

Parting Shots

A Farewell to Arms

Col. Todd Schmidt, PhD, U.S. Army

It has been one of the great honors of my career to serve the U.S. Army and the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, as the director of Army University Press (AUP) for the past three years. The team of professionals who make up this organization are exceptionally talented and incredibly dedicated to our mission of supporting professional military education and our shared vision as the premier military service press in the Department of Defense. In an often underappreciated or underrecognized mission, the team at AUP works hard every day to support and augment the education our military professionals receive at every step of their careers.

At the risk of using personal pronouns and admitting personal bias, I came into this position determined to reinvigorate professional military writing. I had an axe to grind, as we sometimes say. I was disappointed by the lack of priority leaders placed on professional development, education, writing, and discourse. However, I quickly found that I was not alone in recognizing this issue as an institutional and cultural challenge. Many Army professionals believed that too often, we let the popular buzz of new concepts and ideas undermine the importance of basic fundamentals.

The launch of the Harding Project and Gen. Randy George's initiative to modernize military journals could not have been timelier. Over the past twelve months, AUP has been the center of gravity for bringing the Army's branch journals onto a modern online platform, Line of Departure.¹ Leaders can now access all the Army's branch journals from one easy-to-use website.

We have spent exceptional time and resources working with all our branch journal staffs, training and developing our editing teams to publish under a new paradigm. Providing up-to-date, fresh content on a daily and weekly basis that is



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available online and in audio is the new bar for how we share, publish, and engage in professional military discourse. The era of periodically produced branch journal editions that are not optimized for the internet, research, and artificial intelligence is over.

The publication of several *Military Review* special issues was a leadership objective that we pursued to provide current, in-depth content and analysis on salient topics that included space and missile defense, irregular warfare, and professional military writing. We also produced an issue dedicated exclusively to war poetry. In other issues, we featured special sections highlighting artificial intelligence, commemoration of the eightieth anniversary of D-Day, observance of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the NATO alliance and its evolution over the years, civil-military relations, Afghanistan and the Global War on Terrorism, China, the 10th Mountain Division, and the 11th Airborne Division. In 2025, our readership can expect more special issues such as themed edition pertaining to challenges facing the Army professional military education

system, as well as sections dedicated to the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Army, activities of other U.S. Army divisions, and other relevant topics.

The establishment of the MG Edwin “Forrest” Harding Fellowship and the LTG (Ret) James M. Dubik Writing Fellows Program were pinnacle achievements for AUP in 2024.² The Harding Fellowship

scholars seeking to understand the Russia-Ukraine war and how history may inform the outcome. Our forthcoming book, *Siren Songs*, is also expected to garner attention as it addresses past military failures and the dangers of interwar escapism. Our films team’s work on *The Soldier and the Constitution* received exceptional praise and circulation across all military services as it

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was established as an official U.S. Army broadening opportunity by Gen. George that will send a cohort of officers to the University of Kansas each year to earn a master’s degree in journalism and mass communications. Upon graduation, Harding Fellows will serve on the editorial staffs of their branch journals, driving change, modernization, and the publication of current, online content. The prestigious, nonresident Dubik Fellowship program selects a more distinguished, senior cohort of established scholars and writers who come from across the spectrum of national security and defense professionals and publish across a number of professional journals and publications. The leadership at AUP was critical to the development and implementation of both fellowships.

While AUP was pursuing new initiatives, our cornerstone mission remained on track. Our books, research, flagship journals, films, staff rides, and multimedia teams kept pace and continuously searched for ways to advance, address customer needs and demands, and improve user experience. The last three years, for example, have seen a marked expansion and improvement in the types of films produced, the quality of books and research conducted, engagement with audiences across all ranks and services, and the new staff rides we have introduced—all of which directly address the Army’s current concerns.

Our books—*Armies in Retreat*, among others—have received exceptional attention from readers and

provided additional resources related to helping service members understand their duties and responsibilities as citizen-soldiers during times of political partisanship and elections. The Combat Studies Institute is currently working on several new staff ride offerings for the military with particular excitement building around a virtual staff ride that features a key engagement in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Finally, our NCO Journal team was recognized by the secretary of the Army for their groundbreaking work to improve publications, readership, and interest across the force.

From a personal perspective, the underlying motivation for me to promote a renaissance in professional military writing is to counter continued challenges of anti-intellectualism that still infect our leadership ranks. Addressing this challenge required changing Army policy, regulation, doctrine, curriculum, and instruction. We helped rewrite Department of the Army Pamphlet 25-40, *Army Publishing Program Procedures*, to require branch journals and professional bulletins to publish in web-first, mobile-friendly format.³ We worked to change Army Regulation 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership Policy*, to expand emphasis on written communication skills as a critical component of leadership.⁴ Increased writing requirements, professional reading and referencing military scholarship is a growing requirement for students attending professional development and education courses. Finally, we expect eventual updates to Field Manual

6-22, *Developing Leaders*, that put more weight on professional writing, unit writing programs, and written communication skills as a component of the leadership requirements model.

What's next for AUP? We will continue to place priority emphasis on our core mission, supporting professional military education. However, going forward and looking at the challenges and gaps in PME, it is clear the Army places little emphasis on working with interagency partners and in an interagency environment. Training and development of mid-career leaders in how to interact and interface with the interagency will only grow in importance. Additionally, the engagement of our adversaries in irregular warfare will continue to increase. In such a dynamic, all levers of national power will be exercised, and Army leaders will need to be ready to plan, work, fight, and lead alongside interagency partners. I believe AUP has a role to play in this domain, helping promote,

and publish salient scholarship that addresses how the Army must transform in contact and in a very complex strategic and operational environment with our civilian counterparts from across the federal government.

The title of this final letter from me as director of the Army University Press is "Parting Shots: A Farewell to Arms." It is meant as a final farewell to an organization and mission for which I have immense respect. It is also a farewell to a career that I have thoroughly enjoyed and an organization and community of professionals for which I have the greatest love, admiration, and reverence. The PEOPLE I have met, the ORGANIZATIONS with which I have served, the PLACES I have traveled, and the MISSION to which I have been a part have blessed me with a phenomenal career, lifelong friends, and, most importantly, the experience of serving the United States of America, the country I love. ■

Notes

1. Line of Departure, accessed 26 November 2024, <https://www.lineofdeparture.army.mil/>.

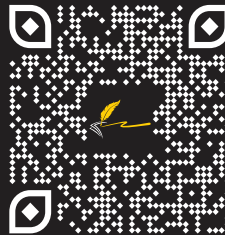
2. Zachary Griffiths, "Meet Your Harding Fellow," Harding Project, 23 July 2024, <https://www.hardingproject.com/p/meet-your-harding-fellow/>; "LTG (Ret) James M. Dubik Writing Fellows Program," Army University Press, accessed 26 November 2024, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/ltg-james-dubik-writing-fellows-program/>.

3. Department of the Army Pamphlet 25-40, *Army Publishing Program Procedures* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], February 2024), 55, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN42301-PAM_25-40-001-WEB-2.pdf.

4. Army Regulation 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership Policy* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, June 2024), 26, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN38315-AR_600-100-000-WEB-1.pdf.



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