

Genesis to Revelation

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TO BEGIN with, the simple statement that the Golden Anniversary of the Military Review coincides with the 50th year of my launch into military writing should at least give me a theme. I do not imply, however, that a man wears as well as a magazine.

At the semi-centennial party, this journal understandably is looking backward a bit. At the same time, I am doing my own military review of how I got this way.

My foundation for what came to be the major part of my life's work was hard field soldiering—two years in Pershing's American Expeditionary Forces—during which I commanded two rifle companies and one casual company, this despite the fact that I had first gone to the front as a line sergeant.

I was 19 when I returned home in late

1919. Prior to enlistment, I had moved up through sophomore English in high school, while taking no history. That was as far as my formal education ever extended in these two subjects. If it was enough, it was only so because my father had perfect command of the language and his sons listened.

Still, I cannot imagine any circumstances by which I might have entered upon professional writing, much less would I have matured as a military writer, had it not been for experience in war.

What I learned mainly was what I saw right before my nose. Furthermore, in managing several companies, I had an unlimited opportunity to experiment with some of my own ideas about how to bring people along. These did not always agree with the book. Nonetheless, the greatest

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value of my war service, especially the combat portion, was that it stirred my curiosity immeasurably.

With my black company, I shipped for home from Brest in September 1919. We sailed on the transport *Koningen der Nederlander*. We were 15 days at sea, with every day a misery and all hands being seasick. My only personal experience at quelling a mutiny was during that voyage.

An Education

A more significant contribution to my education came about as six of us officers sat every night in a poker game, and five of us went broke before we passed the Statue of Liberty. We learned too late that the sixth, a major, was a professional gambler from French Lick Springs dealing from a marked deck. We knew we had been “took,” but, since the five suckers were about to be dropped from the Army, squawking would be vain as there would be no charges preferred. As a result, after the company was demobilized at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, I arrived at my hometown, El Paso, Texas, \$1.50 ahead of bankruptcy. The streetcar fare to the family



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bungalow was 10 cents. Walking to the loop to catch the trolley, I passed a bookstore. In the window was a copy of John Masefield's Gallipoli for \$1.50. Thinking that I might as well go bust as stay the way I was, I bought the book and walked the five miles home.

Military Library

That volume was the beginning of my military library. There are now 4,200 books in it. The growth was painfully slow at first, for Jasper Gaunt stayed right on my tail. I cannot account for this buying of things which I could not afford apart from idle curiosity whetted by my AEF years. I was not working toward a planned, or even vaguely foreseen, future.

The one favor done the returned man after that war was that, if he lacked a high school diploma and had so far matured that it would be infra dig to join a bunch of kids in a classroom, he could enter college without the ticket. There was no GI Bill, and all costs had to be met by the party of the first part.

This was a bit of a problem, but it was eased for my duration at Texas College of Mines by two gimmicks. By putting a five-dollar gold piece on a punchboard and selling chances for a dime each, I could clear \$17. Equally profitable was my debauching of the freshman English class. Engineers abhor writing, or so they did in those days. There were 18 men in the class, half of them ex-officers. The professor required one essay each week. So, I wrote 18 and sold 17 for one dollar apiece. Everybody knew it. Professor Taylor would say: “You read that well, Mr. Broderick, but it's not up to your best style, Mr. Marshall.” What that might be, he never told me, nor did he ever suggest that I might ponder becoming a writer by trade.

My duration at Texas College of Mines was four months, and I quituated without a single credit. My downfall came of a

flying tackle by Major Bill Neyland, one of football's most shining figures. I normally played end. We had lost quarterbacks two Saturdays running, one with a broken leg, the other shot through the heart with a rifle while stealing melons for a lark. So, on a Monday, I was made quarterback with no understudy.

Departs College

On the first play of the game, I ran back Neyland's kickoff; he hit me, spun me in the air, and I somersaulted, coming down on my right shoulder. The scapula broke in two places. Having no substitute, I played more than 59 minutes in that condition. We won, but I lost any prospect of playing football again. When basketball season opened, I attempted a comeback at running guard, and, in , my first second of play in our first game, I was again crippled badly, at which point I said: "To hell with college forevermore."

Thereafter, I tried brickmaking, working in the mines, prospecting, selling, and cowpunching, only to dud out on everything to which I laid my hand. I had lost the confidence in self that my Army service had given me, and my phosgened throat was again misbehaving and souring my stomach. Such were not the causes of my failures, but their consequence. I wore down stumbling from rut to rut. There have been other black periods in my life although none for the same reason and none concerning which I have such a blessed blotting out of memory. Evenings I continued to read my few military books, more than all else as an escape from reality.

In these years, the 1st Cavalry Division had formed at Fort Bliss, Texas. In 1922, when I took the examination for recommission in the Army, I was \$2,700 in debt with a family to support. Misery

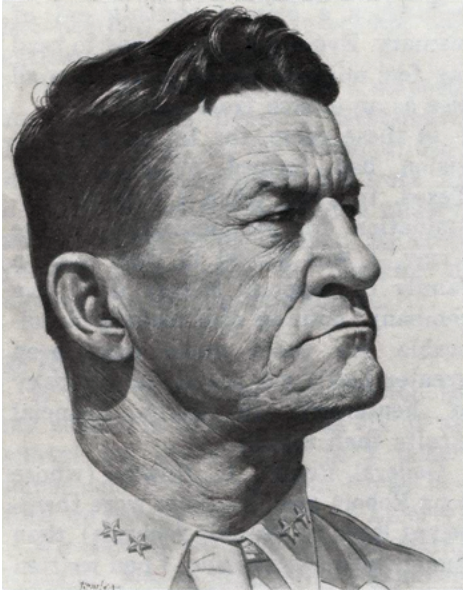
does love company, nothing else making it tolerable. My fears would have been greater had I not found the company of lieutenants in worse financial straits than myself.

General Robert L. Howze (whose sons Robert and Hamilton were themselves later to become generals) then commanded the division. I had written two pieces about him for a local veterans' paper, and he was very kind to me. So was Brigadier General Joe Castner, the Assistant Division Commander, whom I had met in Europe. An expert with a 12-gauge shotgun, he took me shooting. Old Joe was the man to discover that there were snipes in the Rio Grande Valley. I was briefly Assistant G2 under Major Earl Landreth, a very gentle boss who knew I had plenty of trouble.

Proposition

The De la Huerta Revolution was then going in Mexico, and Juarez seethed with unrest. The situation wholly preoccupied the time of the G3, Major Adna Chaffee, that noble spirit who died much too soon after founding the modern Armored Force. Chaffee was a quiet, introspective man possessed of that warm quality that the Scots call innerliness. One day, he came to our office, sat on the edge of my desk and asked, "Marshall, can you write?" I said, "No Sir." He said, "I think you can; you have the phraseology of a writer." I asked if that really meant anything, and he said that he believed so.

Then, he came up with the proposition. He was already polo representative of the division. This required some writing. The Army had just saddled him with another writing task, dealing with the press. This may have been the birth of the public information officer idea. He had time for neither task. If I would take over both chores, he would let me work his ponies.



US Army

Major General Claire Chennault in 1944. Painting by Tom Lea.

I was not an active player ; my health did not permit, but I loved to hack about. Since he was paying for the hay, I had not one thing to lose.

About how to handle the PIO job, I had no doubt from the beginning. There were two controlling ideas: To do it well, I would have to know as much about the division as did its commander, and I would cultivate the press on a person-to-person basis, seeking friendship before asking a favor. Fifty years later, I have no better advice than that to give a young officer in this line of work. The ideal way to operate, it is too seldom done.

As to composition, I held with the few rules of thumb which practice had convinced me were sound. Knowing almost nothing of the rules of English grammar, then or later, I would still add nothing to the basic prescription:

- Every sentence must express at least one idea clearly.
- Economy of words is the correct principle, so shy at adjectives.

- There is always the right word, the strong word, so keep thinking and do not settle for a weaker one.

Above and beyond these reflections on the bounds within which one composes is the absolute conviction that writing is not an art or a special talent, but strictly a discipline. To achieve a style finally, one must do some writing every day, no matter how much it hurts. Forget the hangover. One's physical feelings have nothing to do with what may come forth when sitting at the mill. I have tried on days when everything seemed like peaches down in Georgia only to draw a blank, and there were times when I felt wretched from bourbon or tequila, and the stuff just flowed with never a letup. Do not ask me why.

Before I separated from the 1st Cavalry Division, to my utter astonishment, I had sold three stories to national magazines. However, I still was not, in Winston Churchill's phrases, trying "to build a small literary house for myself." Solidly on

my feet again, I felt I might make a better living elsewhere.

The trifling victories and the brief fling at writing had not caused my changed outlook. My salvation had come from the company I kept. These good comrades made me feel useful again. They included Al Gruenther, later to command Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe; Claire Chennault of Flying Tigers fame; Alex Surles, one of our first information chiefs whose son and namesake is now a lieutenant general; Terry Allen who commanded two World War II combat divisions; and many others.

Several weeks after ending my bobtailed cavalry service, and just 48 hours after becoming a cub reporter, I had become so deeply entrenched in the wonderland of journalism that a GI can loaded with satchel charges could not have blasted me out. The fast firming of the new base came of happy accident, combined with fortune unbelievable. To this was added some initiative born of the new confidence. The

story is too long for this article, besides being unbelievable. Suffice to say, once in, I was happy to be stuck there.

As I moved along, I began to add a few new rules of my own:

- Being awkward at the typewriter, I decided it was best to concentrate and say it right the first time.
- Never waste sweat trying for a clever lead, and avoid the dull, allinclusive lead whenever possible.
- Every piece of writing has a natural length to beget understanding, and giving it more, or less, is bad practice.
- The art of interviewing lies in distinguishing between the trivial and the important. Good listening does it.
- Take your time. Hurry, hurry is the death of fair exchange between the writer and the other person. Too many reporters dash away from the real story.

General Alfred M. Gruenther in 1953 when he was Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe



Army News Features

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About 60 days after I embarked on this slightly adventurous new sea, Arthur M. Lockhart, a well-bankrolled oilman and intimate of the Fort Bliss crowd who had taken an interest in me, popped into my office. He handed me a clipping the sense of which was that a newsman to be worth his salt should be able to write on any subject and in any style, although for breadth, he should also be a specialist. “I think that’s it,” said Art.



US Army

I have often said in talks at Fort Leavenworth that the best ideas by which we live are usually fixed because one person said a certain thing in the right way in a moment when the mind was receptive. Here is a case in point. Within one hour of our talk, I had worked out a plan for my future, this at age 22, from which I never later deviated although two years later I was the editor:

- Whereas most writers on foreign affairs looked to Asia or Europe,

I would take Mexico and the Caribbean as my field.

- Despite being an all-around athlete, I would eschew the familiar topics and try for excellence in the sports of the horse--polo, steeplechasing, and horse showing.
- Having been a professional singer and actor with some talent for painting, I would put all of that aside and strive to be a military critic, of which the country had none.

Major General Terry Allen in Sicily during World War II

There was no need to rebuild my fences at Fort Bliss. They had never come down. I continued as secretary of the polo committee. Ordered to duty with the 7th Cavalry, I rode out a 600-mile maneuver with the division in the Texas Big Bend and, in that exercise, completely recovered my health.

My intimates included Lucian Truscott, who commanded a World War II corps with distinction and flair, and Terry Allen. While I learned much from such contacts, more

important still, I had the whole division behind me. I was their boy who was slightly making good.

Once, the newspaper offered a \$250 prize to the employee who would sign on the most subscribers in one month. I went to the 7th Cavalry. Sergeant Major Smythe and First Sergeant Ed Carey (who was the best military teacher I ever had) rallied the troops. I came away with 157 signatures on the line in one afternoon. This was more than enough.

Using Military Works

As I worked out of debt and more money came to me, the military library kept growing. Empirically, I had learned how to use it to serve my purposes.

Some thoughts on using military works come to mind:

- Read and re-read the books that seem important, the ones that stimulated thought.
- Do not bother with books just because they are the fad. To Mao Tsetung and Clausewitz I say nuts. They are too cloudy.
- On getting your teeth into something meaty, note what is important, to agree or disagree. Make marginal notes. If disagreeing, write a memo saying why. Of this comes original thinking.
- Do not read omnivorously of military writers. Too many have too little to say. Stay with the few who really grab your attention.

Becoming sports editor, city editor, and then boss man on the news side, I continued to do pieces about the military. Here, it seems germane to state that there was, and is, practically no outlet in the American press for anyone qualified to write on military policy and related subjects. This taboo never

having hurt me personally, I can speak of it, I hope, without prejudice.

A military critic is not a “commentator” or “analyst.” As J. F. C. Fuller pointed out, the critic must have the added qualification of approved experience afield in war, and Fuller’s credentials were certainly higher than any writer in this century.

Essential Studies

When I set forth on my own, more by instinct than by trial and error, I arrived at the essential studies. These are military history, military geography, and logistics, or call it timelag.

My finest mentor in this last subject was the late Frank A. Ross, World War II Chief of Transportation in Africa and in Europe, whom I had known from boyhood. As brilliant a text as is to be found on the other two subjects is Johnson’s *Topography and Strategy in War*. When I took command of the European Theater of Operations’ Historical Division, I bought enough copies of the book to supply all of my officers.

In my reading of the literature, I sought to understand the correlating on these three subjects. It was like playing chess or bridge although I shine at neither.

I believed that, to justify himself, the critic had to work things out like a one-man general staff.

Yet there was no anticipation that, apart from the fun, any rewards to me would result from this playing military critic. In fact, I had resigned my commission lest it interfere with my concentration on the higher management of war.

Curiously, in 1927, when I moved from El Paso to Detroit, at lowered income, but in search of a greener pasture, I was hired as a humorist. I was already writing for national publications on the horse and Latin-American affairs and could not imagine that my military studies would be more than

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love's labor lost. Not surprisingly, my new employer wanted none of the distillation of military wisdom.

The move broke contact with the military save for a few individuals—C. P. Summerall, a World War I hero and one of our distinguished Chiefs of Staff, and Iron Mike O'Daniel of Korean War fame, being among them. Their fellowship encouraged me to keep going. I stayed with polo because, better than any other sport, it stimulated my thinking about maneuver in war. As an avocation, I judged horse shows.

For *The Infantry Journal*, I wrote some articles on the theory of armored operations. Shortly thereafter came a letter from Fuller asking where I got my ideas. I replied that I had none and knew nothing about armor, but that I had written after reading his texts, either to agree or disagree. He answered:

My dear boy, I think you are the only person in Britain or America who takes me seriously. So I will take you seriously, as the oak to the acorn. When I can help you, let me know.

Such was the beginning of an inspiring friendship; my debt to this grand Englishman is great indeed.

But for a world catastrophe, it might have ended there. The second great war gave me an unparalleled opportunity to work out

my own ideas. Furthermore, the years and wars that followed were no less generous and productive. They made me one of those base exploiters who profits by war. The Army never handed me a bad assignment. That may be luck extraordinary, but having always believed that, within the military, a man must be a doer and fighter first and a writer second, I do not face the east and bow three times when I congratulate myself.

There is no moral to the story. I had it good; if I made any sacrifice, I was unaware of it. Nonetheless, I came out smelling like a rose.

In closing, I say to young Army writers:

Keep toiling at the mill. If you aspire mainly to command (and you should) remember it can only be done with words and one must practice, practice. The idea that the military looks askance at the writer is sheer bunk. Any army functions well mainly through clear writing. Your operations area is all of mankind. People are your playfellows. So stay gentle. Never let a man of rank hitch you to his chariot because he is either so lazy or inarticulate that he must have another brain do his essential work. Strike forth, keep your eye on the plow to cut a clean furrow, but lift your gaze at the turn to catch another glimpse of the stars.