Introduction

Since the 1960s, Americans’ attitudes toward France have involved a wide array of emotions, from suspicion to anger and even, at times, betrayal. France’s withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s integrated military command in 1966 and its refusal to allow American military aircraft to enter its airspace during the 1986 bombing of Libya deteriorated the congenial American attitudes toward the French, which had been prevalent prior to World War II. The current global war on terror has not changed this opinion, and at times there has been a great deal of hatred of all things French. The “Freedom Fries” movement of 2001–2 that refused to use the word “French” when ordering fast food and the always popular jokes concerning the effeminacy of French arms are reminders of the animosity of Americans to all things French. A recent book titled *Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America’s Disastrous Relationship with France*, which received favorable reviews from the *Wall Street Journal*, documented the history of evil French machinations against America.1 When France offered the United States advice about the dangers of appeasement in early 2010, Minnesota’s Governor Tim Pawlenty replied that it was like “AIG [a company generally held responsible in part for the financial collapse of 2007] lecturing us on financial responsibility.”2 However, this was not always the case. Across a broad spectrum of intellectual activity, America once considered France the model for a wide range of professions, including the profession of arms.

Consider this scene from the United States Military Academy at West Point: there is a small classroom of sixteen cadets and a single commissioned officer professor, in this case a major. The cadets listen attentively to the officer as he describes the movements of Napoleon’s Grande Armée from its victory over the unfortunate Austrian General Karl Mack at Ulm, to its subsequent pursuit of the Austrians and their Russian allies. The officer provides a quick summary of Napoleon’s strategic situation, his capabilities and constraints, and his plan to draw the army of the Third Coalition into a decisive battle. The cadets then analyze the French plan and the Allied response,
identifying the importance of accurate intelligence for battlefield decision-making. The officer directs the cadets to the large-scale map of the battle of Austerlitz laid out on tables in the center of the classroom. The cadets each take an icon of either a French or Allied corps commander and describe the situation and actions of their respective icon, moving the pieces through the phases of the battle of Austerlitz. As the cadets brief their parts, the officer asks them to critique the performance of the French and Allied commanders and their decisions and to explain the causes of Napoleon’s greatest victory. The cadets respond with intelligent criticisms and offer their own unique solutions to the tactical problems presented by the battle of Austerlitz.

This scene came from the course “The History of the Military Art from 450 through 1900,” which I taught while assigned to the West Point Department of History from 2006 to 2009. Every cadet in their last year at the academy is required to take this military history course, and every instructor teaching the course includes a lesson on the battle of Austerlitz. This lesson was part of the Napoleonic history block that consisted of almost 25 percent of the material in the course. This demonstrates the enduring legacy of Napoleon in the undergraduate officer education of the U.S. Army. The study of Napoleon prepared these cadets to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, just as well as it prepared their predecessors to fight in the Civil War or World War I.

However, French influence in the American army was once more than just the use of historical vignettes to teach cadets the history of the art of war. French tactics and military thought reshaped American warfare in the early nineteenth century. Using the 1791 French system of tactics to break a series of defeats in the War of 1812, Winfield Scott introduced French ideas into the American military tradition in 1814. These ideas included a dedication to offensive operations that culminated in an assault, the creation of an infantry army composed of nonspecialized infantry units, a linear but noncontiguous understanding of the battlefield, a desire to combine the effects of all auxiliary arms into the main infantry battle, and the adoption of nondogmatic tactics executed through the initiative of the officer corps. From 1814 through 1940, the U.S. Army organized, trained, learned, and fought according to an understanding of war imported directly from the armies of the French Revolution. The fundamental elements of the American way of warfare remained French, unaffected by battlefield events or advances in technology, for over 100 years. Strong cultural movements and the dedication of the army’s senior leadership ensured the continued adherence to this French approach to warfare until its replacement following the fall of France in 1940, under the leadership of George C. Marshall.
After the War of 1812, French influence dominated more than just the development of American army regulations, technology, and education. The way an army fights is more than just the sum of its equipment, social composition, weaponry, and leadership. When armies go to war, they do so balanced on the tip of an immense pyramid of ideas about the fundamental nature of warfare. Every nation conforms to certain ideas concerning the relationship between citizen, state, and war and acceptable types of soldiers, armies, practices, and traditions. Such conceptualization, which I refer to as a way of warfare, shapes the way a nation thinks about the acceptable uses of its military. This is different from a way of war that describes a nation’s strategic and military traditions. For example, it could be argued that the British way of war during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries utilized their island position and a strong navy to defend their country and achieve their political objectives. However, this is not a way of warfare, because it does not encompass the way the British thought about war, mobilized for war, fielded an army, or engaged in battle. This definition of a way of warfare privileges armies and land combat because armies encompass every facet of national life, whereas the limited numbers and technical skills required by a navy or air force prevent the same kind of involvement by the nation. The strategies, organization, execution, tactical regulations, training methods, and operations of armies on the battlefield do not create a nation’s way of warfare. These elements reflect the ideas represented by a nation’s way of warfare.

These ideas influence the formation of an army’s intellectual framework of the battlefield. This framework is the mechanism by which an army employs its nation’s way of warfare on a battlefield against its enemies. This framework, adopted in large part by the leadership of the army, carries with it various assumptions about the nature of war and the requirements for victory, all consistent with the national way of warfare. In a certain sense, the army’s intellectual framework of the battlefield is the manifestation of that way of warfare. For example, the eighteenth-century European commander considered maneuver to be a perfectly acceptable way of defeating his opponent. He would only attack if he had an advantage, conducted operations that focused on either depots or fortresses, and led an army composed of well-drilled soldiers organized into specialized formations based on their primary purpose on the battlefield. These principles reflected a number of the sociopolitical realities of European nation-states in the eighteenth century: standing armies were extremely expensive, wars were limited in scope and political objective, and armies were composed of subjects and conscripts. Whatever the political
goal of the commander’s nation, his army and operations conformed to the
guiding principles of his intellectual framework of the battlefield.

It is important to identify the central principles and ideas that animate
an intellectual framework of the battlefield, as opposed to merely creating
a list of all the things that a particular army does in war. Understanding
these fundamental ideas has a certain explanatory power when analyzing an
army’s strategy, doctrine, and battlefield decisions. Identifying the develop-
ment of the American way of warfare, its impact on the military institutions
of the United States, and how it changed in reaction to the political, strat-
tegic, and technological elements of modern warfare provides the basis for
such an analysis. It also provides an important context to battlefield deci-
sions, actions, and engagements and has the potential to provide more satis-
fying explanations to some of the more inexplicable moments in American
military history. The benefits of identifying the fundamental elements of an
army’s intellectual framework are a logical first step in any historical study.

Understanding the method by which an intellectual framework is con-
ceptualized, communicated, and adopted is vital to identifying the central
principles and ideas of that framework. Currently, there are several different
schools of thought concerning the generation of the military principles and
tactics that characterize an intellectual framework of the battlefield. Some
scholars argue that technology and adapting to technological change are the
most influential factors in determining the way in which armies change their
principles of war and tactics. Others emphasize battlefield experience as the
most influential source of knowledge that guides the way armies fight and
learn about fighting. Still others identify the military art as a primarily intel-
lectual activity, influenced by social and cultural norms and ideas.

A focus on technology dominates the field of studies on the development
of war. There is a large number of works on the development of specific tech-
nologies, weapons, or vehicles. The development of such technology drives
armies either to adapt their current way of warfare or to generate an entirely
new one. Technological innovation becomes the principle force guiding cor-
responding changes in organization, doctrine, and tactics.5 While there are
more forces at work than just technology, it is either the implicit or explicit
force of change. These arguments are extremely persuasive, as they are
grounded in the technologies that changed the modern battlefield, but they
do not explain why some countries modernize and adapt better than others
or why armies with the same technology utilize it in different ways. Technol-
ogy is certainly an important part of modern warfare, but “in order to have
the heavy bomber, one had first to conceive the idea of it.”4
Almost as prevalent as technological determinism is the argument for the primacy of battlefield experiences in the way armies conduct war. As this argument goes, armies either learn or fail to learn from the bottom up, and all real innovation starts with the individual soldier. Some studies suggest that theory and doctrine are inconsequential on the battlefield, since few people read or understand it and decision-makers avoid being restricted by such dogmas. Although there are many examples of battlefield adaptation throughout military history, there are simply too many counterexamples to make it the driving force behind the creation of a conceptual framework. For every example of pragmatic experience-driven change, there are many more examples of armies which refuse to change their tactics in spite of battlefield experience and therefore suffer incredible casualties or catastrophic defeat. Like technology, battlefield experience does not provide an adequate explanation for either creating or changing an army’s way of warfare.

Technology and experience play important roles in the creation of doctrine and the development of the military art. However, these factors are both used by the power of the human intellect on the battlefield. Clausewitz combined the importance of technology and experience in warfare by arguing that to effectively use force, armies utilized the “inventions of art and science.” But force is only one component in causing the submission of an enemy. The application of force is moderated by regulations and social norms. However, ultimately it is the mind of the commander that mediates the use of force, making the commander’s intellect the most important element in warfare. It is the intellect that is able to discern the truth concerning effective organization, training, operations, and battlefield emergencies. According to this view, war becomes primarily an intellectual activity, with ideas guiding military change. Ideas are able to combine the possibilities of technology and experience and create new conceptualizations of war, new tactics, and new armies. Ideas are also capable of integrating the social influences from the national way of warfare, especially the powerful influence of culture.

With culture used for a wide variety of purposes across several different disciplines, it is important to establish definitions and perspectives for this study on what culture is and how it influences military activity and thought. For the purpose of this argument, “culture refers to the socially transmitted habits of mind, traditions and preferred methods of operations that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community” at a particular point in time. Culture is the synthesis of a nation’s habits and beliefs, which evolve as they interact with different cultural stimuli such as changes in demographics, technology, religion, war, politics, and other cul-
tures. Some historians understand military culture to be connected to but distinct from national culture. Thus, the military must moderate its understanding and execution of war “in ways that are culturally regular” to avoid clashes with the national culture.  

In this model, American warfare becomes a function of American culture, and when the military conducts war in methods outside of those that are culturally regular, the American people force compliance on their military. Although the military has a unique subculture, with norms and values that differ from American culture as a whole, it is imminently influenced by trends in the national culture. However, this influence is much more passive and subtle than a concept that creates culturally regular actions and decisions. Culture provides an important context to the decisions, actions, events, and institutions of a nation. It is also able to cross geographic boundaries and influence other nations. When the French way of warfare crossed the Atlantic Ocean to American military institutions, it became a transnational cultural influence. It was a cultural influence because these ideas were evaluated not on a rational or objective basis but purely on conceptions of reputation and validation because they were French. As such, these French ideas were a social construction in America as opposed to a philosophical influence or a conceptual genealogy.

Thomas Kuhn created a methodology to understand the adoption, maintenance, and replacement of an intellectual framework that incorporates technology and experience through social influences such as culture. He created this methodology to understand the development of science in his groundbreaking work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn studied the great scientific revolutions and focused his historical research on contextualizing the scientific experience. He discovered that science was not a cumulative process but one dominated by a succession of scientific paradigms. Scientific disciplines have a preparadigmatic period characterized by a competition among different theories with different perspectives on the nature of that discipline. This competition continues until one paradigm provides satisfying answers to the most central problems of that discipline and achieves a consensus from the group of practitioners. A paradigm is a set of ideas “unprecedented enough to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity.” This paradigm will then guide scientific research by determining what questions should be answered and what experiments will yield important results.

It is important to note that consensus means the majority of the community becomes convinced by the paradigm, especially people in positions of
power who allocate resources or set broader research policy. There are usually adherents to other, older ideas who never become convinced and are moved outside of the scientific community.\textsuperscript{14} Once a community has accepted a paradigm, the educational institutions change their instruction and rewrite their textbooks to indoctrinate new practitioners into the paradigm through a "rigorous and rigid" process.\textsuperscript{15} After the paradigm becomes the guiding influence of scientific research, scientists then conduct "research as a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education."\textsuperscript{16} However, as research progresses, certain anomalies begin to show up in the data that contradict the expected results based on the paradigm. When these anomalies begin to appear in the research, scientists will conceive of new ways to apply their paradigm to account for them. However, when these anomalies can no longer be ignored, the profession begins the process of scientific revolution that changes both paradigm and worldview, and reconceptualizes the research of the past to lead to a new paradigm.\textsuperscript{17} This new paradigm then produces more satisfying answers to the central questions of the profession than the old paradigm. But new research and observation alone cannot produce consensus, as "an apparently arbitrary element, compounded of personal and historical accident, is always a formative ingredient of the beliefs espoused by a given scientific community at a given time."\textsuperscript{18} When the new set of ideas answers new questions better than the old paradigm does, the scientific community must believe in the new paradigm on the basis of a variety of outside social and cultural influences. Only when those influences exert enough pressure on the community will a new paradigm replace the old, and normal science can continue.

The military profession has a different set of traditions, research, history, organization, and culture than do the physical sciences that Kuhn studied. It is therefore necessary to apply this theoretical methodology to the unique elements of warfare in order to understand its paradigms and their influences. As a set of fundamental ideas concerning warfare, an army's intellectual framework of the battlefield functions as a military paradigm. This intellectual framework is accepted by the military community, predominantly the officer corps, and informs the organization, training, equipment, and operations of the army. Once accepted, the paradigm inspires a new curriculum of professional education that includes infantry drill and general regulations, initial officer schooling, and postgraduate military schooling all teaching the fundamental elements of the intellectual framework of the battlefield. It also provides the direction for the training and conduct of war, as the real laboratory of war is the battlefield. Military research encompasses integrating new
tactics, technology, and organizations to more effectively realize the ideas of the intellectual framework. It is on the battlefield that anomalies, or ways in which the ideas of the paradigm no longer apply to the modern battlefield, manifest themselves. When enough of these anomalies are observed, and there are influential officers who support different and new ideas, the old paradigm is cast away, and a new paradigm is adopted in its place. The Kuhnian model’s focus on the mechanisms through which military communities adopt ideas and use these ideas to generate strategy, tactics, technology, and organizations and on the influence of culture and personality throughout the process, provides a method to identify and understand the fundamental elements of the U.S. Army’s intellectual framework from 1814 through 1940.

Those elements originated with the ideas of the Enlightenment and French military thinkers in the decade preceding the French Revolution. These ideas combined to create a system of war using a rational and scientific approach that maximized the capabilities of the eighteenth-century soldier and technology. The French Revolution took this framework and imprinted on it a series of cultural beliefs about war. From these cultural beliefs, the French army created a series of ideas and principles that combined to form a uniquely powerful paradigm, or intellectual framework, of the battlefield. This intellectual framework, referred to subsequently as the French combat method, generated a system of tactics and general regulations that led to a series of French victories in the Wars of the French Revolution. The French combat method became a transnational cultural influence as armies across Europe adopted its fundamental elements in order to remain relevant on the battlefield. This transnational cultural influence also traveled across the Atlantic, and the United States War Department attempted to adopt the French system of tactics, albeit unsuccessfully, in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

American warfare of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a product of a number of religious, European, and especially British influences. Studies of the early American military tradition of the colonial and Revolutionary period have identified a “frontier way of war” that exerted a powerful influence on the armies of the United States through the War of 1812. However, when General Winfield Scott utilized the French system to produce the only land victories of the War of 1812, he gave legitimacy to a competing French intellectual framework of the battlefield. Subsequently, Scott created a consensus large enough to incorporate this French way of warfare into the American military tradition. The resulting American intellectual framework of the battlefield, based on the fundamental elements
of the French combat method, became institutionalized by a number of American officers educated in France who subsequently taught it to future generations of officers and soldiers. This intellectual framework dominated the American way of warfare through the Mexican-American War, the American Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. It was not until the rise of the German army in the 1930s and the fall of France in 1940 that General George C. Marshall replaced the army’s 126-year-old framework, influenced by the French combat method, with a new intellectual framework of the battlefield.

This book does not attempt to present a complete military history of the U.S. Army from 1814 through 1940, nor does it present the writings or opinions of every single American officer who served throughout this period. Such an undertaking would reveal very little about the intellectual history of the army. Nor does it attempt to link the French influence to the history of strategic thought in America, either in the army or with the commander in chief. This is not a history of French influence in the development of American military technology or equipment, although there was a strong French influence on American ordinance throughout this period. Nor is it a comparative study of American and European military thought or doctrine.

Rather, the succeeding chapters of this book follow Kuhn’s methodology in identifying and analyzing the American way of warfare from 1814 through 1940, creating an intellectual history of the U.S. Army. Beginning with the intellectual framework of the French combat method, the chapters follow its adoption by the armies of the United States, its indoctrination and use throughout four chronological periods, and the decision to end its use because of its inability to continue providing victory on the modern battlefield. Each of these chapters examines the professional education of the period through the study of regulations and educational institutions to establish the intellectual framework taught to new officers and soldiers. The chapters also include an analysis of the cultural influences on both the army and its intellectual framework of the battlefield. Each chapter is defined by the major wars of the period and ends with an analysis of a battle representative of that period, reflecting how dedicated to the intellectual framework the officers and soldiers were at the commencement of fighting and how the actual battlefield experiences affected the fundamental elements of their intellectual framework of war. These descriptions are not designed to advance the knowledge of these events or to provide new research or different perspectives on old analyses. Rather, the use of battlefield case stud-
ies demonstrates the remarkable consistency of thought and action of the American army across 126 years of war and peace. Along with the army’s educational system, system of tactics, and regulations, the battlefield examples demonstrate not only the powerful French influence on the American army’s intellectual framework of the battlefield but also the power of culture on that framework.