Inventors, Salesmen, and Bureaucrats: Creating the Military-Industrial Complex in the 19th Century British Empire

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Schedule of topics:
This lecture series will explore the enduring relationships that formed between companies, governments, and armed forces in 19th century Britain and the Commonwealth. It is a history of human institutions, many of which are still with us today. Armies and navies use a lot of stuff, and a lot of effort went into manufacturing, packaging, shipping, and advertising that stuff. We can use that stuff as a window into a better understanding of historical industry, law, trade, politics, public opinion, and even culture. Centering on a series of historical case studies, we will meet an odd collection of tinkering engineers, melodramatic industrialists, swindling businessmen, pokerfaced government officials, and belligerent military officers. We will ask how the business of military supply went from an open free market of small private companies to an often-secret marriage of government departments and multinational corporations.

Week 1

Merchants: Arms Trade and Empires
The arms trade was at the heart of globalization from the very beginning. As European empires competed to spread their influence to the far reaches of the globe, guns became the first truly international currency.


Week 2:

Entrepreneurs: Inventor-Firms and the Weapons Show Business
Government labs and military R&D are relatively recent creations. In the 19th century, private companies and individual inventors developed most military technologies. Then they had to sell them.

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- Chapter: “Engineering Networks and the Great George Street Clique”, pp. 57-86.

**Week 3**

**Committees: Marketing to Armies and Governments**

In a worldwide open arms trade, how did governments decide which new inventions to buy and which to reject?


**Week 4**

**Lobbyists: Building Economies that can Build Ships**

As technology advanced and projects grew to enormous scale, governments could no longer expect to buy completed products on the open market. It was the navy that first required the formation of something new, a military-industrial complex.

- Chapter: Equipping and running the steam factories, pp. 76-87.
- Chapter: Greene, Scamp and the integrated factory, pp. 88-105.

**Week 5**

**Haulers: Selling Fuel to a Worldwide Navy**

How could the Navy guarantee that its fleet of ships would have the fuel it needed when and where it needed it? How did coal and shipping companies survive in a market where demand could completely shift with each new international crisis?

Week 6

Publicists and Lawyers: Patents, Intellectual Property, and Branding

How did you patent an invention that governments wanted to keep top-secret? Who had the rights to a complex machine that was developed by multiple teams with both public and private money?


  - Chapter 7: “Lessons and compromises”, pp. 78-86.
  - Chapter 8: “Rise of advertising”, pp. 87-97.

Recommended readings for continued learning:


