

In Memoriam: Lawrence S. Kaplan (1924-2020)

Lawrence Samuel Kaplan, university professor of history emeritus and director emeritus of the Lemnitzer Center for NATO and European Union Studies at Kent State University, died on 10 April 2020 in Delray Beach, Florida, at the age of 95. Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 28 October 1924, Larry began his undergraduate study at Colby College in 1941. Like millions of other men of his generation, he was drafted during World War II. From 1943-1946, he served in the U.S. Army Signal Corps; his wartime experience included taking Japanese fire in the Philippines and helping to liberate a Filipino town on the island of Samar. Larry completed his B.A. at Colby in 1947 and went on to graduate study at Yale University (M.A. 1948, Ph.D. 1951) under the direction of one of the field's giants, Samuel Flagg Bemis. His dissertation, published in 1967 as *Jefferson and France; An Essay on Politics and Political Ideas*, reflected his life-long interest in Jeffersonian America, but the need for steady employment at a time when academic positions were scarce pushed him toward more contemporary—and practical—pursuits.

In 1951, he took a position in the Pentagon's Office of the Historian, where he was officially tasked with writing a comprehensive history of the Military Assistance Program. That work held little appeal for Larry, but he found himself increasingly drawn to the fledgling North Atlantic Treaty Organization—perhaps because it marked the end of the nation's adherence to Jefferson's "no entangling alliances" philosophy. When he found policymakers uninterested in his detailed exploration of the alliance's origins, Larry concluded that he needed to switch directions and attempt to secure an academic position. In 1954, he was appointed an instructor at Kent State University, where he quickly rose through the ranks. In 1977, he was named a university professor; in 1986, he received the President's Medal, the highest honor conferred by Kent State. It recognizes faculty and administrative staff who have made outstanding contributions to the advancement of the University through extraordinary and unique service. Larry retired from Kent State in 1993 after thirty-nine years of service.

Larry's graduate training and work at the Pentagon combined to give his research and teaching a distinctive dual character, reflected in his singular achievement of being the only scholar to hold the presidencies of both the Society for Historians of American Relations (1981) and the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (1991). (Those who knew Larry well will no doubt note that SHAFR honored him first.) Larry's work on the early national period ranged from explorations of the concept of isolationism, to thought-provoking analyses of the War of 1812 and dissections of all aspects of Jefferson's foreign policy thought. His published scholarship on NATO addressed issues such as the alliance's origins and evolution, its place within U.S. foreign policy, the broad theme of isolation/entanglement, and the continued vitality of the alliance through a series of difficult challenges. In 1979, Larry founded the Lyman L. Lemnitzer Center for NATO Studies, unique as a U.S. academic institution studying all aspects



of the Organization's work. (The Center has adapted to changing times and is currently known as the Lyman L. Lemnitzer Center for NATO and European Union Studies.) All told, he published a dozen monographs and dozens more articles and book chapters over the course of his career. In a clear testament to his commitment to life-long learning and scholarly engagement, five of those books appeared after he officially retired from Kent State.

Beyond his amazing scholarly productivity, Larry was also a skilled public speaker and dedicated teacher, famous for delivering perfectly formed presentations without the aid of notes. For years after his retirement from Kent State he returned to campus annually for a public address on some NATO-related topic. Over the years, he held Fulbright lectureships and other visiting appointments in Louvain, Nice, Malta, London, Florence, and Bonn, as well as at Michigan State University, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the University of Maryland, and Georgetown University. Kent State University honored him for his classroom excellence in 1967 with its Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching, the university's highest prize for instructional activity; the Ohio Academy of History awarded him its Outstanding Teaching Award in 1981.

Larry was instrumental in the establishment of Kent State University's doctoral program in history in 1961 and played an extraordinarily active role in the Department's graduate program, directing 44 M.A. theses and 28 Ph.D. dissertations over the course of his career. In a reflection of trends within the field, most of those theses and dissertations dealt with Cold War-related topics, but several, especially early on, focused on the early national period. Larry took great pride in following the accomplishments of his many advisees, going out of his way to attend their presentations at SHAFR and other conferences and maintaining an active correspondence with them long after they graduated. His influence as a graduate mentor is reflected not only in the many publications of his advisees but also in their widespread employment in and outside the academy. He was also a generous mentor to younger scholars across the profession.

Larry was a devoted husband and father. His wife of more than seventy years, Jan, passed away earlier this year; plans for their joint burial at Arlington National Cemetery have been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They leave behind their daughter Debbie and son and daughter-in-law Josh and Christina.

SHAFR friends who wish to remember Larry can do so by contributing to the Lawrence S. Kaplan Scholarship at Kent State University. At the KSU Online Gift Portal, please indicate that you would like to support the "Kaplan Endowed Fund," account #12650.

—Mary Ann Heiss