

chief historian's FOOTNOTE

Jim Malachowski



TRANSFORMING THE FOUNDATIONS OF ARMY HISTORY

In 1946, as the United States grappled with the transition from global war to uneasy peace, the War Department undertook a sweeping internal reorganization that shaped the Army's institutional trajectory for decades. These reforms offer a rich case study in bureaucratic agility, strategic foresight, and the balance between tradition and innovation. Today, the Army is again in a period of remarkable change that will set the course of land warfare for decades to come.

Just as history is not static, neither is the Center of Military History (CMH). Like many Army organizations, CMH has entered a new phase of transformation—one that demands operational agility, technical precision, and doctrinal clarity, along with historical insight. This year will mark a turning point in how we define our mission and measure our impact.

Over the past year, CMH accelerated its modernization efforts across critical areas in institutional and warfighting history operations and integrated our archival processes with Army Historical Research Online (AHRO). However, it also has more infrastructure, tasks, and mission sets to manage than it has the people to do so properly. Even as the size of the CMH workforce has decreased, the Army's need for our services has increased exponentially. The legacy framework, while foundational, no longer fully addresses the speed, complexity, and data demands of contemporary conflict. It is not the enduring question of whether we can do more with less, but what functions best support the Army of today and the future.

The process of change creates difficult and sometimes passionate discussions on where to balance traditional scholarship and evolving enterprise-level needs. There are few easy answers, but we have a path forward. CMH leaders are leveraging the Baldrige Excellence Framework to guide revisions in strategy, policy, doctrine, and organizational structure to reflect the realities of multidomain operations and strategic competition. The framework has been proven to help organizations improve performance and get sustainable results. It is integrated into how CMH operates rather than as extra work for an already overtaxed staff. Rather than managing individual processes, the Baldrige framework helps look at the organization holistically in a systems approach. Viewed this way, all work at CMH—from writing our flagship books and monographs, answering inquiries, or creating exhibits that engage the public—revolves around institutional memory as a strategic asset.

This approach, along with the Center's practical experience and lessons learned, is driving an update to the Army's historical operations doctrine. Last released in June 2014, Army Techniques Publication 1-20, *Military History Operations*, is in revision now to adapt historical operations to the changing character of war and the evolving role of the Army in joint operations. At the Army level, the shift is not theoretical. It is

already influencing how the Army is organized and how Army Service Component Commands (ASCCs) deploy historical assets to document and interpret military operations and outcomes.

Looking at few redesigned fundamental principles from a systems approach, it is evident how doctrinal and training processes interlock from the tactical edge to the archive.

- **Forward Integration:** Historians are at the right place, at the right time, and have built trust with units and commanders. Collection plans are tailored to mission, unit, and operation. Embedding historians earlier in planning cycles helps to inform and shape operational narratives, preserve decision logic, and prevent gaps in the historical record.
- **Mission Relevance:** Historical coverage balances content and focus, while considering causative factors, decision points, and historical proportionality to answer vital questions. This provides the basis for analysis that directly supports operational assessments, observed lessons, and future narrative history.
- **Strategic Accessibility:** CMH is restructuring the archive to improve support research, doctrinal development, and public engagement. At the same time, it is leaning into writing more monographs accessible to today's and tomorrow's readers.
- **Solve Gaps and Share:** The expeditionary history team, working with ASCC and deployed warfighting historians, certify the record of Army operations is complete.
- **Public Trust:** Accurate, authoritative, and credible data provide the ability to reconstruct decisions, defend actions, and shape institutional identity.

Although we may be feeling overwhelmed by change, the 1946 War Department reorganization reminds us that reform is not rupture—it is continuity with purpose. By revisiting this pivotal moment, we gain not only historical insight but strategic perspective.

As we navigate the complexities of the present, the historian's work becomes a guidepost. It tells us that change, to be enduring, must be rooted in memory, and memory, to be useful, must be cultivated actively—not just preserved.



Notes

1. See James E. Hewes Jr., *From Root to McNamara: Army Organization and Administration 1900–1963*, Special Studies Series (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1975).

2. "Baldrige by Sector: Nonprofit," NIST Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 3 Nov 2023, <https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/self-assessing/baldrige-sector/nonprofitgovernment>.