In Defense of the Republic

Readings in American Military History

David Curtis Skaggs • Robert S. Browning III

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the first English attempts at settlement along the coast of North America, Americans have been writing—and reading—military history. Military leaders have been celebrated in story and song. And more than one American has used military service, and his ensuing fame, as a springboard to a career in politics. The United States won its political independence on the battlefield and expanded westward behind an army that not only protected the frontier but also explored and mapped the routes followed later by thousands of settlers. Political issues involving the relationship between the states and the federal government, as well as the moral question of slavery, were settled ultimately in the ferociously contested Civil War, which left a legacy of bitterness diminished only by time. American soldiers and sailors spearheaded overseas expansion, and in the twentieth century Americans have fought and died in nearly every corner of the world. War and military affairs have loomed large in American history; indeed, military history cannot be separated from the larger story of the American experience.

Yet military history has never enjoyed complete acceptance as a legitimate specialty among academic historians. Wars and military affairs represented a darker side of the American character, a reminder of a violent aspect of our history rather than a part of national progress. As one of the humanities, "real" history involved the study of political, economic, intellectual, or social trends that illustrated the growth of American civilization. The study of war, on the other hand, seemed to emphasize destruction and violence,

exactly what humanistic scholars abhorred the most. America, after all, stood for democracy and economic opportunity, for toleration and generosity, not for massed armies, fleets, and bombers. A reminder of past wars, military history also implied the potential of conflict in the future.

In part this situation was due to the emphasis within military history writing, which tended to concentrate on operational aspects of war—on tactics, strategy, and generalship. Military history served as a tool for training young officers and was thus often written by soldiers (or ex-soldiers) for other military men who could derive from its study appropriate lessons of the past to be applied in the future. Although a few historians explored other topics, military history rarely dealt with the interaction between the military establishment and the larger society. Given this context, it is not surprising that many academic historians believed that military history tended to needlessly glorify war and served to militarize society.

However, in the years after World War II this point of view slowly began to change. The armed services employed numerous professional historians to record the military operations of that massive conflict, and these scholars observed firsthand the complex and continuous interaction of politics, economics, and societal pressures with purely military operations and decision making. Moreover, the immense growth of the American military establishment following the war and the impact of that establishment upon American society was simply too large to ignore. Historians began increasingly to examine American military history as part of an ongoing process rather than as a series of isolated episodes.

Perhaps the leading example of this trend, and certainly one of the most important, was Walter Millis's landmark study of the American military, *Arms and Men,* first published in 1956. Millis argued persuasively that U.S. wars and military affairs had not taken place in a vacuum. "War," he wrote, "war preparations, military tactics and strategy, military manpower questions, military economics, are not problems arising only suddenly and sporadically in times of international emergency; they are continuous factors within the fabric of our society." In other words, the context of American military history was far broader and more complex than previously thought. The study of military history included the investigation of many topics beyond the traditional ones of battlefield tactics and generalship and encompassed the impact of technological change on military thought; the cultural, societal, and political forces that shaped the military establishment; the impact of military service upon the individual; and the ways military procurement practices influenced the national economy. While the importance of military events during wartime has always been clear, the current research concerning the American experience shows that the influence of military

affairs does not stop with the conclusion of hostilities. Millis was right. Just as uniquely national needs and conditions shaped the development of the military establishment, America's growth and progress have been profoundly affected by its armed forces.

The selections that follow illustrate a variety of approaches now taken in the study of U.S. military history. Not all of them represent examples of the so-called new military history. Some reflect the continuing tradition of the more familiar "drum and bugle" history—the study of generals, tactics, and strategic thought. Yet even these more traditional studies are not, and cannot be, immune from the influence of the changes taking place in the investigation of the American military experience. For instance, in his analysis of Civil War infantry tactics, John K. Mahon forces us to realize the importance of technological change upon military operations and suggests some reasons why military institutions are—like all national institutions—sometimes reluctant or unable to change immediately in response to an altered environment. The face of battle and the troopers' motivations are made clearer in the essays of Robert Middlekauff and Rick Atkinson, which effectively remember the often forgotten human element in military operations.

Other selections provide a new perspective on the American military. Russell F. Weigley's conclusions regarding the development of military thought before World War II suggest some of the ways in which military institutions are shaped by historical forces of which they may not even be aware. John Shy's brilliant and innovative survey of the American military experience combines the basic concepts of learning theory with more familiar information to create an entirely new and thought-provoking way of looking at the forces that shaped the development of the American military.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the articles in this book is that they supply fresh ways of seeing familiar things. Together, they place the study of military, naval, and aerospace history in its larger context. It is simply one more way to study the American experience and one more way of helping us understand the world and nation in which we live.

We selected articles for a first course in American military history. Such introductory courses normally contain more students who are not history majors than do most upper-division history courses. For that reason we avoided discussions of historiographic issues and other topics mostly of interest to professional historians. At the same time we sought readings from some of the country's most distinguished scholars of America's military past. Military history concerns not just the clash of arms but also professionalization, strategic planning, technological change, and logistical support. Each article stands by itself. Yet there is a relatedness among many of them, as the

introductions point out. We want the readers to see these essays not in isolation but rather in conjunction with one another.

In making these selections, we must acknowledge a debt of gratitude to friends and colleagues who offered advice and encouragement whenever asked and without stint. Professors Russell F. Weigley of Temple University and Allan R. Millett of Ohio State University were especially generous with their time, advice, and support. We followed many of their suggestions, and this anthology is better because of them. We thank the following individuals who reviewed the book in manuscript form: Edward K. Eckert, Saint Bonaventure University; Charles W. Johnson, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Charles E. Kirkpatrick, U.S. Army Center of Military History; Major David Lamm, United States Military Academy, West Point; J. Gregory Oswald, University of Arizona; Richard Sadler, Weber State University; and Kenneth B. Shover, The University of Texas at El Paso. And we are very grateful to each of the authors whose work appears in this collection. Their efforts have created a generation of scholarship that we are able to sample here. Obviously, there are other writers and writings and other subjects we could have included. The limits of space forced us to narrow our selection list.

We appreciate the consent of the authors and publishers to print these pieces without the usual scholarly annotation. We decided to eliminate the footnotes in the interest of both brevity and readability. Those interested in the supporting evidence for an author's conclusions should consult the original books and journals in which these essays were published. As we noted, the selection process was not easy. That there are so many good, innovative, and intellectually stimulating articles now available testifies to the continuing and growing vitality of American military history scholarship. We encourage our readers to suggest additional or alternative selections for future editions of this anthology.

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PART I

THE COLONIAL ERA