



(AI illustration by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)

Renewing Professional Writing

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Nearly a century ago, the U.S. Army raced to ready for the next war. Tight budgets, surplus World War I equipment, and only enough manpower for a “mobilization army” meant that the Army had to think harder.¹ Knowing that success would require integrating new technologies and operating concepts, the chief of infantry renewed the *Infantry Journal* in 1934 by naming Maj. Edwin Forrest Harding as editor. In just four years, Harding doubled circulation and fostered critical

debates over the rapidly maturing tank and combined arms.² Today, the Army again finds itself in an interwar period, seeking to transform for the next war.

To prepare for this next war, the Army needs professional discourse. Military journals are the place for such discussion, inspiring change in the Army and always changing to meet requirements of the day. Today, the Army is again renewing its journals to ready us for the challenges ahead.

The Army's Journals, an Overview

The Army has a wide array of outlets, each geared to a different audience and set of problems. There are two Army-wide journals: the Army University's *Military Review* is the official professional journal for the entire Army, while the Army War College's *Parameters* focuses on strategic issues.³ For tactical issues related to a specific branch, there are journals like *Infantry*, *Army Sustainment*, and the *Field Artillery Professional Bulletin*.

Outside the Army's professional and academic journals but within the Army are a cohort of online outlets. West Point's Modern War Institute and the Army War College's War Room focus on professional topics in a web-first, mobile-friendly format with rolling publication, podcasts, and effective social media engagement.

Below that level are newsletters published by organizations or units supporting an even narrower community of interest, such as the XVIII Airborne Corps' *Infantry Brigade Combat Team Warfighting Forum Monthly Newsletter* and the National Training Center aviation training team's *Eagle Eye*. These can include other formats such as SharePoint repositories or even YouTube channels. Unfortunately, they are not systematically archived, and units bear the cost of production and distribution. The form and scope of these newsletters vary widely.

As compared to newsletters, official Army publications benefit from full-time staffs and institutional support. While uniformed staffing may have fallen over the last forty years, largely civilian editorial teams solicit, screen, edit, and publish the Army's professional journals today.⁴

Additionally, there are many great websites, channels, and feeds run by civilian entities but focus on the military such as War on the Rocks, by soldiers in their unofficial capacity like From the Green Notebook, or by Army associations like *Army Magazine*. While some are free, many charge fees that limit the impact of their journals.

Official and unofficial outlets foster professional discourse together. Articles at War on the Rocks may reference *Military Review* articles that reference posts at the Modern War Institute. This is healthy; each outlet has a unique audience and focus. However, the Army has an interest in fostering dialogue *within* Army journals because of the unique value they provide the force.

Unique Value of the Army's Journals

Hosting professional discourse in Army journals is of interest to the service. Professional journals cut across the Army, spreading and storing authenticated and attributed insights and lessons, which provide access to and confidence in the articles we publish.

Accessibility is the key strength of the Army's journals. In the military, the classification of information and common access card requirements often inadvertently hinder knowledge distribution. Likewise, association journals and private outlets often limit access to those who pay a fee. But *Infantry* makes training tips and articles accessible to every infantry unit and library in the Army by publishing and disseminating each issue. Accessibility means that every soldier and civilian must have access to these journals.

The Army's journals also provide an important moderated marketplace for ideas. Anyone can submit an article, and the author of "Training Management Tips," mentioned by Gen. Randy George in this issue's foreword, did.⁵ Russel Eno, then *Infantry's* editor, reviewed the draft, determined it would interest the *Infantry's* audience, and honed the article through back-and-forth with Capt. David Johnson, the author. Satisfied he had a well-argued credible article supported with evidence, Eno published Johnson's piece as a training note alongside a reflection from the chief of infantry on night vision during the Gulf War and a feature article on desert operations. It was a balanced issue, covering a diverse range of topics of interest to the infantry.⁶

The publication pace, both then and now, is not lightning fast. This frustrates those who hope for instant feedback. But it also has its benefits. Fortunately, most articles for professional journals are not time sensitive. Johnson's lessons on training management are nearly as applicable in 2024 as they were in 1992. This is a moderated marketplace, where editors understand their audience, sift through submissions, and then hone the best articles. This process is possible because of the alignment of the editors, authors, and readers on desiring the best for their branch and service.

Once ready for publication, the Army disseminates each journal—cutting across unit boundaries and

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hierarchy. Through publications, leaders can speak to soldiers, soldiers to their leaders, and both to their peers. Johnson's article may have started as a professional development session for other leaders in the 25th Infantry Division. However, the helpful insights in "Training Management Tips" would never have found their way to then Capt. George's desk at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, if *Infantry* had not published and disseminated the article. Likewise, doctrine writers or others interested in improving training management might not have considered his insights.

Once published, the Army libraries archive each issue. Today, the Army could not access "Training Management Tips" if Johnson had instead published in an unarchived newsletter or white paper. While newsletters and white papers help solicit feedback and generate support, their reach is limited. More recently, well-meaning leaders have advocated for increased engagement on social media, but posts and writings on private websites are ephemeral.⁷ Even articles published at well-known institutions like the Council on Foreign Relations can be lost to time.⁸ But we can still benefit from Johnson's 1992 article on training meetings three decades later.

Finally, authentication of the Army's journals builds confidence in each article (see the figure). In this age of mis- and disinformation, in a time where anyone can post on social media under a false identity, each of the Army's professional bulletins are authenticated by the service. Soldiers can have confidence that articles in the Army's professional journals have been vetted. In a hierarchical Army, professional journals are unique. Doctrine takes years to codify. Formal lessons-learned systems require common access cards. White papers and newsletters rely on ad hoc distribution and are lost in email accounts. Only the Army's journals are accessible to everyone, spreading and storing insights and lessons to improve the Army.

Causing Change

The Army's journals have the potential for profound impact on the force, sharing valuable lessons that can change how Army units fight and operate. The May-June 1992 issue of *Infantry*, which hosted "Training Management Tips," also published useful articles on the battalion wedge formation, combat lifesaver training, and mortar employment. Other journals offer useful

information for senior leaders on topics like asking better questions or thinking about cause and effect.⁹ Additionally, journals build communities around shared challenges like jungle operations or innovation.¹⁰ Journals link leaders and improve the Army.

Importantly, the Army's journals also offer a place for thoughtful dissent. When done best, the Army's journals host thoughtful back-and-forth, such as the debate over officer retention and burnout in *Military Review* last year.¹¹ Other pieces, like Wong and Gerras's "Lying to Ourselves," force introspection on the Army's leaders.¹²

Journals also help refine the Army's recent operating concepts: AirLand Battle, counterinsurgency, and today's multidomain operations. In the official history of AirLand Battle, the Army's Training and Doctrine Command includes 109 references to *Military Review* and highlights the "spirited debate in the professional military journals" following the introduction of Active Defense, a predecessor of AirLand Battle.¹³ Likewise, debates over counterinsurgency tactics filled the pages of professional journals, providing useful lessons for deploying units and helping refine counterinsurgency doctrine.¹⁴ More recently, the Army's journals helped refine multidomain battle into multidomain operations and now continue honing that concept.¹⁵ No single article will rewrite the Army's warfighting concepts, but each article adds to the conversation.

Notably, recent discourse has migrated beyond the Army's official journals. While *Military Review* and the branch journals hosted much of the debate on AirLand battle, counterinsurgency debates birthed *Small Wars Journal*, *War on the Rocks*, and others. These modern platforms published more quickly and delivered content formatted for the web and smartphones. The information environment is changing.

The Digital Age

The robust professional debate that filled the Army's *Infantry* and *Armor* professional journals in 1934 has fractured across a variety of web-first outlets and onto social media. Some outlets, like West Point's Modern War Institute are official, while others, like *War on the Rocks* and *From the Green Notebook* are not. Outside strictly professional discourse, many soldiers now post to sites like Reddit or in short videos on TikTok.¹⁶ This transition away from official venues has led to increases in mis- and disinformation.

This medium is approved for official dissemination of material designed to keep individuals within the Army knowledgeable of current and emerging developments within their areas of expertise for the purpose of enhancing their professional development.



(Figure by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)

Figure. Authentication Then (Print) and Now (Online)

Most information no longer comes on broadsheets or in printed books. When reading newspapers or skimming social media feeds, apps format automatically to the screen's size. A click or search rapidly retrieves the desired article. Breaking news is automatically pushed through social media or via an alert. These changes have made information more accessible than ever.

But the Army's journals have not kept up. Where hard copy *Infantry* magazines hosted professional discourse through the 1990s in orderly rooms and at staff duty desks, today's leaders read, listen to podcasts, and watch short videos on their smartphones.

The paradox of this fractured publication landscape is the slow death of conversations on branch and Army issues. For example, with reinvestment in bridging, the Army needs more debate about the employment and structure of engineer bridging companies. However, outlets like Modern War Institute, War on the Rocks, and From the Green Notebook do not appear to have ever posted an article on wet-gap crossings.¹⁷ Contrast this with the back issues of *Engineer*, which has dozens of articles focused on the subject. Sadly, publication of *Engineer* has fallen from about four to only one issue a year, effectively killing debate on this important topic.¹⁸

Only the Army cares deeply about these niche professional topics, so the Army must host them. These debates, and others like them, are critical to the Army's

transformation and warfighting prowess. However, underinvestment and failure to adapt to modern standards impedes these conversations. While the Army largely missed this web-first, mobile transition, the service is taking a lesson from its past to transform the journals for the future.

Embracing Change

Throughout their century-long history, the Army's journals have hosted thoughtful discourse while transforming in format—an approach the Army will draw on today. In the 1930s, the vigorous Forrest Harding renewed the *Infantry Journal* with a lively new cover, soliciting articles from notable military thinkers, and delivering content relevant to members of the infantry association.¹⁹ The Army's professional journal, *Military Review*, has also evolved over the last century. Starting as the *Instructors' Summary of Military Articles* in 1922, *Military Review* matured alongside independent American military thinking. Likewise, the branch journals, once largely controlled by branch associations, moved under branch schools following a change in rules about uniformed editors working for associations.²⁰ The Army's journals have historically evolved with their times.

Today, renewing the Army's journals requires attention to accessibility of contemporary and archived articles, ensuring journal inclusion in professional

military education courses, investments in staffing, and appointing a steward to guide these journals into the future.

Renewing the Army's journals requires a web-first, mobile-friendly website that integrates easily with social media. The recently launched Line of Departure hosts professional bulletins side-by-side with rolling publication. With Army journals consolidated in one place, visitors can also more easily discover articles in the other journals of interest, diversifying audiences across the force. Furthermore, social media accounts can push individual articles into soldiers' social media feeds. While social media cannot replace thoughtful dialogue, it is a venue for bringing content to audiences. Finally, Line of Departure's search function will allow readers to reach back into the archives. As old articles are processed, they will not only be searchable at Line of Departure but will also start appearing on search engines like Google and Google Scholar.

The Army is integrating journals into professional military education courses. Across all Army schools, educators are refining lesson objectives to ensure all military students are familiar with the Army's professional journals and the format for articles. This includes expanding existing scholars programs to the Sergeants Major Academy, which is piloting the Ultima Scholars program this fall.²¹ Between revised learning objectives in military courses and investments in scholars programs, soldiers will better understand their opportunities and obligations to strengthen the Army profession.

A critical aspect of achieving these modernizations is a reinvestment in journal staffs. Journals will soon have dedicated uniformed and civilian staff with web publications functions consolidated at the Combined Arms Center. The new Harding Fellows program will ensure the Army selects those with the aptitude and inclination to edit their branch journals; the program develops fellows through graduate education and then employs them as editors under their Center of Excellence director. Passionate uniformed editors and their talented civilian counterparts, armed with connection to their peers, engagement data, and an institutional advocate, will ensure that the Army's outlets remain relevant.

As the steward of the professional journals, Army University Press will be the central advocate, overseer,

and coordinator. They will ensure these renewal efforts cohere into a new system and advocate for journals into the future. Together, these efforts will renew the Army's journals. Still, this effort to renew professional discourse is dependent on the support and effort of the force.

Your Role

Renewing the Army's journals requires more than just the institutional actions outlined above. Leaders at all echelons must set the example. As the chief of staff of the Army recognizes three articles a month, other Army leaders should take the time to recognize thought-provoking articles or those that bear directly on important questions to their organizations.²² It only takes a minute to send an email or make a phone call, but that small action can have a tremendous influence on the recipient's likelihood to write again or to encourage others to write.

Furthermore, leaders at all levels should consider reading and writing programs as part of their leader development and staff training programs.²³ While professional education courses have an important role, soldiers spend far more of their time in operational and staff assignments. At more tactical levels, brigade, battalion, and company leaders could further encourage soldiers to convert white papers or staff estimates into articles for their branch journals. Professional writing is not hard, but soldiers may require a gentle nudge to start.

Leaders should consider how they underwrite risk for subordinates who write. Soldiers have written in the Army's journals for more than one hundred years, demonstrating intellectual courage and shaping the force. If the Army discourages dissent in formal channels, it arises elsewhere, often in an unprofessional manner. Some ideas may be unpopular, but they should find a home in Army professional journals if they aim to solve problems and strengthen the profession.²⁴ Support soldiers who publish well-reasoned articles aimed at making the Army better.

Conclusion

The Army's professional journals are uniquely important. Through open access, the journals inform the Army, share lessons laterally, provide an outlet for thoughtful dissent, allow us to learn from our past,

and make us better communicators. At the institutional level, the Army is modernizing the journals through improved accessibility, incorporation into education programs, and an emphasis on embracing the digital age.

But these changes are not enough. Leaders must also underwrite reasonable risk for their subordinates who take up the pen and encourage professional writing that improves our Army, even if they have dissenting opinions. ■

Notes

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