

Michael Hesselholt Clemmesen

A Short Biography

Born late 1944 into a family dominated by the medical profession, Michael Clemmesen joined the Danish Army in 1964 as a volunteer immediately after high school (Gymnasium).

After basic and conscript NCO training and service as a light infantry sergeant he had his regular officer education at the Military Academy from late 1965 to late 1968. He was commissioned into the Guards Hussars Regiment and was prepared for training and command of armoured subunits. Interrupted by various professional courses and a tour as UN Military Observer in Kashmir 1975-76, he had troop service as sub unit commander and junior staff officer until 1977 and 1984-1988 as infantry brigade major and battalion commander. He received his army general staff and joint staff education 1978-79 and during the next five years he was employed first in the Defence Staff Long Term Planning Group and then as Military Academy military history lecturer.

Parallel with his troop and UN service and professional education, he studied history at Copenhagen University from 1974 and completed a Master Degree in 1981. Based on his active media participation the heated public security policy debate in 1979-80, he was selected and worked as a board member in the Government Commission for Security and Disarmament Affairs 1981-83 and later as a professional member of the Defence Commission of 1988 until its conclusion late 1989.

From 1989 to mid-1994 he led the late and post-Cold War reforms of the joint staff education at the Royal Danish Defence College, first as Director Joint Operations Studies and thereafter as Strategic Studies and Joint Staff Course Director.

As the first Defence Attaché of Denmark to the Baltic States, he developed and managed the Danish defence support to the three states from 1994 to 1997, and as he realized that any real progress of their armed forces depended on a homogeneous corps of Western trained Baltic staff officers and well educated MOD and MFA civil servants, he sought and got the three countries' and the various supporting states' support for the creation of a combined staff college.

From 1997 he developed the Baltic Defence College as guided by the Swedish Defence Minister, Björn von Sydow, who led the international support for the project. Now Brigadier General, he implemented the project plans in the Estonian University town of Tartu as the first commandant from 1998 to 2004. The two last years were dominated by the transition to a Baltic States' financed and led college, by the preparation for NATO membership and by the creation of the first war college level course.

Retired from the army, he has worked from 2005 until now as a military and strategy historian. He has been employed as senior research fellow at the Institute for Military History and War Studies at the Royal Danish Defence College, with a main research and publication focus on the political-military history of the Scandinavian and Baltic Regions from 1890 to 1940.

He has been awarded the "St. Germain Medal in Gold" by the Danish Society for Military Science for his career-long contributions. He is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies and of the Royal Swedish Society for Military Science. He has been President of the Danish Commission for Military History since 2009 and editor of the Commission's new academic journal "Fra Krig og Fred" since its start in 2013.