



SOCIETY FOR MILITARY HISTORY

George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, VA 24450

February 22, 2021

Dear Trustees of the University Press of Kansas,

We write today on behalf of the Society for Military History to register our concern over the potential downsizing or dissolution of the University Press of Kansas. As the foremost scholarly organization devoted to the study of military history, we feel duty-bound to advocate for initiatives that contribute to the field's health—and to protest measures that further threaten what many view as a besieged field in civilian academia today.

Our membership is diverse, 2,777 strong, encompassing serving and retired military officers, civilian academics, official military historians, museum curators, academic institutions, and legions of others with a passion for military history. With this professional diversity comes a wide range of political views, but we can confidently say that there is near universal agreement that the University Press of Kansas is among the leading publishers of military history in the world. This is not hyperbole. UPK's peers in the field include the likes of Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press. As a publisher of operational military history—that element of the field that struggles to maintain a toehold in civilian academe—UPK is genuinely without peer in the United States.

The reputation of UPK as one of the truly great publishers of military history is matched by the fact that Kansas is home to two of the preeminent graduate programs in military history in the nation: those at the University of Kansas and Kansas State University. Ever since Prof. Theodore Wilson (now emeritus, KU) established the Modern War Studies series in 1986, the name “Kansas” has been synonymous with military history in the United States. UPK is arguably the institution most responsible for building—and maintaining—this reputation. With more than three hundred titles in this series in print and many more in related series such as Studies in Civil-Military Relations and War on Screen, Kansas has become a veritable bastion in the field.

The trustees and executive officers of the Society for Military History are therefore deeply alarmed by the news that the Press's trustees are considering downsizing or shuttering their press to deal with the financial fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. We, too, have been affected by this public health and financial crisis, and nearly all of us on the SMH Council have had to make sacrifices to help our home institutions cope with unprecedented budgetary challenges. We have been willing to make these sacrifices in solidarity with our colleagues and fellow citizens, confident that better days are ahead. But a decision to close the UPK will have irreversible and devastating effects not only on the University Press of Kansas consortium but also upon the entire field of military history. What is currently a bastion will be yielded without advantage. Your previous investments in a press that elevates the Press's standing on the international stage will be lost, as will the revenue that its military history titles generate. The field as a whole will be poorer without what has been—and should continue to be—one of the finest publishers of military history in the world.

Hard times call for tough decisions. They require leaders to take stock of what matters most and prioritize the allocation of resources with one eye on the exigencies of the moment and the other on the future. The Council of the Society for Military History implores you to recognize that closing or reducing the scale of the UPK is at best a short-term expedient. The cost savings are likely to be negligible and transitory, while the damage will be lasting. In academic circles, military history is among Kansas's core strengths, one that allows it to punch above its weight class in the competitive field of higher education. On behalf of all who believe that a firm understanding of military history is essential to understanding our past and shaping a better future, we humbly ask you to retain this core competency for our mutual benefit and that of our fellow citizens.

Sincerely,

The Council of the Society for Military History

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