

The US Army's Postwar Recoveries

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ABSTRACT: The US Army's typical postwar recovery process, which can last a decade, is characterized by increased strategic commitments, insufficient resources, and conflicting priorities. The most traumatic aspect of recovery, personnel turbulence, often manifests in the discharge of experienced leaders and technicians, generational discord, tension between policymakers and commanders in the field, insufficient maintenance, inadequate training, and social problems. As past examples illustrate, future success depends on how well soldiers today adapt to an austere postwar environment.

“What all Army operations will have in common is a need for innovative and adaptive leaders and cohesive teams that thrive in conditions of complexity and uncertainty.”¹

As the US Army transitions from full engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan to the uncertain and complex operational environment predicted by Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) planners, it must again undertake the historic process of military recovery. If the previous two centuries of Army history are any guide, this process will probably take almost a decade. And in the service's long institutional memory, the years after demobilization are always dark ages—long stretches of austerity, hollow forces, internal tensions, and public hostility. Despite their grim reputation, periods of recovery have often served to inform discussions about current military issues.

During the revolution in military affairs debate, analysts studied the two decades between the World Wars for insights on their own era's policies, doctrines, and technologies.² In the 1990s, the broken Army of the post-Vietnam era was romanticized as the incubator of the “prodigal soldiers” who had led it to victory in Desert Storm. A few years later that same Army was cited as a warning of the dangers of military overextension in Iraq and Afghanistan.³ Perhaps because soldiers have served as sources of inspiration, literature on the Army's experiences after every war is extensive; however, there is very little analysis of postwar recovery as a distinct military phenomenon. This comparative study of the Army's

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1 US Department of the Army, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World, 2020–2040*, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Fort Eustis, VA: Headquarters, TRADOC, 2014), 15.

2 Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Military-Technical Revolution: A Preliminary Assessment* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002); and Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

3 James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers: How the Generation of Officers Born of Vietnam Revolutionized the American Style of War* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1995); and Mark Thompson, “America's Broken-Down Army,” *Time*, April 5, 2007.

recoveries from past wars illuminates some of the current and future problems likely to be faced even though it provides no easy solutions.

The Complexity of Recovery

For the last decade, the US Army's vision statements have defined the impending environment as complex and uncertain with adaptation and innovation as crucial abilities for professional soldiers. Today's planners, who are experts in current military affairs, have the daunting task of preserving the Army's present capabilities while simultaneously anticipating future contingencies. Planners make both immediate and imminent decisions on everything from spare parts to schools and post exchanges to personnel. They not only need to identify, retain, and place the next war's William T. Shermans and George C. Marshalls but also to purge today's Beetle Baileys. They must concurrently fulfill existing missions and plan for the near and long-terms. And they must do so under conditions of austerity that include restricted budgets, personnel cuts, and a civil-military atmosphere too often characterized by miscommunication and mistrust—just as they have in the past. In this unstable environment, the past can be both a guide and a trap, a postwar invitation to seize a few examples of strategic success—the blitzkrieg, amphibious war, AirLand Battle—as the road map to a future D-Day or Operation Desert Storm. The benefits of such an approach, perhaps more inspirational than practical, must be balanced by studying the unified themes, the problems, and the shared experiences of the Army's postwar recoveries as provided in this article.

The US Army is, was, and will always be a hierarchical, top-down organization overseen by a federal agency. The inevitable consequence is a focus on the study of postwar recovery based on Washington-mandated institutional and organizational changes. Although much insight can be gained by studying postwar legislation or the roles of key individuals and bureaucracies, this approach can frame the ensuing postwar era's problems and solutions as largely a matter of institutional change. Thus, the Army's recovery from the Spanish-American War is restricted to the Root reforms, World War II (WW II) to the national security legislation of 1947 and 1949, Korea by Eisenhower's New Look, and Vietnam by Barry Goldwater and Bill Nichols's legislation.

Aside from missing many other significant changes, this approach contains an inherently false assumption that recovery programs generated by the Pentagon army are matched by changing conditions in the field army. To illustrate, compare the soaring rhetoric from the Pentagon during Chief of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor's 1956 pentomic initiative with the reports from battalion-level field units that were tasked with its implementation.⁴ From Washington, the staff proclaimed an Army for the atomic era, but from the perspective of Fort Lewis's harassed battalions, the effort produced a cascade of woes, from malassigned personnel, constantly changing tables of organization and equipment,

4 In an effort to make the US Army relevant for the atomic era, Taylor embraced experimental technologies, imposed a doctrine of limited tactical warfare on its schools, and created pentomic divisions that replaced century-old regiments with *battle groups*, see Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1986); and Brian McAllister Linn, *Elvis's Army: Cold War GIs and the Atomic Battlefield* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

administrative disorder, and missing or damaged equipment to a complete shutdown of training.⁵

Based on the last century or so of the Army's postwar recovery process, today's planners can anticipate some familiar problems. First, after every conflict, the US Army not only *recovers* most of its prewar responsibilities but also inherits some new ones. The post-Civil War force not only assumed its predecessor's frontier and harbor defense missions but also the onerous task of Reconstruction. After defeating Spain in 1898, the Army still had to protect the homeland by constructing and manning a complex harbor fortification system and shielding overseas territories from Great Power rivals. In 1907, defending the Philippines alone required almost a quarter of all Army personnel. The post-World War I (WW I) force maintained its predecessor's overseas and continental defense commitments and also the 1920 National Defense Act's mandate to administer, equip, and train a million-man mobilization force. The post-WW II Army continued the service's historic continental defense obligation augmented by new responsibilities for civil and air defense and also expanded its international role from Berlin to Tokyo.

The rapid emergence of the Communist Soviet threat increased international deployments and led to the momentous and unprecedented decision to authorize peacetime conscription. In 1950, this recovering Army was thrown into combat in Korea. It emerged from that conflict with expanding military obligations—including the requirement to provide permanent combat-ready forces in Asia and Europe, a continental air defense program, overseas military assistance, a strategic rapid deployment force, and a general reserve. The post-Vietnam recovery may, in retrospect, appear an exception to the historic pattern of increasing commitments, but a closer examination of that hollow force and its extensive missions, most notably stopping a resurgent Warsaw Pact, reveals the persistent pattern of postwar overstretch. During the 10-year recovery period of the Gulf War, the US Army was deployed in a series of frantic and often ambiguous missions in the Balkans, Somalia, Haiti, and numerous other places as Defense Secretary Les Aspin Jr. boasted he could simultaneously restructure the nation's armed forces and do more with less.

Past experience indicates today's recovering Army will have little chance to revive before receiving new and burdensome missions—just as Supreme Allied Commander Europe General John R. Galvin warned his fellow officers of the tendency to “invent for ourselves a comfortable vision of war” and to prepare for “a combat environment that is consistent and predictable” against “an enemy who looks like us and acts like us.”⁶ Such comfortable visions are often assumed to be essentially conservative, leading to the cliché that peacetime armies are always preparing to fight the last war. At its worst, this mentality includes efforts to reestablish prewar certainties and customs with spit-and-polish routines that conjure images of the post-WW I Army's fixation with polo.

5 On the problems caused by the ‘pentomicization’ of the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, see After Action Report (ROCID) File, 4th Infantry Division, Box 56, Entry NC3-38-81-4, Record Group 338, National Archives, College Park, MD.

6 John R. Galvin, “Uncomfortable Wars: Towards a New Paradigm,” *Parameters* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 2; and Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

The vision, however, can sometimes cut free from the past and thrust the Army into the future. As with reactions to traditional efforts, the verdict on these radical postwar transformations is mixed—for example, both the post-Spanish-American War and the post-Korean War forces underwent radical reorganization programs, but only the first initiative was successful.

Whether reactionary or revolutionary, the real danger of falling for a comfortable vision of war is that the Army will invest its meager resources in missions that prove irrelevant to the future requirements of the United States. To avoid obsolescence, planners must have a clear-eyed, realistic appraisal of future needs and defend it from all budget-chasing bids to resolve each crisis.

Personnel Turbulence and Recovery

Beyond the lack of foreknowledge about the military environment, the most consistent and traumatic problem in the US Army's recovery experience has been prolonged personnel turbulence. In some cases the government has matched the services' expanded postwar strategic commitments with increased manpower billets, at least on paper, but then failed to fund them. Following the Civil War, Congress tripled the regular Army's prewar size; after the Spanish-American War of 1898 it quadrupled. In both cases legislators soon slashed military budgets, hollowing the organization. After WW I, Congress approved a standing army of 280,000 soldiers as well as a substantial increase in reserves. But in the next decade, the number of soldiers hovered between 130,000 and 138,000 troops. When war finally broke out in Europe in 1939, there were only 188,000 active duty soldiers; after WW II, 1.6 million. Yet, neither the president nor Congress provided sufficient funding. In June 1950, soldiers totaled some 600,000, most of whom were stationed in Europe or the United States not in Japan or Korea. In the six years after the Korean War armistice, President Eisenhower and Congress cut Army personnel from 1.54 million to 862,000; six years after withdrawing from Vietnam, from 1.12 million to 775,000.

The tendency of civilian leadership to impose reductions in force in a capricious, arbitrary, and spontaneous manner compounds this problem. The human effects have often been calamitous. What appears to outsiders as small cuts in surplus personnel actually entails firing or reducing the rank of hundreds of dedicated professionals who not only experience a potentially significant loss of retirement benefits but also general demoralization as younger officers and specialists exit their service.

Facing the inevitable discrepancy between changing missions and having sufficient personnel to accomplish them, the Army's postwar leadership has made hard decisions and set clear priorities. Even though most of their predecessors' choices were later vindicated by the test of war, today's strategic planners should not be blind to the risks that were accepted. After the end of the Philippine war in 1902, Secretary of War Elihu Root chose to sacrifice the Continental Army's readiness to his educational and organizational reforms and the buildup of Pacific defenses. As a result, many stateside combat arms regiments had only a third of their officers and enlisted personnel in 1907 when Chief of

Staff Major General James Franklin Bell contrasted the current force with the long-serving, well-trained, proud force that had gone to war in 1898. Noting the shortfalls in recruiting, the skeletonized units, the inexperienced officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and the widespread demoralization, Bell, not being overly pessimistic, concluded that most officers believed “conditions are growing steadily worse.”⁷ Four years later, the First Field Army in Texas revealed the service could mobilize barely half a division. Chief of Staff Leonard Wood bluntly informed Congress that the service was unprepared to fight any comparable opponent and published an article with the chilling title of “Why We Have No Army.”⁸

The choices Bell and Wood faced may have reflected the Root era’s conflicting priorities, but they were not atypically complex. After the WW I demobilization, Chief of Staff John J. Pershing and his successors had to resolve other no less difficult questions stemming from the 1920 National Defense Act: Should the focus be on creating a small, but efficient rapid-reaction force? Should the Army commit its troops to defend the overseas territories and the nation’s coasts from attack? Should investments be made in promising technologies such as the airplane or tank? Should combat units be skeletonized so regular Army cadres could train a large citizen-soldier reserve and officers could be educated in the responsibilities of higher command? Ultimately, the Army focused on the last mission while trying to fulfill the others to the best of its ability. In making these choices, the Army’s leaders abandoned any realistic hope of defending the Philippines or modernizing their service’s equipment. They gambled that if correctly mobilized, American industry would provide the tools and its citizens the soldiers for war. In retrospect, they deserve much credit for laying the foundations for victory, but they perhaps condemned the Army to wage an unimaginative, resource-intensive, brute-force land war against the Axis powers.⁹ An even more problematic decision, Maxwell Taylor’s pentomic experiment may have inhibited both the conventional and counterinsurgency skills needed in South Vietnam a decade later.

The Recovering Army’s Generation Gap

Personnel turbulence has a devastating effect on the recovering Army’s officers that inevitably leaves the postwar officer corps unbalanced with too many captains and too few colonels for peacetime needs, an excess of infantry officers and insufficient aviators, or as happened after WW II, a surplus of conventional warfare experts and virtually no one qualified in atomic weapons. Besides grade or specialty imbalances, every recovering army had to deal with internal generational divisions between prewar, wartime, and postwar officers as deep as the current tensions between Baby Boomers, Xers, and Millennials. No doubt

7 J. Franklin Bell, “The Army as a Life Occupation for Enlisted Men,” September 1, 1907, in Appendix B, *War Department, U.S.A., Annual Reports, 1907*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 1907), 80; and Johnson Hagood, Circular Relative to Pay of Officers and Enlisted Men of the Army (Washington, DC: War Department, Adjutant-General’s Office, 1907).

8 George Kibbe Turner, “Why We Have No Army: An Interview with General Leonard Wood,” *McClure’s Magazine* 38 (November 1911–April 1912): 677–83.

9 John Ellis, *Brute Force: Allied Strategy and Tactics in the Second World War* (New York: Viking, 1990); and Phillips Payson O’Brien, *How the War was Won: Air-Sea Power and Allied Victory in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Generation Z will bring its own attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses. Optimistic planners assume each new generation will bring desperately needed technical skills, but hardheaded logisticians respond that a teenager's skills in repairing a jalopy or operating a computer do not mean he can fix a tank or maintain a battalion communication net. As one exasperated officer explained during the height of the atomic battlefield experiment in the 1950s, "The accuracy of our weapons is so far superior to the accuracy of the persons manning them as to be ridiculous."¹⁰

The postwar "military generation gap" can be quickly summarized. The survivors from the prewar Old Army endured a long and slow peacetime promotion process with command, staff, and school assignments that prepared them for their wartime responsibilities. They tend to believe their subordinates require indoctrination in their service's historic traditions and standards. Meanwhile, those commissioned during the most recent war feel, with some justification, that their experience provides at least equal qualifications, particularly over those Old Army-types whose "good wars" were fought back in the rear. One Philippine war veteran recalled the struggle between his cohort and the prewar "old irreconcilables" as "holding fast to old ideas of organization and training, or better, the almost total lack of both."¹¹ In 1930, a Command and General Staff College (CGSC) student remembered those commissioned during WW I as "of the opinion that they were about as good as a great number of their superiors. Consequently, instruction for them was very hard."¹²

The young officers who proved successful in WW II were also confident of their abilities and suspicious of those trying to restore prewar traditions. Michael S. Davison, who graduated from West Point in 1939 and was a lieutenant colonel by the war's end, recalled his time at CGSC in 1946: "There wasn't much those instructors could tell us. Or, at least we didn't think they could."¹³ Another war-tested lieutenant colonel, commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1941, recalled his outrage when a "pompous idiot of a colonel" with "one row of ribbons"—indicating both the colonel's prewar longevity and stateside posting—told a room full of veterans they lacked the maturity to succeed in a peacetime army.¹⁴

Newcomers who bring their own assumptions and values compound the recovering Army's generational divisions. To quote one disenchanted captain in the post-Korea Army, junior officers often translate what seniors decree as a return to their fondly held Old Army's standards as "post beautification, all manner of special duty, post details, [and] demonstrations, all of which seem to have a higher priority than

10 E. B. Crabbill "A Combat Soldier Sounds Off," *Harper's* 216 (April 1958): 19. On more recent generational divisions, see Leonard Wong, *Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2000).

11 "One Soldier's Journey," manuscript, p. 91, George van Horn Moseley Papers, Box 1, Hoover Institute Archives.

12 Hugh C. Gilchrist, *The Responsibility of Senior Officers in Instructing Junior Officers in the Preparation of Their Future Career as an Officer of the Army*, Individual Research Paper #90 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff School, 1930), Combined Arms Research Library.

13 "Michael S. Davison Oral History," manuscript, 1976, vol. 1, p. 48, 47919931, Michael S. Davison Papers, 1925–1976, Ridgway Hall, US Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC).

14 "William R. Desobry Oral History," manuscript, 1977, vol. 1, p. 45, 47058203, William R. Desobry Papers, 1918–1977, Ridgway Hall, AHEC.

training.”¹⁵ These generational fissures have been aggravated when senior officers’ wartime experiences have not immediately produced expertise in postwar missions. One lieutenant serving in a tank battalion in the mid-1950s remembered his superiors as mediocrities: “Many had entered WW II as teenagers. A lot of them had gone to OCS. . . . They didn’t receive adequate training, or understand what it meant to be a company commander . . . for the most part, the lieutenants carried the load.”¹⁶ Today’s senior officers, who often boast of the Army’s current depth of proven combat leadership, would do well to remember the captains in the 1970s who complained of commanders who “couldn’t get out of the jungles of Vietnam” when the time came to wage mechanized warfare in Europe.

Exacerbating these differences in generational attitudes, every recovering army incorporates what earlier officers termed “the hump”—a large cohort of equivalent rank and age who block the peacetime promotion ladder. The bigger the war, the larger the “hump.” A cohort of Civil War veterans dominated the Army’s upper ranks into the twentieth century, and those who were junior officers in Cuba and the Philippines still numbered among the generals of WW II. The post-WW I hump was notorious for keeping Dwight D. Eisenhower a major for 16 years. For WW II and Korea veterans of the 1950s, the time-in-grade from captain to major more than doubled within a few years. And unlike Ike, most Army officers after WW II were, and continue to be, unwilling to remain stuck in grade for over a decade. The goal of the post-Korean War era was to keep half its Reserve Officers’ Training Corps graduates, but it retained only 10 percent in fiscal year 1956. Worse, almost a quarter of US Military Academy graduates resigned within five years of commissioning. A US Army War College study confirmed what many both inside and outside the service already knew: “The retention of junior officers is the key to the solution of the most vital long-range personnel problem now facing the Army.”¹⁷

Rebuilding the Enlisted Ranks

Problems resulting from officer turbulence in a recovering army are compounded by the upheaval in enlisted ranks. At the end of every war from the Philippines to Korea, observers noted a rapid decline in both the quantity and the quality of soldiers. In 1904, for example, the 70,000-man Army lost most of the 30,000 veterans who had enlisted between 1898 and 1901 for the Spanish-American and Philippine wars. The chief of staff returned from an inspection convinced that too many recruits were underage “weaklings” and that “evidently the minimums of the standards for admission to the army had been closely observed, if not

15 John M. Tatum, “Should Aggressor, the Training Aid System, Be Changed to Improve Tactical Training at Small Unit Level?” (Infantry Officers Advanced Course Student Paper, US Army Infantry School, 1956–57), Maneuver Center of Excellence HQ, Donovan Research Library.

16 “Louis C. Wagner, Jr., Oral History,” manuscript, 1996, vol. 1, p. 21, 47137923, Louis C. Wagner Papers, 1932–1996, Ridgway Hall, AHEC.

17 Max L. Pitney, “The Retention of Junior Officers” (Army War College Student Research Paper, March 19, 1959), AHEC. For another view, see J. Robert Moskin, “Our Military Manpower Scandal,” *Look* 22 (March 18, 1958): 27–33.

trespassed on in the enlistment of these unsatisfactory men.”¹⁸ Moreover, poor pay and worse living conditions convinced many to leave, stripping the Army of experienced enlisted leaders and skilled technicians. The same problems appeared after WW I. Less than two years after the Armistice, an officer reported a popular sentiment among veterans was “I am through with the Army.” To persuade soldiers to reenlist, the 1920s army repackaged itself less as a combat force than as a way for young men to achieve “education, vocation and Americanization.”¹⁹ Three years after the end of WW II, the Army estimated it would have to discharge two-thirds of its enlisted strength within 18 months and that less than a fifth of these would reenlist. To make matters worse, enlistees represented the bottom of the manpower barrel. In one group of replacements sent to the occupation forces in Japan, 98 percent were in the lowest acceptable mental category.²⁰

The perception that standards have declined for incoming personnel has often extended to career enlisted personnel. Historically, the postwar noncommissioned officer cadre contained not only a large number of proven squad leaders and technicians, but also soldiers whose rapid rise through the enlisted grades was due more to vacancies in their unit than to individuals’ technical skills or leadership. By the end of war, some soldiers achieved ranks and benefits far exceeding what their qualifications would fetch in the civilian world; however, they soon discovered that the postwar Army expected far more of them than the wartime force did. Likewise, requirements kept increasing, particularly for paperwork. In the post-WW I Army, lifetime privates were often illiterate, and sergeants were expected to read at the third-grade level. In the post-WW II Army, over a third of the sergeants lacked an eighth-grade education. In 1957—four years after the end of the Korean War—41,500 NCOs (40 percent) scored in mental Category 4, designating illiteracy or cognitive impairment. By expending enormous time and resources, the US Army steadily raised both standards and opportunities for its sergeants, but the qualitative recovery of the NCO corps extended into the 1960s.²¹ A similar extended effort was required in the post-Vietnam era to restore the NCO corps.

The personnel turbulence inherent in all recovering armies often suggests a postwar force traumatized by indiscipline, demoralization, substance abuse, and a variety of other social problems that reflect what Homer noted in the *Iliad*: some warriors simply cannot adjust to peace. The turbulence also reflects long-standing public concern that military service corrupts America’s young men and women. The US Army may be more successful than most in helping members adjust to peacetime, but it has suffered from highly publicized instances of misconduct by a few individuals—pacification operations in the Philippines, post-World War

18 “Report of the Chief of Staff,” in *Annual Reports of the War Department*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1904): 226. On the post-1898 Army’s problems, see Brian McAllister Linn, *Guardians of Empire: The U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 55–67.

19 Gerald Egan, “The Recruiting Problem,” *Infantry Journal* 17, no. 3 (September 1920): 214–18.

20 HQ, 8th Army Annual Report 1949, Box 273, Entry 1A1, Record Group 550, National Archives, College Park, MD; and *A Study of Desertion* [1920], Ridgway Hall, AHEC.

21 Linn, *Elvis’s Army*, 159–62; and John T. English, “Military Personnel Management” (lecture, Army War College, Carlisle, PA, February 27, 1957), AHEC.

and Korean War Occupation black markets, the Aberdeen Scandal—that threatened the reputation of all who served.

Social, Training, and Maintenance Problems

One recovering-army problem that commands a disproportionate degree of public interest is substance abuse. In the Spanish-American War, reformers managed to ban the sale of beer at post canteens; by WW I, the Army was forced to accept prohibition. The result was a dramatic and destructive increase in alcohol-fueled crime and demoralization. Recent scholarship has invalidated the old shibboleth that opiate addiction was “the army disease” among Civil War veterans and also the myth of Vietnam’s “addicted army.”²² In many cases, references to historic drug use in the armed forces reflected changes to public, medical, and legal standards that reclassified substances once prescribed for medical treatment as illegal. The evidence itself is ambiguous. Court martial statistics suggest minimal drug use in the post-WW I Army while anecdotal evidence indicates in some places, such as Panama, usage was relatively common. In post-WW II Japan, narcotics became a significant problem. Reports of soldier-addicts in the Korean War prompted a host of sensational media exposés and a flurry of federal commissions, which soon revealed military drug use was lower than civilian usage. In the post-Korean War period, the number of soldiers arrested for narcotics offenses was relatively small, but soldiers such as Elvis Presley used amphetamines to boost energy or to lose weight. Although statistical evidence indicates the use of illicit drugs among today’s soldiers is far less than among civilians, in 2009 military doctors issued almost four million prescriptions for pain relievers, some of which have proven to be physically or psychologically addictive.²³

A recovering army’s personnel turbulence plays havoc with maintenance and training. Every postwar army inherits mountains of wartime equipment, often designed for specific tactical situations or terrain, and often equally damaged by climate, combat, overuse, or negligence. The technician-soldiers capable of repairing and maintaining this specialized arsenal are likely to leave the service for civilian occupations, compelling the postwar army to recruit, train, and retain a host of new technicians as repairmen.

Between Congressional parsimony and its own uncertainty about which equipment can be used for the next war, the recovering army is always a war-surplus army. During the Spanish-American War, soldiers fought with black-powder rifles three decades old and wore blue wool uniforms possibly dating from the Civil War. A decade after

22 Jonathan Lewy, “The Army Disease: Drug Addiction and the Civil War,” *War in History* 21, no. 1 (January 2014): 102–119, doi:10.1177/0968344513504724; Jeremy Kuzmarov, *The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); and Anni Baker, “The Abolition of the U.S. Army Canteen,” *Journal of Military History* 80, no. 3 (July 2016): 697–724.

23 “Drug Facts: Substance Abuse in the Military,” National Institute on Drug Abuse, March 2013, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/substance-abuse-in-military>; Katherine J. Freydl, *The Drug Wars in America, 1940–1973* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 77–88; Peter Guralnick, *Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1999), 21, 50; and Donald B. Peterson, “Comments on Drug Addiction,” *Medical Bulletin of the U.S. Army Far East* 1, no. 12 (November–December 1953): 204–209. Indicative of the confusion that still exists, a medical doctor might restrict “narcotic” to opiates while a police officer might apply it to any controlled substance, including amphetamines and marijuana.

the end of WW I, soldiers were still wearing wartime uniforms, living in wartime barracks, using wartime equipment, and sometimes eating wartime rations. Tank crews towed their antiquated, malfunctioning war-surplus vehicles into formation for inspections. Three decades later, their successors—also lacking working engines—added a flourish by hand-cranking their tank's gun barrels to salute the passing brass. If today's company-grade officer must spend most of his day scrounging parts and inventorying matériel, at least he can take pride in preserving this recovering army tradition that dates back two centuries.

Adapting to Recovery

With history as a guide, what can the US Army, and those who study it, anticipate during its next transition from a postwar military force to a peacetime force preparing to fight the next war? The recovery period between wartime and a fully recovered peacetime force will be long-lasting, perhaps a decade. The recovery will be interrupted by recurring prewar missions and by new and unforeseen military commitments. The recovery era requires carefully selecting soldiers for the future Army. And, recovery imposes its own restrictions.

For soldiers in the recovering army, the strategic environment is always in a state of flux: former enemies often become allies and vice versa, low-level regional threats may erupt as clear and present dangers and then subside to minor annoyances, and new technologies may resolve an immediate problem while creating greater ones for the future. In contrast, the recovering army can be sure of certain constants—resources will never match requirements, tension will be inherent between field forces and the Pentagon, and readiness will often come at the cost of future capabilities.

Selecting soldiers during the recovery era is not only a question of integrating and assimilating those with experience in the wartime force but also about acquiring new talent able to adapt to future threats and environments. Moreover, the immediate postwar period may appear an ideal time to restore prewar standards, focus on readiness, inaugurate long-delayed organizational reforms, impose prewar standards, revise doctrine for recent lessons, upgrade matériel, and otherwise undo the damage of war. The implementation of Washington's mandated organizational, doctrinal, personnel, and other reforms; however, will be delayed by new missions, hamstrung by drastically reduced budgets, sabotaged by personnel turbulence, or beset by any combination of the problems the Army encountered in past recovery efforts.

Those serving in today's armed forces can take some satisfaction in knowing their service has a history of triumphing over adversity and emerging stronger at the end; for good reason, these postwar recovery eras have been associated in the service's memory with hardship, austerity, and sacrifice. For the future envisioned in the Army Operation Concept, creating leaders "able to adapt and innovate for the future" may be the greatest contribution of, and greatest challenge for, today's recovering Army.