

# Military Reform of an Earlier Era

reviewed by Capt Bruce I. Gudmundsson, USMCR

**TO CHANGE AN ARMY: General Sir John Burnett-Stuart and British Armored Doctrine 1927-1938.** By Harold R. Winton. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 1988, 360 pp., \$29.95. (Member \$26.95)

On the top floor of the gothic tower that served my college as its central library was a perfectly ordinary room made extraordinary by the books it housed on the subject of British military history. The most fascinating part of this collection was that which dealt with the mechanization debate of the 1920s and 1930s. Half-century-old issues of the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* and the *Army Quarterly*, leavened generously with the works of Capt Basil Henry Liddell Hart and Gen John Frederick Charles Fuller, told the story of a British Army torn between conflicting visions. Not only did the British Army of the interwar period have to deal with the ever-present need to police a farflung empire with detached battalions, which conflicted with the requirement to prepare a six or seven division expeditionary force for possible employment in Europe, it also served as the arena for a drawn out conflict between the advocates of armored warfare and those who preferred an army powered by the muscles of men and horses.

This collection that gave me so much pleasure is gone now, banished by my book-rich but space-poor university to an underground book depository. Never again will procrastinating undergraduates be able to spend a few

happy hours with the books that record the arguments and counterarguments of the 20-year-long mechanization debate. All, however, is not lost. The pleasure to be experienced learning about this period, as well as the insights into the nature of military organizations that can be gained from studying it, are now available in the form of a first-class history entitled *To Change an Army: General Sir John Burnett-Stuart and British Armored Doctrine 1927-1938*.

Partially disguised as a biography of a relatively obscure peacetime general, *To Change an Army* is, in fact, the most complete, best balanced, and most thoroughly researched book on the subject of the British mechanization debate of the interwar period available. The author, LtCol Harold R. Winton, USA, began the project that became *To Change an Army* while a graduate student under the guidance of the distinguished military historian Peter Paret and has brought to work all the rigor of the professional academician. As a result, his narrative is based not only on the published literature on the subject, which is voluminous, but also on the private papers of the principal characters. The style in which the book is written, however, is far from the dry, pseudoscientific banter favored by many academic historians. *To Change an Army* is not only written to be read in a comfortable chair by the fire (or on a camp stool in front of a general-purpose tent), it is so organized that those who wish a general overview of the period can get it

by reading only the first two chapters, while readers who want to sink their teeth into the subject will have plenty to chew on.

While written from the point of view of an Army officer deeply engaged in the remaking of that institution (LtCol Winton is currently serving as deputy director of the School for Advanced Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth), *To Change an Army* contains insights that are of great value to Marines. As the "force in readiness" of a nation that depended primarily on seapower to defend its interests, the British Army of the 1920s and 1930s had a mission very similar to that of the Marine Corps of today. Our military culture, moreover, is remarkably like that of the British Army of the interwar period. We, too, are in the midst of a debate about doctrine and organization that mirrors that described in *To Change an Army*.

Despite the fact that *To Change an Army* was written with a view to educating Americans about the nature of military reform, readers who expect Winton to provide them with a formula for successful change will be disappointed. The book is a case study of how a military force evolved, one that will provide many opportunities for comparison with both current situations (i.e., the Army and the Marine Corps) and with other cases (e.g., the failure of the French Army of the same period to modernize as described in Robert Doughty's *Seeds of Disaster*). It does not, however, set forth a "general theory" of military reform. US&MC

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## A Blueprint for Vietnam

reviewed by Capt Louis D. Caporale, Jr.

**THE KOREAN WAR.** By Max Hastings. Simon & Shuster, NY, 1987, 389 pp., \$22.95. (Member \$20.65)

Until recently, the American public, as well as most American military historians, had little interest in the "forgotten" Asian war. Yet from 1950-1953, U.S. forces suffered approximately 142,000 casualties—only slightly less than the number of Americans lost in the 10-year struggle in Vietnam. The Korean War also brought the U.S.

military to the brink of using nuclear weapons as military leaders planned for the possible use of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons against both the North Koreans and the Chinese. Max Hastings reveals these and many other interesting details in his latest work, *The Korean War*.

This easy-to-read book deals not only with the political and military aspects of the Korean War but also with the human aspects as well. The skill and insight that have made Hastings' other works notable successes are

present here to bring life to this neglected chapter of U.S. military history. Using an extensive bibliography and hundreds of personal interviews from soldiers of both Communist and United Nations Forces, Hastings develops credibility that is difficult to refute. He is most objective in his assessments of the inconsistencies in U.S. foreign policy and the dismal performance of the United Nations forces in Korea.

This book could easily have been titled *A Blueprint for Vietnam* since Hastings suggests so many parallels between the two wars. Korea, like Vietnam, was a war in which there was no clearcut military strategy. It was also a war in which the United States experi-