

# Professor appointed as military historian

## UW-Madison faculty member will serve Joint Chiefs of Staff

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When an opening for a historian for the Joint Chiefs of Staff opened a few months ago, applicants needed a unique set of qualifications.

Among the requirements: a Ph.D in history, an Army reservist rank of lieutenant colonel or colonel and the proven ability to produce high-quality historical writing.

Also, a "top secret" clearance.

Which certainly winnowed candidates to a very small pool. But University of Wisconsin-Madison military history professor John Hall could check all the boxes.

So following a phone interview and a few days of vetting, Hall got the call to head out to the Pentagon to write the official history of the development of counter-terrorism plans and strategy. Hall knows that the history he writes will very likely be classified, but he's hoping he might be able to eventually release something to a wider readership.

"I hope I will be able to write a full and faithful history of the operations I'm covering. That will obviously be a highly classified document. I anticipate it would be at the top secret level," said Hall,



Hall

45, Ambrose-Hesseltine associate professor of U.S. military history at UW.

"What I would like to do is then take that same document and redact, edit, excise, etc., and try to produce a version of it devoid of any sensitive information that would be useful by a broader general audience," Hall added. "It's also

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quite possible there will only be a classified version and it will be declassified years down the road."

The West Point graduate spent 15 years on active duty in the Army as an infantry officer and strategic planner plus another 4½ years in the Reserves where he is a lieutenant colonel. He joined the UW-Madison faculty in 2009, teaching a variety of classes on military history as well as Native American and early-American history.

The U.S. Armed Forces has documented its history since World War II, frequently by historians like Hall who interview participants, read documents and reports and write an account soon after the event.

Hall tells his students that for most historical subjects there's usually a rolling, 30-year window where journalists are the ones telling the story of what happened.

"Then with the perspective of the distance provided from an event where principals get more candid in their old age or they feel more free to talk because others have died, you can write a much fuller and deeper history of the events than what was possible while they were unfolding," Hall said.

"That doesn't mean that first draft of history typically written by journalists was not worth the effort. The work subsequently done by historians would be much harder had there not been those first drafts of history."

He's not sure how long he'll be at the Pentagon observing, interviewing and conferring with four-star generals as the global war on terror plays out. But it's likely he'll be on leave from UW for a few years.

Hall reports to Fort Belvoir in Virginia this week and will begin his new appointment after Labor Day.

Meanwhile, he plans to continue advising UW graduate students and serve on campus committees while he's in Washington, D.C. He'll also continue working with history professor Mary Lou Roberts to develop a new program at UW about the intersection of war and society.

Hall, John  
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