivers, and (unfortunately)

training cadre and in desperate need of specialists in crucial areas, such as electronics or combat leadership.

The decline in overall soldier quality was perhaps most manifest in the NCO corps, which the US Army calls the "backbone" of the service. The stupid, barely literate, bullying sergeant who terrorizes his far smarter subordinates is a hoary stereotype in American popular culture, still represented by Sergeant Snorkel in the newspaper comic strip *Beetle Bailey*. Although he was created in 1950 as a representative of the post-WW2 service, Snorkel was endemic in all recovering armies. Historically, the postwar NCO cadre benefitted from the return to the ranks of some veterans promoted to officer for the war. But this slight improvement was balanced by an influx of marginally qualified men of limited experience who are promoted either due to wartime exigencies or after an abbreviated leadership course. In the post-First World War army, sergeants only needed to read a field manual, literacy roughly equivalent to that expected of a nine-year old third-grader. Seven years after the end of the Second World War, over a third of the sergeants lacked an eighth-grade education; the average draftee had completed high school. In 1957, four years after the end of the Korean War, it was estimated that 41,500 NCOs (or some 40% of the entire NCO force) were in Category IV, a mental group so limited that the Army would soon refuse to enlist them. Indeed, of the entire Category IV population in the Army, NCOs composed over half. As one Army report noted, "it is surely an unsatisfactory situation when well educated [soldiers] find themselves under the charge of illiterate or semi-literate NCO's, and it is not to be expected that they will return to civilian life with a high regard for the quality of the Army." Many of these NCOs tended to congregate in occupations where an

education counts for little and an ability to master a job by practice means much. These units were themselves filled with what the Army used to term "substandard" personnel.

It is not surprising, given its low quality, that the recovering armies between 1900 and 1960 were characterized by discipline problems, demoralization, and a variety of other social problems. The people who should be enforcing discipline, these inexperienced and uneducated officers and the marginal NCOs, could rarely do so. The resulting troop misconduct was often glossed over as veterans "letting off steam" as the service tightened up on the necessarily relaxed wartime standards. Such explanations overlook the fact that the discipline problems continued for almost a decade after the war's end, and that most of the perpetrators are not veterans. Desertion and AWOLs (Absent Without Leave) rates remained much higher than prewar rates for years after the end of the war. In the five years prior to the Spanish-Philippine Wars of 1898 the desertion rate was about 3%; in the five years after, it was between two and three times that rate. A similar increase in AWOLs and desertions occurred for five to six years after each succeeding war. After the Korean War, the Army reported almost 60,000 AWOLs, or 5% of its total manpower, between July 1955 and June 1956.

Much of the current criticism of the "broken army" argument cites the great difference between today and Vietnam in rates of drug abuse. In many respects, this is a fallacious argument. Statistics for American military drug abuse during and after the Vietnam era are less than conclusive and based on only a few sources. Indeed, the Army's statistics on drug abuse throughout the 20th century are so incomplete that it is hard to place the post-Vietnam recovery in a historical context. For most of the century, the Army has counted only marijuana, cocaine, and heroin/morphine in its statistics for

drug abuse. Based on this standard, a 2008 Department of Defense report found only 2% of military personnel tested positive for drugs. Yet that same year, 25% of Army personnel admitted to abusing prescription drugs (and alcohol); in 2009 military doctors wrote 3,800,000 prescriptions for narcotics. So, depending on which statistics you accept, today's Army either has a minimal drug abuse problem or a very serious one.

A similar discrepancy between official statistics on drug abuse and other evidence occurs after every war. The Army lacked reliable drug tests until the 1950s and so statistics are almost entirely drawn from general courts martial records between 1919 and 1940. These records reveal that in the seven years of the Army's recovery from the First World War there was an increase in drug cases: between July 1922 and June 1923 there were more narcotics-related courts martial (58) than between July 1926 and June 1941. Anecdotal evidence indicates that drug abuse was far more common that the relatively few dozen who were caught in the act and convicted by court martial. It is likely that wartime drug use is underreported because commanding officers and enforcement agencies have far more immediate problems. After the Spanish-Philippine wars, soldiers stationed in Asia treated their recurring dysentery and malaria with opium. A 1908 report by the Army judge advocate decried the fact that US soldiers had easy access to "liquors, cocaine and morphine . . . the great majority of offenses committed by enlisted men are due, directly or indirectly, to drugs or liquor." In the Panama garrison following the First World War one veteran recalled, "we certainly had a drug problem." One area of this post was so popular with smokers that it was referred to as "Marihuana Bridge." When a new commanding officer ordered that this description never be used again, soldiers immediately took to calling it "the place that used to be called Marihuana Bridge." In the

Recovering Army after the Second World War, one 1950 report speculated that 40% of the soldiers' crimes in Japan were drug-related. In 1954, a year after the Korean War ended, 728 soldiers were charged with narcotics offenses in the Far East command. This, and media reports of widespread drug abuse in the Korean War, prompted President Dwight D. Eisenhower to establish an interagency committee. Their 1956 report concluded that narcotic use was lower than that of the civilian population, less than 3 addicts per every 100,000 military personnel. Yet these statistics referred only to narcotic addiction and did not include amphetamine and barbiturate abuse, which much evidence suggests was widespread in the service. To cite the example of the most famous soldier between Korea and Vietnam: Elvis Presley received amphetamines from a sergeant during maneuvers, and was later able to buy them in quart-sized bottles from the post dispensary.

Equipment and Maintenance

The problems of the Recovering Army's personnel are mirrored in its equipment. By the end of each war since 1898 the US Army has invested heavily in equipment designed to conduct military operations. Even in the guerrilla war in the Philippines it had to purchase and distribute tens of thousands of Krag rifles, design and issue a new field uniform, and invest in everything from transports to telegraphs. Much of this equipment was highly specialized, designed for specific tactical situations or specific terrain and requires highly skilled technicians to maintain it. Some of this equipment was obsolete by the time the war is over, and most of it is in poor repair or badly damaged by climate, combat, or negligence. Inevitably, the Army based its postwar procurement plans on a complete overhaul of its wartime stock. And just as inevitably, equipment

budgets were cut far below planners' estimates, requiring the Recovering Army to rely on its wartime equipment for the next five to seven years. Moreover, as the skilled technicians leave the wartime force, the remaining wartime stock fell into the hands of the low-quality personnel, many of them barely trained. The result was that within a few years the Army experienced an equipment crisis. A decade after the end of the First World War, soldiers were still wearing wartime uniforms, living in wartime barracks, using wartime equipment, and even eating wartime rations. During exercises in Hawaii, the most combat-ready force in the entire Army had ancient tanks that often had to be towed to the parade ground to line up for inspection. After both the Second World War and the Korean War it was not unusual for a third of a unit's vehicles to be inoperable and another third to require major repair.

Learning from the Past

A final characteristic of a Recovering Army is an intense internal debate on the lessons of the recent war and their application for the next one. For over a century, US Army military intellectuals had tended to subscribe to one of three strategic traditions: those who envision war as an engineering project (Guardians); those who view it as a struggle of martial skills (Heroes); and those who conceive of war as an administrative problem (Managers). Each tradition draws the lessons that fit its preconceived ideas. Thus, after the Spanish-Philippine conflicts, the Guardians dismissed the guerrilla war as an aberration, the Heroes discussed the importance of courage and initiative, and the Managers focused on the military's imperial responsibilities. In similar fashion, after the First World War, the Guardians sought to develop a scientific model for continental defense, the Heroes extolled the individual infantryman and the indomitable commander,

and the Managers studied how to mobilize the nation's industry, manpower, and popular will. This postwar debate within the Army intellectual community may take years to resolve and often complicates the service's efforts to transition from the last war to the next.

Conclusion

A glance at some recent vision statements and speeches would indicate the service leadership anticipate no period of recovery from the Iraq-Afghanistan conflicts. This may be so. But if history is a guide, what can the US Army, and those who study it, anticipate during its transition from postwar military force to a peacetime force preparing to fight the next war? In three of these four cases studied in this paper, the recovery period between wartime and recovered peacetime force took nearly a decade, the sole exception being the Korean War that interrupted, and in many ways exacerbated, the recovery from World War 2. The postwar period has inevitably brought military commitments far greater than any facing the prewar army. In each decade after war, the Army has to overcome challenges that were either unanticipated or underestimated by military planners--and whose cumulative impact greatly lengthens the recovery process and makes it far more socially traumatic. These challenges were not easy to overcome, and came at considerable cost, much of which has been ignored by both soldiers and scholars due to later victories. Such history-written-backwards redemption narratives are not going to help today's officers except, perhaps, for spiritual inspiration. Indeed, they are more likely to create unrealistic expectations and lead to hasty decisions in an effort to 'do something.' At worse, following such unreliable guides may lead to a blind return to 'proven' past methods. Such selective cherry-picking of the past is not going to help

either the US Army or the American public. Only an extensive and impartial analysis of postwar US Army recoveries, stripped of mythology, is going to provide the intellectual framework to guide those who face the problem of guiding today's recovery.