
RUSSELL F. WEIGLEY



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RUSSELL FRANK WEIGLEY was the preeminent American military historian of the twentieth century, and arguably the most distinguished scholar at Temple University during his long career there. Weigley was born on 2 July 1930 in Reading, Pennsylvania. He received a B.A. from Albright College in 1952, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Pennsylvania in 1953 and 1956 respectively. His Ph.D. dissertation was written under the supervision of Roy F. Nichols, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, himself among the best historians of his generation.

Professor Weigley began his career in academia with short appointments at the University of Pennsylvania (1956–58) as instructor, and at Drexel University (then the Drexel Institute of Technology) as assistant professor (1958–60) and subsequently associate professor (1960–62). In 1962 Weigley was appointed as assistant professor to the faculty at Temple University, where he spent the remainder of his career. He was tenured in 1965. In 1985, Weigley was named Distinguished University Professor, the highest honor the university can bestow on a faculty member. Only a handful of Temple faculty have received this honor. It has been described as “Temple’s crème de la crème, [who] are chosen in consultation with the Educational Policies Committee of the Board of Trustees in recognition of outstanding scholarship.”

Professor Weigley distinguished himself in his scholarship and his teaching. His books included the influential *Towards an American Army: Military Thought from Washington to Marshall* (Columbia University Press, 1962), and *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Macmillan, 1973). These remarkable texts surveyed the nature of civil-military relations and the establishment of military power under uniquely American circumstances. Among other ideas, Weigley explored the political ambivalence that an increasingly powerful American military engendered in a democratic society; moreover, Weigley was interested in the growth of the American officer corps, which was established under circumstances so different from those of the contemporaneous European models that were the most respected in the world; the role of the military as an extension of American imperialism; nationalism and (the failure of) diplomacy; and the military as both agent and product of increasing American world power during the twentieth century. Weigley also wrote a seminal history of the army, *History of the United States Army* (Macmillan, 1967), still considered a classic survey, and *Eisenhower’s Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944–1945* (Indiana University Press, 1981). The latter, one of five finalists for the American Book Award in 1982, argued that American military leaders in Europe at the close of World War II “lacked a clear conception of war.” Weigley’s writing did not romanticize war,

however, as the newsletter *Strategic Visions* recounted: “In addition to meticulous research, compelling arguments, and crisp, graceful prose, Weigley’s writings were permeated by a strong moral element. . . . ‘Armies,’ he once told a classroom of shocked undergraduates, ‘are simply state-organized instruments of mass murder.’” Nonetheless, Weigley’s graduate classes were routinely populated by active-duty American military officers eager to study with Dr. Weigley.

Professor Weigley’s 2001 book, *A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861–1865*, won the Lincoln Prize as the best book of that year related to Lincoln or the Civil War. As he often did, in the introduction to this volume Professor Weigley recounted how his childhood visits to Gettysburg had sparked his interest in military history. He wrote there, “The battleground of Gettysburg offers the bright face of a vacation destination at noontime, but there is always a chill in the air nevertheless, and at dawn or dusk the emanations from too much violence, suffering and killing become palpable.” Professor Weigley also edited *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, a best-selling and often-cited book considered by many the most useful and authoritative survey of the history of the city. His book *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*, the first of an unfinished trilogy of books on the evolution of warfare in Europe, won the Outstanding Book Award of the Society for Military History in 1992 for non-United States military history.

In all Professor Weigley wrote or edited ten books, and elevated the literature of military history, previously much associated with ardent amateurs and professional soldiers, into the arena of mainstream history. In addition, he wrote dozens of juried articles, was awarded an honorary doctorate by his alma mater, Albright College, and was a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1969–70. But Professor Weigley’s talents were not limited to writing history. In 1990 Temple University’s College of Arts and Sciences Alumni Association conferred on Dr. Weigley its Award for Excellence in Teaching. Indeed, as a teacher, Dr. Weigley was well known to have a comprehensive command of military history and a dazzling lecture style that was famously challenging and engaging. He taught at least thirteen different undergraduate and eleven graduate courses, directed dozens of dissertations and master’s theses, and often displayed an almost photographic memory for bibliography. In a graduate seminar, Professor Weigley once made critical corrections to twenty-five student bibliographies on random subjects in American military history, correcting publication dates and the most minute bibliographic details, from memory. Of Dr. Weigley’s contributions to scholarship at Temple, his colleagues Professors Ershkowitz and Immerman wrote, “. . . Russ was the heart and soul of the

Temple History Department. He was its most important scholar, its premier mentor of graduate students, and one of its most popular undergraduate instructors. . . . Russell Weigley left a profound and indelible impression on many scholars of military history, colleagues who worked with him, and graduates and undergraduates who studied under him.”

Professor Weigley was also co-founder of the Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy (CENFAD) at Temple University. The Center represents Dr. Weigley’s and his colleagues’ vision of an academic center devoted to nurturing students of military history, to the exchange of ideas in seminars and other conferences, and to programmatic support to advance the study of military history. CENFAD is already a successful center of academic pursuit and is a key feature of the Temple University history department.

Dr. Weigley was elected to the American Philosophical Society in 1993. He was an active member, attending meetings regularly, and sat on the Executive Committee, the Committee on Research, and the Committee on Library. He was also a key leader on the board of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, where he was the chairman of the Publications Committee of the board of the Society. Dr. Weigley’s service to the profession comprises a long and impressive list of associations and accomplishments that reflect his generosity, but among the projects to which he was most devoted was one he was working on just before his sudden fatal heart attack: Dr. Weigley served on a committee to plan a memorial and museum in Normandy, commemorating the Allied invasion of France in 1944.

Dr. Weigley is survived by his wife, Emma Seifrit Weigley, their son, Jared, and daughter, Catherine. He died on 3 March 2004.

Elected 1993; Committees: Executive 2002–03; Library 1995–2003; Research 1998–2004

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