



History and Heritage in the Operational Force

An Action Plan

Col. Charles R. Bowery Jr., SES, U.S. Army, Retired

History will not give us solutions to today's problems but, properly used, it will give us insight and get us to ask ourselves the right questions.

—Dr. Peter Knight, U.S. Army Center of Military History

In 1965, American author James Baldwin remarked, “The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.”¹ In no organization is this statement truer than in the U.S. Army. The profession of arms carries with it an instinctual awareness of the past. Unit and individual experiences are a constant presence in the lives of Army soldiers and civilians and can be powerful tools for analysis, critical thought, self-reflection, and esprit de corps. But these tools must be built and maintained in an intentional manner if they are to be useful outside of a classroom setting. The vehicle for building a state of historical-mindedness in an Army unit is a historical program. The building blocks for a historical program include a unit historical file, a process for completing an annual historical summary, a process for maintaining

unit lineage and honors, and a deliberate plan to use unit history for professional development.

The sad fact, however, is that across the Army's operating units, historical programs are in a state of increasing decay. This decay has two underlying causes, one intellectual and one structural, but the causes feed and accelerate each other. Historical instruction in Army schools and training, from Reserve Officer Training Corps and West Point precommissioning through the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), mid-career training, and the Army War College, is rigorous, well-resourced, and highly regarded by Army senior leaders. In these environments, the value of historical analysis is a given, at least for most people. But leaders frequently struggle with transferring concepts learned in his-

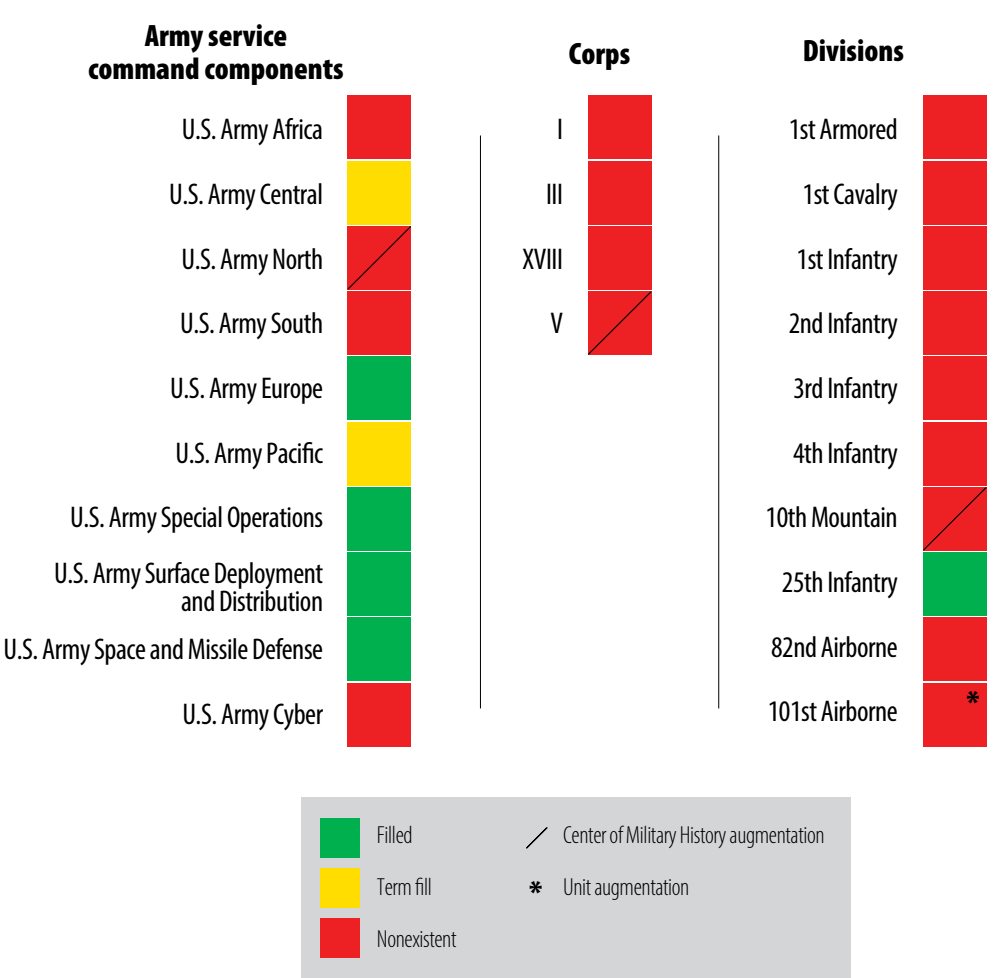
torical programs from the classroom to the operating force, where the imperatives of contingency operations, mission readiness, training, and sustainment drive everything and fill schedules. Commanders never have enough time to do everything, and they are constantly evaluating risk and prioritizing tasks. Unit historical programs usually lose in this environment because they are not seen as mission essential. This is the intellectual

Col. Charles R. Bowery Jr., SES, U.S. Army, retired, is the executive director of the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. He holds an MA from North Carolina State University. During his active duty career, Bowery served in Army aviation units in the United States, Korea, Germany, Iraq, and Afghanistan, where he commanded an attack helicopter battalion. He also taught military history at West Point and served on the joint staff.

Previous page: Sgt. 1st Class James Bowie (*left*) of the 138th Military History Detachment (MHD) conducts a field oral history interview with a member of 3rd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, 9 April 2019 as part of an external evaluation of their training at Fort Hood, Texas. The 138th MHD of the Indiana National Guard, along with three additional MHDs from the U.S. Army Reserve and U.S. Army Forces Command, participated in the first-ever multicomponent collective training evaluation of MHDs. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Center of Military History)

cause of decay in historical programs.

As a result of this widespread perception that historical programs are not mission-essential activities, they are not resourced with time or people, leading to the structural problem of having no trained historians in command historian positions. Army Regulation 870-5, *Military History: Responsibilities, Policies, and Procedures*, which governs Army historical programs, specifies that Army units at division-level and above will have assigned command historians, either military or civilian.² As figure 1 indicates, however, this requirement is honored mostly in the breach, and these positions are either unfilled or eliminated from manning documents across the operational force. Only one Army division currently maintains a command historian; this is the structural cause of decay in historical programs. In three active component Army divisions, the local museum director is considered the division historian, delegating to those museum professionals an unrealistic workload. The intellectual and structural causes of decay reinforce each other over time because the Army grows generations of leaders who have no experience with the value of unit historical programs and so do not think of or know how to maintain them. As these leaders rise through the ranks, there is also no command-driven requirement from above to comply with the regulation. Left unchecked, this decay will continue.



(Figure by author)

Figure 1. Current Status of Regular Army Command Historians (as of September 2020)

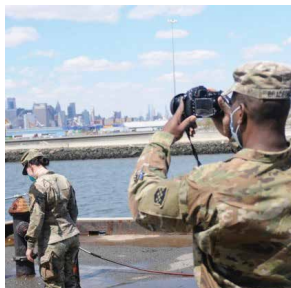
The effects of this decay go far beyond a degraded level of soldier awareness of unit history and heritage, which in itself lessens unit effectiveness. Commanders increasingly have little or no perspective on unit performance over time and have a decreased awareness of the cultural and political dimensions of the theaters of operation they encounter. This latter effect compounds itself as these leaders advance in rank and responsibility, and it further limits their ability to embrace and function within the strategic and policy levels of war.

As the Army’s lead for historical programs, the Center of Military History (CMH) has developed a five-point action plan to address shortfalls in history and heritage programs across the operational force.

Five lines of effort

- 1) Insert historical programs content into the Army Strategic Education Program
- 2) Assign 5X command historians (individual mobilization augmentee/reserve officers) to commands
- 3) Insert historical programs training into battalion/brigade precommand courses
- 4) Establish the unit historical officer program
- 5) Enhance additional skill identifiers 5X for military historians

Real time



Real perspectives



Real transitions



Outcomes

- ✓ Actionable historical programs for leaders at all levels
- ✓ Resilient, inspired, culturally engaged soldiers and units

(Figure by author)

Figure 2. History in the Operational Force—Center of Military History Initiatives

Its initial focus has been on the Active Component but will seek to build interest and momentum that can cross over to the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve as these programs take root. This is a “train the trainer” approach to building programs, with CMH providing subject-matter expertise, constant reachback, and ongoing synchronization. It focuses on the idea that a unit historical program is a commander’s program, not one that is administered by a staff officer or an external agency. Figure 2 depicts the five lines of effort of this action plan.

In order to reinforce a culture of lifelong learning, assist the Army in developing strategic thinkers, and establish senior leader advocacy for history and historians, the first component of this action plan will be to insert historical programs training into the Army Senior Leader Education Program. The first opportunity to do so will occur in January 2021, when

military policy, strategy, mobilization, and civil-military relations. This portion of the program truly focuses on positioning “actionable history” as a strategic enabler for Army senior leaders.

The Army’s general officer leaders are accustomed to seeking historical support, so CMH must continue to rebuild command history offices to provide them with that support. Thus, the second component of the action plan involves assigning U.S. Army Reserve officers as command historians at Army service component command, corps, and division levels in the Active Component. These officers will be assigned to CMH, with reserve duty specified at the headquarters location to which they are assigned, and their duties will be structured to include potential deployment with their headquarters. Command historians will have three primary duties: the development and maintenance of unit historical files, the compilation and submission

CMH will provide an orientation to CMH products and services at the Army Senior Leader Education Program event for newly selected brigadier generals. As a part of this line of effort, CMH will partner with Army University Press (AUP) and the Army War College to offer senior leaders relevant historical content in a variety of formats and platforms that will maximize their time. CMH’s Field Programs and Historical Services Directorate also continues to develop nontraditional staff rides aimed at engaging senior officers and civilians on strategic topics such as national

of annual historical reports for their units, and the supervision and coordination of subordinate command historians (at Army service component command and corps levels) or brigade and battalion unit historical officers (UHO, additional-duty officers below division level) within their commands. As these officers' time and capabilities permit, they will also be encouraged to answer commander and staff requests for information and develop unit professional development programs such as staff rides. CMH will advertise these command historian positions, interview applicants, make selections for the historian positions, and provide the officers with initial training and ongoing technical support. The command historian will wear the insignia of the supported unit and will conduct regular drill periods and annual training at the unit in order to accomplish his or her primary missions.

Because command historians will be expected to do historical work and because some will not have historical training, CMH will coordinate attendance for all at the Army Field and Unit Historian Course, a distributed learning course taught by AUP. All selected command historians will also have a short temporary-duty onboarding at CMH in order to familiarize

themselves with the products and services available for their use. Command historians without history degrees will also be encouraged to earn a graduate degree in history from an accredited institution. In all cases, CMH staff will be available for assistance and support, but the success of this aspect of the program is dependent upon both the individual command historian's doctrinal grounding, staff, and interpersonal skills, and the unit commander's understanding of the historian's role in the staff.

In an effort to grow senior leaders with experience in maintaining and using historical programs, we have begun to integrate instruction on these programs into the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command battalion and brigade commanders' training courses. Each basic branch in the Army teaches these courses for incoming commanders, and the Combined

Dr. Peter Knight, U.S. Army Center of Military History Field Programs Directorate, describes the action at Pointe du Hoc, Normandy, France, on the anniversary of D-Day 5 June 2019 for Secretary of Defense Mark Esper during the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration. (Photo courtesy of HQDA Public Affairs)

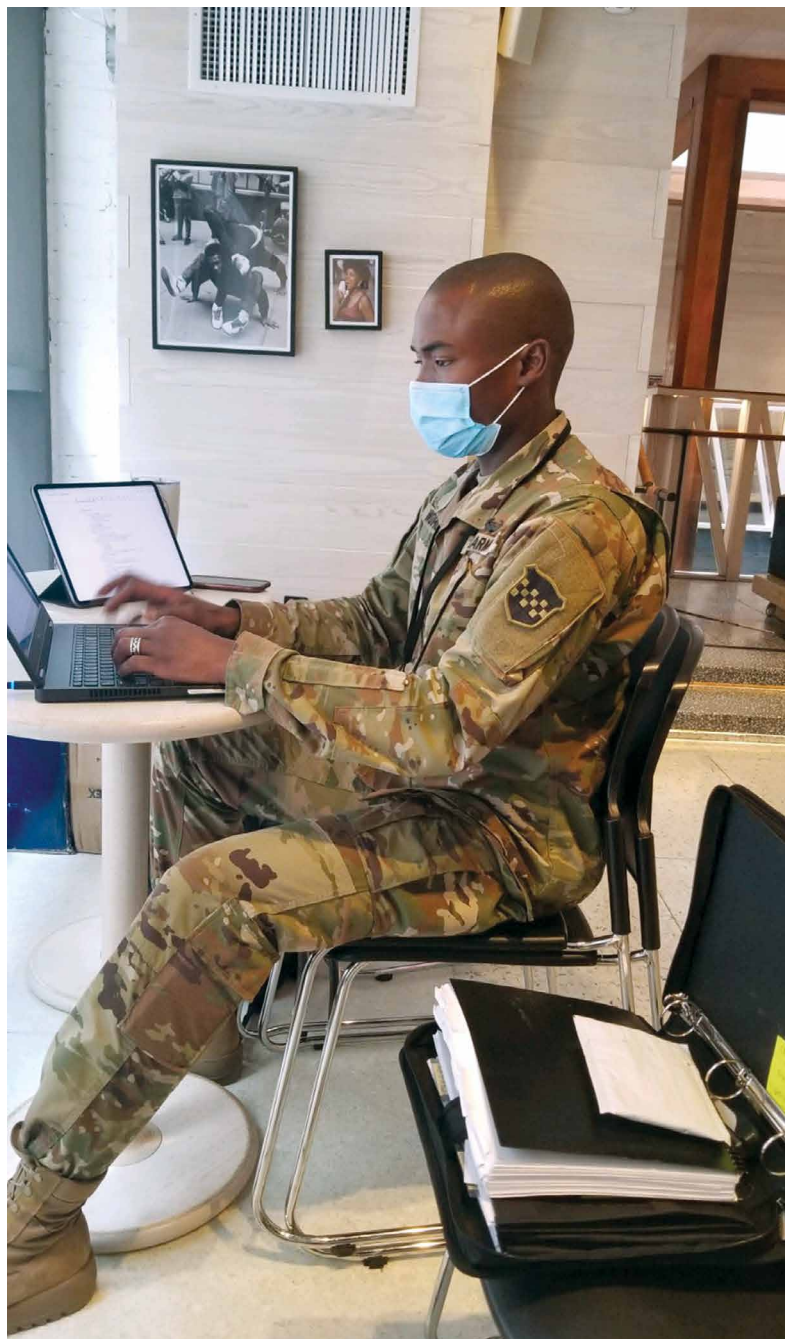


Arms Center's School for Command Preparation conducts a centralized Army-level course. CMH executed the first iteration of this instruction for the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, Georgia, which runs a pre-command course for armor- and infantry-unit commanders. CMH will continue to deliver the instruction virtually, with interactive exercises that expose commanders to the resources available to them and to their historical officers on CMH and AUP digital platforms. Over the course of fiscal year (FY) 2021, CMH will develop a version of this instruction for the Army-level course at Fort Leavenworth.

Because of the sheer number of brigades and battalions across the Army, it is unrealistic to plan to staff them with full-time historians. What commanders need at this level is an additional duty officer or noncommissioned officer (NCO) who can build and maintain a unit historical file and who can submit periodic summaries of these files to command historians at the division level. CMH will accomplish these tasks via the UHO program, which will become Army policy in the new version of Army Regulation 870-5, due out in FY 2021.

A word first about what the UHO is not. He or she is not expected to perform the analytical or publishing functions of a historian; rather, the UHO is expected to maintain a unit file of historical documents such as command and staff rosters, orders, concept documents, training guidance, readiness reports, command inspections, and after action reviews. CMH is developing a standard operating procedure to guide UHOs in their duties; is testing and fielding a SharePoint-based digital tool that will give UHOs the ability to compile and submit annual summaries to their higher headquarters; and is developing a distance learning UHO training module. This module will help UHOs both to accomplish their

doctrinal duties and potentially expand their personal skill sets to include developing unit heritage and professional development programs for their units.



Capt. Julian Woodhouse, officer in charge of the 315th Military History Detachment, reports on COVID-19 operations supporting the Department of Defense's Task Force New York 22 April 2020 from one of the primary operations centers, the Moxy Hotel in Times Square. Woodhouse is part of the team of U.S. Army historians mobilized across the continental United States documenting COVID-19 operations for the U.S. Army. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Lamont Bradford, U.S. Army)

When units deploy for combat or humanitarian assistance operations, CMH will offer support to UHOs and command historians in a two-phase process. Before units deploy, CMH will conduct an in-person or virtual mobile training team to provide them with predeployment training in document collection and interface with theater military history detachments. Upon a unit's return, another CMH team will facilitate UHO after action reviews, provide expertise in the completion of unit command reports (the deployment version of an annual historical summary), and advise on the completion of updates to unit awards and campaign participation credit.

Rounding out this action plan will be continued program enhancements for the Skill Identifier (SI) 5X, Army Historian, and the expansion of the historical program to embrace NCOs. To this point, a master's degree in history has been a baseline requirement for earning the 5X SI, which is administered by CMH's Field Programs directorate. Expanding this opportunity will generate more interest in historical programs and thus professionally develop the force. With this in mind, CMH will partner with the U.S. Army Human Resources Command to expand the 5X program to begin in precommissioning education and the NCO Education System. For example, officer cadets who complete a bachelor's degree in history will be eligible to earn an apprentice-level 5X SI, with tiered levels of achievement leading to UHO and command historian positions, as well as opportunities to compete for advanced civil schooling and assignments as a history instructor. In the enlisted ranks, the new Project Development Skill Identifier H6B, Historian, will differentiate NCOs in the public affairs military occupational specialty from those who are assigned to military history detachments. This program enhancement will

also deepen the Army's bench of officers and NCOs capable of serving in demanding staff positions across the Army and the joint force.

After FY 2021, the next phase of historical programs improvement will focus on developing more effective content for unit historical programs. As the Army historical program continues to branch out into social media, documentaries, podcasts, audiobooks, and virtual staff rides, the time is now to consider how CMH can provide historical content to soldiers in ways that will engage and inspire them, and create in them the desire to learn more. CMH will seek to partner with AUP, the Army War College, the history faculties at West Point and Fort Leavenworth, and Training and Doctrine Command's Military History and Heritage Office to do this. This action plan will be much more effective through synergy among Army historians and museum professionals.

The time is now for innovative thinking to reverse the longstanding decay of historical programs across the Army. To revive historical programs is the intent of this action plan. By coaching successive generations of officers and NCOs to establish and maintain historical programs in their units, equipping them with the tools (command historians, UHOs, and historical products), and encouraging lifelong learning and self-development, the five lines of effort described here will reestablish historical mindedness across the force. This action plan will also foster further collaboration and professional development among the Army's civilian and military historians, museum professionals, and archivists. The Army's return on this small investment will be a low-cost, incremental improvement in the problem-solving and critical thinking abilities, cultural awareness, resiliency, and pride of leaders, soldiers, civilians, and units. ■

Notes

Epigraph. Peter Knight, U.S. Army Center of Military History, email message to author, September 2020.

1. James Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt," *Ebony*, August 1965, 47.

2. Army Regulation 870-5, *Military History: Responsibilities, Policies, and Procedures* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007), para. 4-3.