

Perspectives in Military History

49th Annual Lecture Series

“Frontier Professionals: The Evolution of the U.S. Army Officer Corps from the War of 1812 to the War with Mexico”

Dr. Samuel J. Watson

Professor of History, United States Military Academy

After the defeat of the British in the War of 1812, the young but burgeoning United States found itself far from a lasting peace. Along its extensive borders, the fledgling republic struggled to maintain its territorial integrity, push west against hostile Native Americans, and sustain a military force capable of defending the country against internal and external enemies. In 1821, the United States Army downsized yet again, putting a strain on the armed forces to perform their duty to its fullest. In the cauldron of frontier service and political frustration, the Army's officer corps met the challenge and evolved into the bulwark of leadership that eventually led both sides in the next great conflagration, the American Civil War. The story of the professional evolution of the Army's officers from their early days of struggling through massive cuts to their strength through to fighting the country's bloodiest battles is laid out in a book by Dr. Samuel J. Watson of the U.S. Military Academy entitled, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1821-1846*. In this lecture, Dr. Watson will follow the themes of his book to discuss how the officer corps not only avoided the politics of the expanding nation, but also instilled a lasting professionalism among the young men destined to lead. He will examine the officer corps' role in the campaigns against the Creeks, Cherokee, and Seminole, and explain how their role in calming tensions with Canada avoided another war with the British. The lecture will show how a great transformation among the professional officers led them to conquer the west, calm or subdue the interior, and defend the borders.

Dr. Watson is a Professor of History at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA). He has taught at Houston Community College, Texas Southern University, and the University of St. Thomas in Houston between 1993 and 1999. He began his service at West Point in 1999, as an Assistant Professor in the Military History Division, moved to the American History Division in 2002, and was promoted to Associate Professor in 2005, and to full Professor in 2013. Professor Watson chairs the USMA Library Committee and serves on the USMA Academic Freedom Advisory Committee. In 2014, his books *Jackson's Sword* and *Peacekeepers and Conquerors* together won the Society for Military History's Distinguished Book Award. Professor Watson is an editor for *The West Point History of the Civil War* and a volume editor for *The West Point History of Warfare*.

DATE: Wednesday, January 20, 2016

TIME: Doors open at 6:30 PM and the talk begins at 7:15 PM

PLACE: USAHEC, Visitor and Education Center, Multi-Purpose Room

For updates and any last-minute changes in “Perspectives” meeting times and places, please check the USAHEC homepage: www.USAHEC.org or call the Information Desk: (717) 245-3972.