

Multidimensional Approach to Teaching Military History in the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik

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Abstract

This article focuses on describing and providing a basic overview of approaches to teaching military history at the Armed Forces Academy. Based on a content analysis of the curriculum and literature devoted to history, authors offer insight into selected approaches to teaching historical subjects. They describe three fundamental theoretical approaches through which history can be taught. They examine the differences between these approaches as well as their potential integration, which may help expand students' ability to understand the various stages of the historical development of warfare. Authors analyze selected theoretical approaches, namely the chronological approach, the four generations of warfare approach, and the civilization waves approach. They outline their main characteristics and attributes. By combining these approaches in teaching, it is possible to help students develop a more comprehensive understanding of historical development within the process of training a professional soldier.

KEY WORDS: *military education, history, generations of war, civilisations waves.*

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1. Introduction

The contemporary world is changing very rapidly, often in dramatic ways. The ability of states to respond to threats depends on many factors. One of these is the preparedness of the armed forces, particularly their personnel. The quality of training is therefore considered one of the key factors. Current social contexts and the resulting societal problems and especially issues of security and peace underscore the need for the development of military science, which undoubtedly incorporates questions related to sociology, ethics, economics, and, not least, history.

For this reason, it is important to take into account the forms of training provided to military personnel prepared in specialized institutions. The primary providers of such education are military schools established at various levels for this purpose [1]. In the Slovak Republic, this role is fulfilled by the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik.

The main objective in development and building the resilience of the Slovak Armed Forces is, through targeted and systematic education, to increase the level of the historical context understanding of the warfare development as a positive value shaping the necessary competencies and qualities of current and future professional soldiers.

We proceed from the idea that qualitative indicators of human resources include the level of education and military skills, the managerial and leadership abilities of the officer corps, motivations for pursuing a military career, the level of discipline, and other characteristics of a social nature [2].

The conceptual component of combat potential represents a foundation expressing the intellectual capacity of military personnel to understand the laws of armed conflicts, as well as the nature of planning and conducting military operations in an organized manner. It is applied not only in the activities of military personnel at the strategic level of command, but across the entire spectrum of command and staff functions at all levels of command. Its importance stems from the recognition that success in contemporary military operations requires not only sophisticated material equipment of operating units, but also "literate military personnel" capable of creative thinking, even under extreme conditions in a dynamically changing operational environment. The conceptual element also plays an important role in preserving and developing collective memory, which reflects accumulated historical experience in the use of armed forces and significantly contributes to improving existing operational procedures and practices.

The conceptual component provides commanders with the ability to understand the context in which they make decisions and serves as a foundation for the application of creativity, ingenuity, and initiative to ensure success in complex situations [2].

Since military science deals with armed conflicts, it must examine their causes, course, and consequences, all of which have a very broad scope within human society. For this reason, knowledge of history is essential for military personnel.

The aforementioned conceptual component enables commanders to understand the context in which they make decisions and serves as a basis for applying creativity, ingenuity, and initiative to ensure success in complex situations. Among its fundamental elements are military-strategic principles. The content of these principles is derived from historical experience gained from successful wars, and their appropriate application can significantly and positively influence the outcome of an armed conflict.

Military theorists have been concerned with uncovering the laws of warfare for more than two thousand years, as evidenced by the works of classical military strategists, from the Chinese theorist Sun Tzu, through Niccolò Machiavelli, to Antoine-Henri Jomini or Carl von Clausewitz. Here is the rational justification for military history as the basis of military education – its preponderant practical value basis in the training and mental development of a soldier [3].

Similarly, we can refer to the statement of Master Sun Tzu: “The art of war is the most important art for the state. It determines life and death, survival or destruction. It is therefore essential to cultivate and study it” [4].

2. Education in History at the Armed Force Academy

The set of general education and specialized subjects at the Armed Forces Academy includes subjects devoted to history. These include the subject *History of Military Art*, which is compulsory for all study programs. Another subject is *History of Military Science and Technology*, which forms part of the *Security and Defence of the State* study program. These subjects aim to explain the laws and patterns governing the development of warfare and armed conflict. They also provide insight into the evolution of tactics as well as operational and strategic art. In this context, they incorporate an overview of the development of military technology and its use on past battlefields. Students thus gain knowledge not only about wars themselves, but also about their causes and consequences. At the same time, they acquire an understanding of the development of tactics and strategy in relation to societal and technological progress in specific historical periods.

In the process of training military personnel, several theoretical approaches or concepts can be applied in teaching military history: the chronological approach, the theory of civilization waves, and the theory of generations of warfare. Naturally, there are more theoretical approaches, but these appear to be the most suitable for didactic practice.

2.1 The Chronological Approach

History as a discipline is not a monolithic complex. For technical and practical reasons, it is divided into individual historical disciplines based on the following criteria:

- Spatial: dividing history into world and regional history, and into the histories of individual states and regions.
- Thematic: according to content focus, such as political, economic, social, cultural, and military history.
- Chronological: according to a time axis, where the continuous historical process is divided into smaller time periods [5].

For this reason, the chronological approach is the most commonly used theoretical approach in teaching military history. Its essence is to familiarize students - future officers with historical events and the development of warfare within an established periodization of history.

Secondary school history textbooks [6–10] most frequently use the chronological approach, typically with clearly separated segments for regional and national topics. Military history teaching at the Armed Forces Academy builds on this foundation, adding areas specifically related to the development of warfare. Thus, the use of the chronological approach ensures continuity with the teaching of history at Slovak secondary schools.

This approach guarantees the acquisition of fundamental knowledge about the nature of wars and warfare across historical periods from the earliest ancient civilizations, through the Middle Ages, to the modern era.

A weakness of this approach may be a certain degree of relativization, as warfare has evolved and changed its character, creating a need for typologies of wars that the chronological approach alone cannot provide. All military forces are a product of numerous circumstances and influences. Some of them are social or economic, religious, and technological [11]. We must therefore agree with the idea put forward by Chaliand, that difficult and complex though it may be, it is important to develop a typology of wars, starting from the observation that there have been many different concepts of warfare and its nature in history. If we exclude the wars of primitive societies, which were determined by subsistence and demography and were probably not very costly in lives (because of concern for survival), we can try and sketch out a loose typology of wars, as follows: Ritualized wars, Wars, with limited objectives, Wars of conquest, Mass wars and Wars without quarter [12].

Of course, there are other typologies of dividing historical conflicts from authors such as: Tom Wintringham [13], Michael Howard [14], or William Lind [15–17] and others.

2.2 The Four Generations of Warfare Approach (4 GW)

One of the specialized subjects taught at the Armed Forces Academy is military tactics, supported by a solid base of textbooks. The authors of widely used textbook [18] briefly mention the typological division of wars based on the theory of four generations of warfare by William S. Lind. This represents one of the first applications of this theoretical approach in teaching military history at the Academy, and it provides scope for further development and study within the Slovak Armed Forces.

To ensure interdisciplinary continuity, this theoretical approach is also applied in teaching the history of military art. While the subject *Military Tactics* focuses on current attributes of warfare, *History of Military Art* expands knowledge about the historical development of tactics and military art.

The author of the theory of generations of war is William S. Lind. His study, "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," [15] written in collaboration with four U.S. Army and Marine Corps officers, was first published in the Marine Corps Gazette in October 1989. Later studies [16] and publications [17] have expanded on the theory.

Generation of War is a concept used to categorize the stages of warfare, developed primarily in terms of the prevailing strategies, tactics, and technologies of a particular period. The concept provides a useful framework for understanding how warfare has changed over time, as well as in light of technological advances. At the time of his theory's inception (1989), Lind outlined a historical development in three generations. Following feedback on his ideas, he gradually added a fourth generation (2004).

First Generation Warfare (1GW). Its duration is defined by the Peace of Westphalia until approximately 1860. This generation was characterized by the mass concentration of deployed forces combined with linear tactics and strict adherence to designated formations. The basis of tactics was the use of weapons, especially smooth-bore muskets, and therefore with strict fire control drill. There was a great contradiction between the "culture of order" and the disorder of the battlefield. The generation ends with a contradiction between the use of fixed formations and the introduction of more modern weapons. The most suitable example is the period of the Napoleonic Wars. According to Lind's theory, the first generation was a product of current technology capable of producing smooth-bore firearms. Ultimately, the use of such technology also determined tactics. Specifically, the tactics of lines and columns, which required perfect drill and training. This also results in the so-called culture of orders [13,18].

Second Generation Warfare (2GW). It began as a result of increasing industrialization and the introduction of new weapons technologies. Its main features include trench warfare, the massive use of artillery, machine guns, and the planned use of railways and telegraph networks for communication and logistical support. A distinctive feature emerging during this period was the use of chemical warfare agents. The most famous examples are the American Civil War, World War I, and the Spanish Civil War.

Second generation warfare was a response to the rifled musket, breechloaders, barbed wire, the machinegun, and indirect fire. Tactics were based on fire and movement, and they remained essentially linear. The defense still attempted to prevent all penetrations, and in the attack a laterally dispersed line advanced by rushes in small groups [15]. This means that the second generation has significantly different characteristics than the first, and therefore, when describing the development of the military, it is necessary to point out different parameters, both technologically and tactically.

Third generation warfare (3GW) was based on ideas rather than technology. German infiltration tactics devised in World War I were truly nonlinear, which resulted in maneuver instead of attrition being relied upon to destroy an opposing force [19,20]. In contrast to the previous two generations of warfare, the focus of the third generation was on speed, surprise, mental and physical "disruption". A typical example was the use of non-linear tactics based on blitzkrieg and manoeuvre warfare. There was a change in tactics as well as military culture. The art of war was focused on the use of armoured forces, air support and dominance, strong and flexible logistics, and together with this, on the use of the initiative of commanders. The best examples are World War II and the conflict in the Persian Gulf.

The principles of the 3rd generation consisted of the concentrated deployment of armoured vehicles (tanks), massive and precise air support, and ensuring air supremacy. Equally high-quality logistics were required, as well as flexibility, initiative, and surprising methods of action by commanders [18].

The fourth generation (4GW) is characterized by the blurring of the boundaries between war and politics, military and civilian population. States are losing their monopoly on conducting armed conflict. The basic feature of a 4th generation conflict is that one of the parties to the conflict is represented by an aggressive non-state actor. Other characteristic features are the complexity and long duration of the conflict, terrorism, and the decentralized and often transnational base of the non-state actor.

The roots of fourth-generation warfare can be traced to the strategies and tactics used by resistance movements (guerrilla movements) throughout history. Guerrilla warfare, characterized by hit-and-run attacks, sabotage, and the exploitation of civilians, has been and continues to be used by groups resisting occupation or fighting conventional military forces. Examples include the Spanish guerrilla war against Napoleon, the guerrilla resistance during World War II in Europe, and the struggles for independence in Africa and Asia. The period of decolonization and the rise of national liberation movements in the 20th century played a crucial role in the development of fourth-generation warfare.

This concept provides a useful framework for understanding changes in the conduct of warfare over time, particularly in relation to technological progress. This approach is primarily applicable to interpreting developments in the modern era, characterized by the widespread use of firearms. It also offers an expanded perspective on the evolution of military technologies and the specifics of their application in individual historical periods. The advantage of this theoretical approach lies in its emphasis on the changing nature of warfare in the modern era, especially in connection with the so-called fourth generation of warfare. Its focus is on asymmetric tactics employed by non-state actors, with guerrilla warfare, insurgency, and terrorism coming to the forefront.

It is understandable that the so-called 4 generations approach also has its limits. The first is that it is focused on describing the development of the military since the mid-17th century. It is necessary to realize that the authors of this approach are based on the socially recognized understanding of the end of the Thirty Years' War as a significant turning point in history. Therefore, they expand the military-technological and tactical framework to include a political framework, because permanent armies are beginning to emerge in Europe. Lind himself states that after 1648 the state established a monopoly on war [16] and this period of development of international relations is called the Westphalian period [21]. Similarly C. J. Jayachandran wrote: "The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War between the Habsburgs and the United Protestant Powers, is now generally regarded as the historical event that established the state's monopoly on "legitimate organized violence," which we understand as an act of war" [22].

This is why, in teaching military history from the four-generation theory approach, we emphasize that these are generations of "modern" military, or more precisely, we speak of the theory of four generations of modern military, which essentially modifies Lind's original concept and makes it better suited for teaching military history.

2.3 The Civilization Waves Approach

The third theoretical approach is the so-called theory of civilization waves. This approach is based on the work of Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, specifically on the ideas presented in the publications *War and Anti-War* and *The Third Wave* [23,24]. Since the theory of generations of warfare does not address the historical periods of antiquity and the Middle Ages, this approach serves as a suitable complement.

Another reason for including the civilization waves approach in teaching military history at the Armed Forces Academy is the fact that it has been incorporated into a military strategy textbook used at a partner institution in the Czech Republic.

The theoretical approach based on civilization waves explains the development of the nature of war as a social phenomenon, categorizing it according to specific criteria. Its basic framework distinguishes three fundamentally different stages of human societal development. The first stage, or wave, is the agrarian wave; the second is the industrial era; and the third encompasses the contemporary globalized world.

The first civilization wave- the agrarian wave examines the development of society and the nature of warfare from the emergence of the earliest civilizations. Its economic foundation is agriculture, and it spans the period from antiquity to the 17th century. Its defining characteristic is that human society is based on agricultural production and a close relationship to soil.

According to this theory, agriculture enables civilizations to prosper and, consequently, to wage war. However, it also imposes limits. Wars are typically conducted during periods when agricultural labour is not required. Soldiers are often rewarded in kind, and their equipment and armament are limited by technological capabilities and available resources. Strategic objectives are likewise limited, usually involving territorial expansion, the defeat of neighbouring nations, or the imposition of a new ruler.

The second civilization wave begins with the Industrial Revolution in the 17th and 18th centuries, which fundamentally transformed economic foundations. With the transition to mass production, the era of mass armies also emerged. The economic base of this period consists of industry, manufacturing, trade, and raw materials. Factory production enabled the standardization of weapons and their mass deployment.

In connection with the societal changes brought about by the early modern period and industrialization, a new type of society the industrial society emerged. New relationships based on trade became a significant feature. Commercial companies arose and, due to their growing economic power, gradually gained influence over state politics. Over time, multinational corporations and conglomerates developed. Mass production became a defining feature, with increasing demands for speed and efficiency. Machines began to replace human labour in factories, with workers primarily operating machinery and requiring less specialized education.

Mass principle played a role not only in production but also in society. Just as mass production formed the basis of industrial economies, mass destruction became the foundation of wars in the second wave. As industrialization progressed, warfare itself became industrialized. This allowed for the mobilization of large segments of the male population into armies, turning the military into a primary instrument of the state [25].

The third civilization wave emerges with the development of information systems and brings the opposite effect - demassification. Countries of the third wave export information, innovation, management, technology, software, and services worldwide. One such service may include security provided by third-wave military forces [23].

Understanding the theory of civilization waves enables students to grasp the essence of social changes and movements from sociological and philosophical perspectives. It also helps fill certain gaps present in the previously mentioned theory of the generations of modern warfare.

4. Conclusions

The aim of military education is to ensure high-quality preparation for the military profession. In addition to a wide range of specialized subjects, it also includes topics that broaden education in the social sciences, such as political science, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and, of course, military history.

An officer who understands the causes of conflicts and the historical development of warfare can respond more flexibly and with greater expertise to changes in the security environment. Such an individual is capable of contributing to the development of documents that improve military training and doctrines related to preparation for armed conflict. They are also better equipped to navigate complex societal issues.

Knowledge of history acquired through an interdisciplinary approach supports the development of key competencies required of commanders and leaders. The success of this formative process is enhanced when historical phenomena are examined from multiple perspectives rather than being limited to a single viewpoint, such as the chronological one. On the contrary, teaching history through multiple theoretical approaches and appropriately combining and complementing them leads to a higher quality of education. The use of multiple theoretical approaches in teaching military history provides a multidimensional perspective that is essential for understanding this broad and complex field. An indispensable tool in this process is the application of appropriate teaching methods.

The significance of a multidimensional approach lies in:

1. Expanding the possibilities of the chronological approach in providing an overview of military history.
2. Ensuring interdisciplinarity and continuity with other specialized subjects.
3. Supporting analytical and critical thinking among students.

The combination of these three theoretical approaches can therefore be considered beneficial, as it offers a multidimensional view of the warfare development. At the same time, we can conclude that, it helps eliminate the shortcomings of individual approaches when used in isolation.

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