

April 4, 2016

TO: Board of Trustees, Society for Military History

FROM: Sam Watson

RE: Coffman Prize Committee Report

I am pleased to provide the following report on behalf of the 2016 Edward M. Coffman First Manuscript Prize Committee. The committee consisted of me as chair, Lien-Hang Nguyen (University of Kentucky), and Lisa Brady (Boise State University).

This year, we received seven entries for the Coffman Prize, the same number as in 2014 and 2015, although I expanded my outreach by collectively emailing approximately a hundred attendees of the West Point Summer Seminar in Military History from the past five years. This number of entries (seven) has been the historical norm, with the exception of the inaugural offering in 2011 (when the committee judged only a quarter of the 21 submissions deserving of full consideration). (In 2013 seven of eleven submissions received, after an extension of the deadline following an initial seven submissions, warranted commendation to the University of North Carolina Press.)

I was delighted that the committee members independently agreed on the top two manuscripts and quickly came to the consensus that the outstanding manuscript in the competition was that of Dr. Jordan Hayworth, for his 2015 University of North Texas dissertation "Conquering the Natural Frontier: French Revolutionary Expansion to the Rhine River, 1792-1797." Hayworth complicates our understandings of French revolutionary ambitions and military capability, exploring several layers of debate about French territorial expansion to and beyond the Rhine, revolutionary politics and international relations, and the potential for peace: debate among historians, among the French revolutionaries, and among the French revolutionary commanders. He adds depth, nuance, and a contingent operational dimension, not focused on Napoleon, to the narrative of civil-military declension developed by Jean-Paul Bertaud and other scholars. Military history rarely connects "domestic" politics and military operations as much as it should; to integrate French intellectual history and international relations as well is quite an achievement, and is really unique in scholarship on the French Revolution, its military forces, and its wars.

We also praised the close runner-up, Dr. Brian Drohan, for his University of North Carolina dissertation manuscript (which he has since defended successfully) "Human Rights at War: Activism, Counterinsurgency, and the End of the British Empire," both for its fluid writing and for the close connections Drohan demonstrates between insurgency and counterinsurgency, British domestic politics, the growing discourse of human rights during the mid-twentieth-century, and international relations. Drohan's work is distinctive, if not unique, in linking military history with the new historiography of human rights, which has tended to bypass or sideline military history. It is also refreshing to read a work on counterinsurgency that is not primarily focused on the success or failure hereof, and that does not attempt to posit a single overriding interpretation for that success or failure. The committee agreed

that it was appropriate to acknowledge this manuscript with an honorable mention and recommendation to the University of North Carolina Press.

The other dissertations submitted to the committee all brought new perspectives and attempted new connections between topics and interpretations, although the committee believed that these sometimes overreached. Thus, I can write, as I did last year (using language from previous years' reports), that the Coffman Prize indeed has emerged as a venue for identifying promising scholarship that presents new perspectives and connections, particularly in war and society studies. We still need to work on expanding the number of entries. However, I do not think that extending the deadline for two weeks, or even a month, would make much difference, except to the committee members' schedules.

I cannot say enough about the hard work and keen intelligence of the members of this committee. Both of my colleagues have served three years on the Coffman Committee, and have requested relief from their duties. With two new members next year (which will be my third on the committee), one of them will be able to replace me as chair.