

IN MEMORIAM

Russell F. Weigley



*R*ussell F. Weigley, professor emeritus of American history at Temple University, died at the age of seventy-three on March 3, 2004. He passed away suddenly following a heart attack at his home in Center City Philadelphia. Russ had just returned from Washington, DC where he participated in a meeting sponsored by the American Battle Monuments Commission for the purpose

of planning a new memorial and museum for Omaha Beach in Normandy, France to commemorate Operation Overlord. He is survived by his wife of forty years, Emma Seifrit Weigley, and by his son Jared and his daughter Catherine.

Weigley was a long time member of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, serving as president, vice president, and a member of the editorial board of *Pennsylvania History* and on the Executive Committee of the association. He was introduced to the Pennsylvania Historical Association by his mentor Roy F. Nichols, one of its founders. For many years, he could be found at its various meetings, including the annual convention, meetings of the executive committee, and various research meetings. He often thrilled such gatherings with his superlative command of military battles and strategy. Along with other persons active in PHA, Weigley crossed Pennsylvania many times to attend meetings. Coming from eastern Pennsylvania, Weigley came to understand the breadth and complexity of the state. Traveling from Philadelphia to Erie was the same distance as going to Portland, Maine. Professor Weigley like many other members remembered staying in a motel in Laredo a few days after about fifty percent of it had burned down, of meeting in Johnstown a week after one of the city's periodic floods, and of visiting Wilkes-Barre after Hurricane Agnes. Russ's commitment to Pennsylvania history knew few boundaries as he was also a member of the board of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

A lifelong resident of Pennsylvania, Weigley was born in Reading on July 2, 1930. It was as a child growing up about seventy miles from the battle site at Gettysburg that Weigley developed his lifelong interest in military history. His parents made an annual excursion to Gettysburg and he walked the battlefield at a time when there were no motels, no souvenir shops and one could contemplate what happened and the meaning of Lincoln's words spoken there. In making this trip, Weigley followed the route of his great grandparents, who had visited the battlefield in the summer of 1863 along with thousands of other Pennsylvanians to view the carnage. Russ Weigley wrote of the emotions that Gettysburg always had for him, so that during a visit even in the summer, "there is always a chill in the air. . . . I know the ghosts." Growing up in the midst of World War II also had an influence on his vivid imagination.

Weigley graduated from Albright College in 1952 and received an MA degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1953 and PhD in 1956. At the

University of Pennsylvania, he wrote his dissertation under Roy Nichols. It was published as *Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M.C. Meigs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Upon receiving his degree, Russ Weigley taught at the University of Pennsylvania from 1956 until 1958 as an instructor and from 1958 until 1960 at Drexel University. He joined the faculty at Temple University in 1962 as an associate professor and remained until his retirement in 1999 as Distinguished University Professor. For thirty-six years he was virtually the heart and soul of the History Department. Russ was its most important scholar, its mentor of graduate students, and one of its most popular undergraduate instructors. Professor Weigley also taught as a visiting professor at Dartmouth College and was a visiting professor of military history at the United States War College at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. After retiring from Temple University, Weigley continued to teach two graduate seminars a year in military history. He was also the co-founder of Temple University's Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy.

These are but the outlines of an unusually productive scholarly career in the field of military history, but they do not capture the life of such an outstanding scholar, colleague, and teacher. Weigley left a deep impression on the many persons who were touched by his presence as scholars of military history, as persons who worked with him or who were guided by him in their undergraduate and graduate studies. He was the author of nine books and the editor of three more. Sixty-five of his articles appeared in journals or in books. In addition to these publications he gave numerous invited lectures. Several of his books received awards for outstanding merit. In fact, among his most recent, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), won the Society for Military History's Distinguished Book Award, while his last book, *A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861–1865* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), received the Lincoln Prize in 2001. Perhaps his most important works were *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), which was nominated for the American Book Award in History in 1983, and *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973).

Weigley was dedicated to grand historical narrative. Although he respected recent innovations in historical writing, Weigley tried to tell an interesting story. But he always looked at the broad picture and tried to tie his work into the total picture of strategy and tactics. In the words of John

Keegan, "No one who seeks to understand the military history of the United States can do so without consulting the works of Russell F. Weigley." Although grounded in American history, he began researching the *Age of Battles* as the beginning of a three-volume history of modern warfare in order to understand the way the modern state has been organized to fight wars. Unfortunately, we are denied his insights from the remaining volumes of this trilogy as well as from his projected history of the Battle of Gettysburg.

When Weigley came to Temple, it was a boom time for the university and he would remain at the center of both the History Department and the university for the next four decades. He was always the vital force within the department no matter who held the chairmanship. Weigley was the department's most prolific scholar. He had the most graduate students and was the teacher to whom most undergraduate students flocked. At one point he had over thirty PhD candidates working under him. Even in his retirement Weigley continued to direct dissertations. He did all of this quite selflessly taking time from his own writing. Weigley attracted from all over the country a large number of students anxious to gain a better understanding of the nature of the American military. Army officers were one of the largest groups of students who came to study with him. As one officer indicated at his memorial service, Weigley probably had more influence than any single individual in recent years on the way the army thinks about its strategic planning. Many of his non-military graduate students have found jobs in research in government agencies or in branches of the military and continue to exercise a good deal of influence on how the government prepares for war.

He was an excellent undergraduate teacher and his classes were often closed a few days after registration began. In 1990, Weigley won the College of Arts and Sciences Alumni Award for Excellence in Teaching. He inspired many of these students to go on to pursue graduate degrees in history, particularly military history. Even in the dark days during and after Vietnam, when undergraduates considered military subjects taboo, they flocked to Russ Weigley's lectures.

He was at the center of a very large department. At one time in the early 1970s, the Temple History Department had more faculty than any other department in the country. In hiring and other personnel matters, Weigley more often than not had the last word. Other faculty generally followed his lead because of his scholarship, which went far beyond his specialty of American military history. He also played a major role in university affairs serving on a presidential search committee and was active in a wide range of

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professional organizations, including the board of the American Philosophical Society, in addition to his activities with PHA.

From the time of his arrival in 1952 at the University of Pennsylvania as a PhD student, Russ Weigley was a great booster of everything Philadelphia. He lived in a house in the center of town and prided himself on walking or using public transportation to get around the city. He was a lifetime supporter of the Philadelphia Phillies and developed an encyclopedic knowledge of the team. Given the fact that Philadelphia was more often at the bottom of the National League than at the top, it was a love that had a lot of bumps. His devotion to Philadelphia led him to take up the editorship of the large volume, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982). His article on the Civil War in Philadelphia is one of the best in the volume.

Russ and Emma Weigley were the perfect hosts. Few persons in the department could forget one of Russ's and Emma's New Year's Day parties. The guests were invited to start off the year with cups of fish house punch. Those of us from out of town had no idea of what we were getting into. After one glass you had to set the clock ahead to the next year and after two cups, you did not know what century you were in.

The death of Russ Weigley was a great loss to his colleagues, friends, his many students, and the historical profession. We will all miss his advice and the many books that were still to come. But we will miss Russ the person most of all. He was one of those rare individuals who combine a fabulous mind with spirit, humor, and the warmest of hearts. He was an inspiration to us all.

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