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## **‘I Should Like to See Our Young Officers Read All Your Volumes:’ Theodore Ayrault Dodge and American Military Biography**

Colonel Theodore Ayrault Dodge (1842-1909) was a prominent American military historian writing at the end of the nineteenth century. Some of his work, most notably his biographies of Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Caesar, remains in print today, but Dodge’s work has largely been forgotten. Dodge’s contributions to American military history were twofold. He fought with the North in the American Civil War, losing a leg at Gettysburg.<sup>1</sup> That experience, which was followed by a stint in the Draft section of the War Department, led him first to write a study of the Chancellorsville Campaign of 1863,<sup>2</sup> and then to write a general history of the Civil War in the 1880s, called *A Bird’s Eye View of Our Civil War*.<sup>3</sup> According to Dodge, the second book was of great interest to ‘school libraries.’<sup>4</sup> His second contribution was a series of biographies of the ‘Great Captains’ of military history starting in 1890, titled the *History of the Art of War*. Dodge completed five biographies before his death, which included the ancient warriors cited above, as well as Gustavus Adolphus and Napoleon Bonaparte.

Dodge’s *History of the Art of War* was an important contribution to both military history and biography. It is important to understand that Dodge did not make any difference in writing about the lives of great commanders and understanding the overall progress of the art of war from its origins to the nineteenth century. As we will see below, he believed that the two areas of history were in fact linked. This article will look at two related aspects of Dodge’s biographies to understand his contribution to the genre. First, it is important to understand the link between biography and the history of the art of war in Dodge’s work, which differentiates it from the other projects of his contemporaries, most notably that of the German historian Hans Delbrück. Second, Dodge’s biographies are unique in the American literature of the period in both subject and scope, but at the same time are characteristic of American military writing in their focus on the theories of Antoine-Henri Jomini, who wrote about the Napoleonic Wars. The problem that Dodge raises of writing for a general or a military audience is also important for understanding how his work fits into the context of his time.

To date, there are no academic studies available on Colonel Dodge. This is a significant surprise, as his works were seen as important on both sides of the Atlantic in

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Forty Years of Hard and Happy Work*, Boston: Henry S. Dunn, 1899, p. 184-185.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *The Campaign of Chancellorsville*, Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1881.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *A Bird’s Eye View of Our Civil War*, Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883.

<sup>4</sup> Dodge, *Forty Years*, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

the first half of the twentieth century. This importance can be seen in two letters, which demonstrate that Dodge was a friend of President Theodore Roosevelt, and that Roosevelt approved of Dodge's historical work. Roosevelt's letter of 18 May 1908 was published in the 1908 edition of *Alexander*.<sup>5</sup> In it, the president stated:

I am greatly pleased to learn that you think of presenting your twelve volumes on the Art of War to our military posts. I have read every volume. I have enjoyed all your work, and I look forward especially to the remaining volumes on the Campaign of Frederick. I should like to see our young officers read all your volumes, for it would do them real good.

It would be difficult to imagine a more important endorsement than that of President Roosevelt, who was known for his own military skill. In an earlier letter from 1902, Roosevelt thanked Dodge for sending his books, and discussed their other common interest, horsemanship.<sup>6</sup>

Dodge's contribution is also evident in the historical writings of some of the most prominent British strategists of the twentieth century. In the Preface to his own *Generalship of Alexander the Great*, General J.F.C. Fuller said that his inspiration for writing the book was reading Dodge's work on Alexander during the First World War in 1917.<sup>7</sup> Fuller also cited Dodge's statement qualifying Caesar as the 'greatest man in antiquity,' as a justification to write his own book on the subject.<sup>8</sup> Captain Basil Liddell Hart used Dodge as a major reference (though not always favourably) in his book on the military career of Scipio Africanus.<sup>9</sup> Both Fuller and Liddell Hart were instrumental in the development of military strategy in Britain in the interwar period.<sup>10</sup> After the 1960s, however, few references to Dodge's works can be found in military history or biography.

### Dodge's Life and Career

Before turning to an analysis of Dodge's *History of the Art of War*, it is useful to briefly analyze the author's background. The only source available is Dodge's own autobiography, *Forty Years of Hard and Happy Work*, published in 1899, ten years before his death. Dodge was born in Massachusetts in 1842, to a Puritan family, which

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<sup>5</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Alexander: A History of the Origin and Growth of the Art of War From the Earliest Times to the Battle of Ipsus, B.C. 301, with a detailed account of the campaigns of the Great Macedonian*, vol. I, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1908.

<sup>6</sup> 'Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Theodore Ayrault Dodge,' Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division:

<http://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record.aspx?libID=o183148> (accessed 30 June 2016). Dodge also published books on horsemanship, including his most important commercial success, *Riders of Many Lands*, Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901.

<sup>7</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Alexander the Great* [1960], Boston: Da Capo Press, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant* [1965], Boston: Da Capo Press, 1991, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *Scipio Africanus: Greater than Napoleon?* [1926], Boston: Da Capo Press, 2004, p. 93-94, p. 245.

<sup>10</sup> It must be noted here that General J.F.C. Fuller's open sympathies for the Nazis and the British fascist movement presents a problem for the study of Fuller's works on military history and strategy.

he claimed was descended from a family who settled in Salem in 1629.<sup>11</sup> His Protestant upbringing is evident in his biographical writings, and comes out the most in his biography of the Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus. The adoption of Protestantism by the Swedish Vasa family gave them, according to Dodge, 'a sort of Homeric right.'<sup>12</sup> Dodge goes on to claim that Gustavus entered into the Thirty Years' War not out of personal ambition, but as a 'saviour' for the Protestants of Germany, who were being destroyed by the Catholics who started the war.<sup>13</sup>

Dodge's family was unique in that his father was offered a job in London in 1851, and that the entire family moved to Great Britain in 1852.<sup>14</sup> Dodge was sent first to Belgium to school where he learned French and then to Berlin for four years of military education, where he met prominent Prussian military commanders, including Helmuth von Moltke the Elder.<sup>15</sup> He went on to study at University College London and the University of Heidelberg, which gave him considerable language skills as well as extensive knowledge of European history.<sup>16</sup> This continental European experience, highly unusual for an American of his generation, surely provided Dodge with some of the tools necessary to write his later biographies of European military commanders.

Dodge enlisted in the Union Army in 1861 at the outset of the Civil War, and quickly rose through the ranks. He knew President Abraham Lincoln personally through working for the War Department in the latter part of the war.<sup>17</sup> After the war, he wanted to stay in the U.S. Army to become a general, but was forced to retire as a colonel in 1870.<sup>18</sup> In 1881, Dodge began what he called 'serious literary work,' after multiple trips to Europe.<sup>19</sup> He would travel to Europe frequently over the subsequent years to carry out research and visit the battlefields for his biographies. It must be noted that Dodge seems to have had no training as a historian, and while he was invited to lecture at Harvard, he was not a professor there or at the U.S. military academy at West Point.<sup>20</sup>

Dodge claimed in his autobiography that his inspiration to write biographies of European military commanders came from a book project that he envisioned around 1885, titled 'The American as a Soldier.' The book was never written, and Dodge said it was because he did not know enough about the soldiers of other countries for a comparative study.<sup>21</sup> He wrote in his autobiography:

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<sup>11</sup> Dodge, *Forty Years*, *op. cit.*, p. 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus: A History of the Art of War from Its Revival after the Middle Ages to the End of the Spanish Succession War, with a detailed account of the most famous campaigns of the Great Swede*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> Dodge, *Forty Years*, *op. cit.*, p. 80-81.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90, p. 95-99.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134-142.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252-253.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260, p. 276.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

I began to read up on the ancient warrior, and a growing interest in the subject prompted me to start a series of biographies of Great Captains, the undercurrent of which should be a History of the Art of War, which their deeds had created.<sup>22</sup>

He published six lectures on the Great Captains at the Lowell Institute in Boston in 1889,<sup>23</sup> and his first biography, *Alexander*, in 1890. The rest of the biographies were published up to Dodge's death in 1909. He was never able to complete the biography of Frederick the Great. He was also asked (it is not clear who did the asking) to write biographies of the American Civil War Generals Sherman and Meade, but stated that it was necessary to complete his Great Captains series first before studying the major American commanders.<sup>24</sup> This was not because Dodge believed the American generals to be inferior to their historical European counterparts. Dodge thought rather that the art of war had reached a 'perfect state' with the American Civil War, and that it was necessary to describe the historical context in which this apogee had been reached before discussing the contemporary Great Captains.<sup>25</sup> The next part of this essay will discuss how Dodge constructed his conception of European (and by extension, American) military history around the biographies of a select few individuals.

### Using Biography to Create a *History of the Art of War*

For Dodge, biography was a tool through which to understand the greater scope of military history, and did not really constitute a separate genre of historical writing. This is evident in Dodge's interest in minute military detail at the expense of much of the rest of the lives of the great commanders. Little attention is paid to the personal or family life of his subjects, and Dodge makes it clear in the Preface to *Alexander* that he is not writing a political history, and that politics is a 'side issue,' important only when it affects military events.<sup>26</sup> As might be expected, however, Dodge was not able to fully excise politics from his history, and political dealings are particularly prominent in his work on Gustavus Adolphus and the discussion of the reasons for the Swedish intervention in the Thirty Years' War.<sup>27</sup> Dodge also admitted in his biography of Julius Caesar that the Roman commander was a better politician than Alexander and Hannibal, and that this fact was what really set him apart from his illustrious predecessors.<sup>28</sup>

Another major omission in Dodge's works is any real in-depth discussion of sea power. His works might be better titled the *History of the Art of War on Land*. The Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 barely merits a paragraph in the four-volume, two-thousand-page biography of Napoleon. At the same time, Dodge's treatment of the sea battle is

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>23</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Great Captains: A Course of Six Lectures Showing the Influence of the Art of War on the Campaigns of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, Frederick, and Napoleon*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1889.

<sup>24</sup> Dodge, *Forty Years*, *op. cit.*, p. 367-368.

<sup>25</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. x.

<sup>26</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>27</sup> Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus*, *op. cit.*, p. 100-102.

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Caesar: A History of the Art of War among the Romans Down to the End of the Roman Empire with a detailed account of the campaigns of Caius Julius Caesar* [1892], Boston: Da Capo Press, 1997, p. 756.

surprising in its sympathy for the English. Rather than defending his hero, Napoleon, Dodge ends the discussion of the battle by saying ‘Every Englishman had truly done his duty.’<sup>29</sup> The lack of any major discussion of sea power could be because Dodge’s chosen commanders were not primarily known for sea battles. Another possible reason is that Dodge may not have wanted to enter into the realm of the most prominent American military historian of his time, Alfred Thayer Mahan, who wrote several works on the history of sea power in Europe.<sup>30</sup>

Dodge believed that military history could be divided up into three different periods: ‘remote antiquity to the decadence of Rome,’ the Middle Ages, and the emergence of Gustavus Adolphus in the Thirty Years’ War to the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> This periodization was approximately the same as that followed by Dodge’s counterpart in Germany, Hans Delbrück, who was also writing a *History of the Art of War*. Delbrück, a professor at the University of Berlin, divided up his four-volume history into war in the antiquity, the ‘barbarian invasions’ of Rome, the Middle Ages, and ‘the Dawn of Modern Warfare.’<sup>32</sup> While it is by no means certain that Dodge would have known about Delbrück’s works, the similarities of the two historians’ projects make a comparison useful.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike Delbrück, Dodge completely discounted the Middle Ages as an interesting period of historical study.<sup>34</sup> He passes over the period in ten pages at the beginning of *Gustavus Adolphus*, and moves quickly on to the seventeenth century. This does not mean that he believed there was a clear linear progression from Alexander to Napoleon with a break during the Middle Ages. He demonstrates rather that the art of war was at its apogee both in the antiquity and in the nineteenth century, after this art was essentially rediscovered by Gustavus Adolphus in 1611.<sup>35</sup> The Greek and Roman world of Alexander, Hannibal and Caesar is nearly the equal of that of Napoleon in Dodge’s work. Frederick the Great learned directly how to organize his line of battle from the actions of the Great Captains in the ancient world.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Napoleon: A History of the Art of War, from the Beginning of the Consulate to the End of the Friedland Campaign, with a detailed account of the Napoleonic Wars*, vol. II, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904, p. 212.

<sup>30</sup> The most important book by Admiral Mahan is *The Importance of Sea Power on History: 1660-1783*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1894. It remains one of the most important American historical works.

<sup>31</sup> Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> On Delbrück, see Gordon A. Craig, ‘Delbrück: The Military Historian,’ in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 326-353.

<sup>33</sup> Dodge was aware, however, of the German General Staff’s ongoing project at the beginning of the twentieth century to publish an extensive history of the reign of Frederick the Great, which is what caused him to postpone his own biography of the Prussian King until a later date. See Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Napoleon: A History of the Art of War, from the Beginning of the French Revolution to the End of the Eighteenth Century, with a detailed account of the Wars of the French Revolution*, vol. I, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904, p. vii.

<sup>34</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 8; Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus*, *op. cit.*, p. viii, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus*, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

<sup>36</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. xii. Frederick did not learn his oblique order from Alexander, however, but from the tactics of the Theban commander Epaminondas at the Battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C., which took place nearly forty years before Alexander’s expeditions.

While Delbrück built his history around the study of army organization, tactics, and significant battles, Dodge used biography.<sup>37</sup> Dodge believed that the art of war was created and shaped by the actions of great commanders, and that only certain military leaders can influence the development of the art of war. Alexander created the art of war through his conquests.<sup>38</sup> Napoleon was able to build on the acts of all his predecessors to reach the summit of the art. Dodge states at the outset of his biography of Napoleon that:

The beginnings of the modern era in the art of war date from the French Revolution. It was the upheaval of the people of France which laid the foundation of personal service, and added to this patriotic gain, though in a crude manner, the changes that gradually led up to the art as it exists today. All this was later moulded into a definite form by Napoleon.<sup>39</sup>

This statement is important for Dodge's general approach, as it indicates that he began to realize that understanding changes in society and army organization was also essential for the study of the art of war. Towards the end of his biography of Napoleon, Dodge claims that the French commander was 'the Perfect Strategist,' but, at the same time, his successes were 'the outcome' of the French Revolution.<sup>40</sup> These statements would seem to be contradictory, but examples such as this are common in Dodge's work, reflecting the author's conception of the art of war.

A major problem with Dodge's work is that the central unifying principle, 'the art of war,' is never sufficiently defined. The ambiguity of the term allowed Dodge to expand the analysis beyond the strict limits set in the prefaces to each volume to other aspects of military history including army organization and technological development. Other military thinkers are often mentioned, and Dodge pays particular attention to Xenophon's *Anabasis* (370 B.C.), saying that 'more originality in tactics has come from the *Anabasis* than from any dozen other books.'<sup>41</sup> Xenophon's work was necessary context for the development of the biographies of the Great Captains. Indeed, Dodge pays so much attention to the historical context that often the biography of the Great Captain in question does not begin until well into the book.<sup>42</sup>

For Dodge, pre-existing military organization and technology are key reasons for the success of the chosen Great Captains. Military organization is often portrayed as a family affair, and thus fits into the biographical structure of his works. Alexander was given an exceptionally strong army by his father Philip II, which he could expand upon, especially in improving cavalry tactics. Dodge indicates that he believes this dynamic to be typical, saying that Frederick the Great received a very good army from his father, Frederick William.<sup>43</sup> Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca, was extremely important in training his son for his later war against Rome, and Dodge states: 'It was only the

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<sup>37</sup> Craig, 'Delbrück,' *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. ix-x.

<sup>39</sup> Dodge, *Napoleon*, vol I, *op. cit.*, p. 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Napoleon: A History of the Art of War, from Lützen to Waterloo, with a detailed account of the Napoleonic Wars*, vol. IV, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1907, p. 709, p. 718.

<sup>41</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, *op.cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>42</sup> In *Alexander* (vol. I), the biography itself begins on p. 127, in *Hannibal* on p. 132, in *Caesar* on p. 37, in *Gustavus* on p. 33, and in *Napoleon* (vol. I) on p. 131.

<sup>43</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, *op.cit.*, p. 135-138.

wonderful military capacity of Hamilcar Barca and his family which made the light to brighten [in Carthage]... before it finally flickered and went out.<sup>44</sup> Politics in the Carthaginian state, on the other hand, were the real reason for Hannibal's defeats, not the failings of the commander himself or of his family.<sup>45</sup> We are given few details about Caesar's family life, however, and the army organization of his time is imputed to his predecessor Marius.<sup>46</sup> Gustavus' family, the Vasa, did not so much create the successful army that he used in the Thirty Years' War, but rather created the political conditions in Sweden that Gustavus drew upon to field an effective fighting force.<sup>47</sup> Napoleon's advantages, as mentioned above, came from the social and military changes of the French Revolution.

In using family connections to show progress in military developments, Dodge links the art of war in many cases to the intelligence of particular leaders and their families. In this, Hannibal is singled out for special praise, as Dodge calls him the 'Father of Strategy.'<sup>48</sup> Dodge argues that Hannibal's task of fighting a huge power with limited resources, cut off from his bases, and with little support, was much more difficult than that faced by other commanders. He states: 'Measuring his task and resources by that of any soldier of history, he may be not untruthfully said to be *primus inter pares*.'<sup>49</sup> The link with military organization is clear, as the great commanders of history must have exceptional intelligence capacities to be able to make use of innovations in organization to win battles and campaigns. All the biographical aspects in Dodge's work are mustered to show how they affected the ability of his subjects to make war.

The focus on military campaigns in the biographies can be disconcerting when compared to other biographies. Little space is devoted to the lives of the Great Captains, and most of the books are taken up by detailed descriptions of their military campaigns, which include many maps and diagrams of minute tactical manoeuvres. In this, Dodge was trying both to make his books accessible to the general reader, and to duplicate the charts and maps appearing in the new military histories of the American Civil War.<sup>50</sup> His trips to Europe, exceptional for the time, allowed him to draw up his maps based on his visits to the battlefields.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, Dodge had realized by the time he published *Caesar* that this approach was difficult for the typical reader of biography. He included a recommendation in the preface for his readers to consult the introductions to the chapters to avoid the sections that 'will be found too technical.'<sup>52</sup>

By the time Dodge arrived at the biography of Gustavus Adolphus, the books had become much more technical, and began to address more systematically the issue of technological development in the art of war. Dodge was content in his earlier biographies to describe the weapons, uniforms and tactical formations of the ancient

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<sup>44</sup> Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Hannibal: A History of the Art of War Among the Carthaginians and Romans, down to the Battle of Pydna, 168 B.C., with a detailed account of the Second Punic War*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891, p. 29.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 598.

<sup>46</sup> Dodge, *Caesar*, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

<sup>47</sup> Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus*, *op. cit.*, p. 63-66.

<sup>48</sup> Dodge, *Hannibal*, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 614.

<sup>50</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, *op. cit.*, p. x.

<sup>51</sup> Dodge, *Caesar*, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

world, with many hand-drawn images. There was little systematic thinking about technological progress, however, beyond the new ideas in tactics brought about by the intelligence of the Great Captains. By the time Dodge arrived at his narrative of the Thirty Years' War, he was forced to acknowledge that advances in technology had changed the art of the war as well as the genius of the Great Captains.

Many historians in recent decades have posited the existence of a 'military revolution' in Early Modern Europe. The theory is that advances in siege weaponry, and artillery in particular, led to sweeping changes in fortifications and to a new way of warfare in Europe. Army size increased, and new tactics were introduced across the continent to deal with the changes.<sup>53</sup> Dodge attempted to minimize the effects of the introduction of gunpowder, but was not able to do the same for the tactical changes introduced in the sixteenth century.<sup>54</sup> He mentions in passing the great leaders who changed military tactics in Europe during the period, including William and Maurice of Orange, Spinola, Henry IV and Coligny, in his narrative, but without going into much detail about their lives.<sup>55</sup> As with other military leaders outside of his chosen six, Dodge did not consider a description of their lives to be necessary to understand the progress of the art of war in Europe.

Gustavus Adolphus had to adapt to the new technological environment and the tactical and organizational changes that the new advances had brought about. Gustavus' genius for Dodge lay in his ability to reorganize the battlefield in response to new innovations. Dodge stated: 'Under Gustavus, the three arms [infantry, cavalry and artillery] supported each other much in the modern way.'<sup>56</sup> Gustavus also introduced 'grand tactics,' according to Dodge, which are what we call 'operations' today, and are more commonly attributed to Napoleon.<sup>57</sup> A subtle shift in approach is evident, in that the Great Captain no longer changes the art of war by his actions alone, but that Gustavus' intelligence was marshalled to make sense of, and adapt to, the new technological and organizational environment. Gustavus was unique in that he understood the changes occurring and moved the fastest to adapt them into his armies. The analysis suffers somewhat in that Gustavus was killed only two years after entering the Thirty Years' War, so his influence over such a short period of time is harder to gauge. This is a problem that Dodge does not address.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Dodge's biographical approach to the study of the art of war had to be adapted to take into account many new variables in the strategic environment that were less present in the books on the ancient world.

In his biography of Napoleon, Dodge was also obliged to adapt his approach in admitting the importance of the French Revolution for Napoleon's changes to the art of war. The French Revolution allowed for huge armies to be created, as the nation was

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<sup>53</sup> See, in particular, Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>54</sup> Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus*, *op. cit.*, p. 22, p. 27.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.

<sup>58</sup> Only about 350 pages of the 900 pages long *Gustavus Adolphus* are about the Swedish King. Gustavus' death at the Battle of Lützen in 1632 intervenes on page 397. The rest of the book deals with the second half of the Thirty Years' War and warfare in the second half of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century.

mobilized to fight the wars after 1791.<sup>59</sup> This fact was of course nothing new for even contemporary historians of Dodge, but it is important to point out that other factors than Napoleon's genius contributed to the progress in the art of war at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Dodge imputes the involvement of a large part of the French male population in the army to either 'a fanatical patriotism, or else the fear of the Convention and its bloody methods.'<sup>60</sup> Army organization was improved, following the enlistment of hundreds of thousands in the French Army, and Napoleon 'continued and perfected' those developments.<sup>61</sup> The French Army gained a great deal of experience between 1791 and 1794, which was a base for Napoleon to use his considerable intellectual capacities to create a new way of war.<sup>62</sup> In *Napoleon*, Dodge created a sort of theory to accommodate the influence of external factors on the ability of Great Captains to change the art of war. He stated that Great Captains needed 'factors,' 'force of intellect, force of character... [and] opportunity.'<sup>63</sup> The lives of Gustavus and Napoleon led Dodge to understand that a favourable historical context was a condition for Great Captains to appear and change the system, and that it was not just the Great Captains who could change the course of military history.

Despite the admission that external factors were important in the lives of Great Captains, Dodge makes little effort to be objective in his works. For the author, the great commanders are heroes, often of a mythic stature, which sets him apart from contemporary historians, as well as from the nineteenth-century 'scientific' German school of history of Leopold von Ranke, of which Delbrück was a part.<sup>64</sup> For Alexander, Dodge states that 'we may better liken him to an Homeric Greek than to an ordinary mortal... he was Achilles come to life.'<sup>65</sup> Hannibal for Dodge was 'a demigod,' and much of the biographical part of the book on his life is spent trying to downplay later accusations of Hannibal's cruelty toward his enemies.<sup>66</sup> As we saw above, members of Gustavus' Vasa family were also seen as Homeric heroes, and Dodge lauds Gustavus' personal beauty, strength, and religious fervour.<sup>67</sup> Caesar and Napoleon come off less well, however, as Dodge argues in the conclusion to his biography of Caesar: 'Caesar and Napoleon impress us as characters in history. Each calls out a thrill of admiration; neither calls out a thrill of human sympathy.'<sup>68</sup> Dodge had personal preferences for the Great Captains, and attempted to bring his readers over to his point of view.

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<sup>59</sup> Dodge, *Napoleon*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 3-4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128-129.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>64</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 253-254; Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 180.

<sup>65</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>66</sup> Dodge, *Hannibal*, *op. cit.*, p. 237, 621.

<sup>67</sup> Dodge, *Gustavus*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>68</sup> Dodge, *Caesar*, *op. cit.*, p. 767.

### Dodge's Intended Readership

After having examined how Colonel Dodge used biography to write a wider history of the progress in the art of war across history, it is important to ask whom he was writing for. Dodge was by no means a professional historian, and was also not a serving military officer, unlike many of his contemporaries writing history in the United States. As Dodge's perceptions of the role of external factors of military organization, technology and social factors changed as he advanced through history, so his ideas regarding his readership also changed.

Dodge, somewhat surprisingly, did not initially intend for his books to be read by military officers. In the preface to *Alexander*, Dodge wrote that his books would not interest the military, as 'the military student is willing to devote his days to research; he should not rely on others.'<sup>69</sup> What Dodge is trying to say here is that military officers should read the primary sources of the Great Captains themselves, but that the general reader, his intended audience, could not be expected to do so. He also stated that 'there is no pretence to make this a military text-book,' which was in part to set himself apart from the works of Jomini, whom Dodge admired. Dodge believed that Jomini was difficult to understand for anyone who was not a military professional.<sup>70</sup> Thus, again in the preface to *Alexander*, Dodge promised to limit the technical military details in the book, but this is not at all what follows, as reading his biographies necessitates much previous knowledge of military history, tactics and strategy.<sup>71</sup> In his second biography, *Hannibal*, Dodge again claimed that it was not intended as a military textbook.<sup>72</sup>

As mentioned above, by the time Dodge reached *Caesar*, he stated that some of the material might be too complex for the general reader. This may have been in response to a wider military readership, who demanded an even more technical approach, or complaints by the general readers that the earlier volumes were too complicated. There is no mention of readers in *Gustavus*, and in the preface to the first volume of *Napoleon*, there is one reference to the fact that the 'general reader' was likely to appreciate the inclusion of direct quotes from Bonaparte in the text.<sup>73</sup> The letter from President Roosevelt, cited at the beginning of this essay, hints that the readership was more military, at least by 1908. Military readers would likely have appreciated the level of strategic and tactical detail found in Dodge, as well as the fact that his works fit well into the military historiography in the U.S. in the nineteenth century.

### Dodge and American Military History

Colonel Dodge never attended West Point or any other military college in the U.S., but his biographies are consistent with American military history writing of the

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<sup>69</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. x.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>71</sup> This was despite Dodge's claim in his autobiography that he wanted to make his books accessible; see Dodge, *Forty Years*, *op. cit.*, p. 347-348.

<sup>72</sup> Dodge, *Hannibal*, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

<sup>73</sup> Dodge, *Napoleon*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

period, especially his interest in the military theorist and Napoleonic-era soldier Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779-1869).

Jomini was born in Switzerland, and served with Napoleon's army from 1804 to 1813. In 1813, he defected to join the Allied forces, and became a general in the Russian Army. He remained in Russia following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and would subsequently rise to command the entire Russian Army later in the century.<sup>74</sup> Jomini, who was highly appreciated by Napoleon, despite his defection, was seen by later generations, especially in the U.S., as the theorist who was best able to understand the lessons of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>75</sup> Jomini's main theoretical contribution was a book called *Summary of the Art of War*, composed of two volumes published in 1837 and 1838.<sup>76</sup> It was translated into English first by Major O.F. Winship and Lieutenant E.E. McLean in 1854, and then by Captain G.H. Mendell and Lieutenant W.P. Craighill during the first part of the American Civil War in 1862. The Mendell and Craighill translation remains the standard in English today.<sup>77</sup> Jomini also wrote many other histories of military campaigns, including books on Frederick the Great, as well as on the campaigns of the French Revolutionary forces.

As with Colonel Dodge, Jomini's subject was the art of war, and he was looking for principles in that art that remained consistent over time. He stated that 'Military science rests on principles which can never be safely violated in the presence of an active and skilful enemy.'<sup>78</sup> This series of inviolable principles is often contrasted with Jomini's Prussian counterpart, Carl von Clausewitz, whose theories of war were based on the Prussian's dialectic approach.<sup>79</sup> Dodge was like Jomini in that the Swiss theorist was interested primarily in the actions of two Great Captains, Frederick the Great and Napoleon. Other military leaders were secondary, as they were not responsible for the main strategic and tactical actions in recent wars.<sup>80</sup> Jomini is also known for having a theory of war based on geometry, with linear lines of operations directed toward decisive points. Strategy and warfare could be studied independently of politics in Jomini, something Dodge also believed in his biographies.<sup>81</sup>

The purpose of this article is not to provide a full analysis of Jomini's military theories or a criticism of his strategic thought. What is important, however, is the place of Jomini in American military history and strategy in the nineteenth century. After the Napoleonic Wars and the disastrous experience of the War of 1812, American military officers began to look abroad for guidance on how to prepare a professional army. The Napoleonic experience was considered to be the most useful source of such lessons on how to prepare for future war, and the chosen theorist of Napoleonic warfare for

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<sup>74</sup> John Shy, 'Jomini,' in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, *op. cit.*, p. 146-153.

<sup>75</sup> Napoleon read Jomini and stated that he 'clearly understood and developed' the French Emperor's manoeuvres at Austerlitz; see Bruno Colson, *Napoleon On War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 313.

<sup>76</sup> The French title is *Précis de l'art de la guerre*; see Shy, *op. cit.*, p. 153. The English-language translation, which is now 150 years old, is inadequate and needs an update.

<sup>77</sup> Bassford, *Clausewitz*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>78</sup> Antoine-Henri Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. G.H. Mendell and W.P. Craighill, Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>79</sup> Shy, 'Jomini,' *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159, p. 164.

Americans became Jomini.<sup>82</sup> Jomini's principles of war were translated for West Point officers as early as 1825, well before the publication of his *Summary of the Art of War*.<sup>83</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, West Point professor Dennis Hart Mahan did much to introduce Jomini's ideas to a new generation of American cadets who would later fight on both sides of the Civil War.<sup>84</sup> Dennis Mahan wrote a number of books on fortifications and military engineering that relied on Jomini as their basis.<sup>85</sup> His student, Henry W. Halleck, wrote more theoretical works about warfare, which were widely read, and also used Jomini as their basis.<sup>86</sup> Interest in Jomini continued throughout the nineteenth century in America, and towards the end of the century, the navy adapted his theories for the expansion of American sea power. The most important theorist was Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, the son of Dennis Hart Mahan, and his 'new science of naval strategy' was heavily influenced by Jomini.<sup>87</sup>

The great American historians that relied on Jomini did not stray into the field of biography, however, and limited their work to tactical manuals or strategic treatises intended to shape the future of the U.S. military. Thus, Dodge was writing in the tradition of American military thought of the nineteenth century, but his biographical approach was something novel. Dodge's *History of the Art of War* starts and finishes, however, with Jomini. In *Alexander*, Dodge claimed that Arrian did not understand Alexander's conquests as well as Jomini would have done because 'it needed the remarkable campaigns of a Frederick and a Napoleon to compass the inner meaning of the art of war. This meaning we must seek in modern military criticism.'<sup>88</sup> The idea that Jomini's theories could allow Dodge to understand ancient military campaigns has two important ramifications. First, it reinforces the idea of contemporary historians that Jomini was dominant in American military thought, even at the end of the nineteenth century. Second, it indicates that Dodge believed that the Napoleonic Wars were the height of the art of war, which allowed for a full understanding of all of military history.

Dodge does not directly mention Jomini again until the biography of Napoleon, but the Swiss theorist's presence is found throughout the texts. *Alexander* starts with a discussion of the 'correct lines of manoeuvre' of the Great Captains, which is a term that comes directly from Jominian thought.<sup>89</sup> The emphasis throughout the biographies on the geometrical dispositions of armies in battle and their manoeuvres on the march is also characteristic of Jomini. These types of descriptions take up the bulk of the text in all of Dodge's biographies. It is in the final volumes on Napoleon, however, that he fully expands on Jomini and uses his work to the fullest extent.

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<sup>82</sup> Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012*, New York: Free Press, 2012, p. 118-119. Clausewitz was not chosen as a reference, and was not translated into English until 1873.

<sup>83</sup> Shy, 'Jomini,' *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>84</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Policy and Strategy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977, p. 83-84. Though nearly 40 years old, Weigley's book remains one of the standard sources on the topic today.

<sup>85</sup> Millett, et al., *For the Common Defense*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>86</sup> Weigley, *American Way of War*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174. It should be noted, however, that Mahan never directly cites Jomini in *The Influence of Sea Power on History*.

<sup>88</sup> Dodge, *Alexander*, vol. I, p. ix-x.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Dodge cites Jomini to demonstrate the permanent nature of Napoleon's principles, such as the claim 'When you want to deliver battle; assemble all your forces; neglect none of them; a battalion sometimes decides the day.'<sup>90</sup> He claims that Jomini borrowed this from Frederick, another one of Dodge's heroes. Similar principles of Jomini appear throughout the biography of Napoleon, to illustrate how the French commander obeyed those principles to achieve success in his campaigns. In the four volumes on Napoleon's campaigns, there are 21 references to Jomini's military thought or to his participation in Napoleon's wars.

At the end of the fourth volume of *Napoleon*, Dodge devotes the final chapter of his biographies to 'Early Military Critics: Bülow. Jomini. Napoleon.'<sup>91</sup> Heinrich von Bülow was a Prussian officer whose theories, according to Dodge, anticipated those of Jomini, even though Bülow died before the end of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>92</sup> Dodge provides a rather complex description of Bülow's ideas regarding supplying war and lines of operation to show his influence on Jomini. Dodge admired Bülow a great deal, and clearly sees Jomini's theories as being adapted from his predecessor's.<sup>93</sup> Bülow appears to have had little or no influence in American military historiography in the nineteenth century.

What impresses Dodge about Jomini is his set of clear rules, which he states 'are precise and accurate, and though many seem absurdly simple, it must never be forgotten that he first laid them down.'<sup>94</sup> He then provides a long list of Jomini's main principles of war, reinforcing the geometric approach based on a superiority of force at the decisive point, which was a popular conception in the American Army in the nineteenth century.<sup>95</sup> As with most of his Great Captains, Dodge does not criticize Jomini, and lauds him for being the 'first and greatest exponent of that science which men the most employ.'<sup>96</sup> In this case, it would not be inaccurate to say that Dodge nearly classes Jomini alongside the Great Captains. He likens himself to Jomini in saying that the Swiss theorist learned from studying the experiences of Frederick and Napoleon,<sup>97</sup> and while he does not say so, the implication is that he himself was doing the same thing throughout the biographies in the *History of the Art of War*. As with his contemporaries in the nineteenth century, Jomini's theories were organizing principles for Dodge's construction of his own historical work.

## Conclusion

Dodge's massive series on the *History of the Art of War* was original for the time, as it does not seem that any of the important American military historians of the day had attempted to look at history systematically through biography. At the same time, Dodge fits clearly into contemporary military historiography in his focus on

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<sup>90</sup> Dodge, *Napoleon*, vol. I, p. 279.

<sup>91</sup> Dodge, *Napoleon*, vol. IV, p. 719-741.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 721-722.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 726.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 728.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 727-732.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 731.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 732.

Jomini and the belief in the Napoleonic Wars as the pinnacle of the art of war in history. This would probably help explain the commercial success of the biographies and the interest by military officers indicated by President Roosevelt.

Dodge's work is far from unproblematic, however. He is not at all objective regarding his treatment of the Great Captains, and probably imparts to them greater strategic powers than was the case. The choice of Great Captains also presents a problem, as it leads him to overlook very large periods of history. The historical development of certain periods such as the Middle Ages is completely ignored. This runs against the more recent findings that technological and organizational development, particularly in Early Modern Europe, often had their roots in developments in the medieval period.

While Dodge's books are often problematic and outdated, the biographies need to be put back into their proper place in American military historiography. Dodge's work has much to tell us about how the American Army understood military history and the Napoleonic Wars in particular. It can deepen our knowledge of post-Civil War military theory in the U.S., and go beyond what is often a sole focus by historians on the scholarship of Alfred Thayer Mahan.

As Dodge's biographies are extensive, and there is little to no scholarship on his books, there are many possibilities for further research. More needs to be done regarding Dodge's reception by his contemporaries, in particular to see if his biographies were on the reading lists of military educational institutions in the U.S. and abroad in the first half of the twentieth century. It would also be useful to examine the extent to which Dodge's claims about the Great Captains stand up to the light of more recent historical research and archaeological findings. Finally, an extensive comparison of Dodge's books on the American Civil War to his historical biographies could shed light on how the direct combat experience of the Civil War led American historians to interpret the more distant past.