Reviews

Rebuilding the Post-Vietnam U.S. Army


By GEN William R. Richardson U.S. Army retired

If you want to understand how the U.S. Army resurrected itself after the Vietnam War and proceeded to design and build an Army that could take on the Warsaw Pact and win, you would be well advised to delve into the collective writings and speeches of GEN Donn A. Starry, all exceptionally well put-together by historian Lewis (Bob) Sorley in a two-volume set entitled Press On! (which happens to be a favorite Starry statement, recognized by those who worked for him). No one but Starry had such a strong hand and a smart mind in this rebuilt Army. He was clearly the right person for the right jobs at the right times. He knew how to make things happen in the arcane world of doctrine, combat and training developments. Father of the AirLand Battle doctrine and the Army 86 studies, both of which led to the Army that was successful in Desert Storm and later in the drive to Baghdad in the Iraq War, Starry brings to the reader of Press On! an amazing amount of useful material that explains how to prepare for war.

The first volume is replete with the story of armor in the U.S. Army, but it also covers related topics such as the battlefield, doctrine, force structure, leadership, military history, modernization and planning. It begins with a 22-page “Reflection” by Starry, an exceptional summary of the Army from World War I onward. It presents the reader with Starry’s views on the problems with the Vietnam War and what was not taking place during that period of conflict. Volume II follows with chapters on soldiers, strategy, training, values and the Vietnam War, among others. It closes with seven oral-history interviews with Starry on his life and career. Two compact discs are included in the collection. One contains the full text of the book-length monograph Mounted Combat in Vietnam, written by Starry with staff assistance at Fort Knox, Ky., in 1978. The second compact disc shows Starry as a speaker and briefer and includes some of his presentations, including “Sergeants’ Business,” “Tanks Forever” and a classic version of AirLand Battle.

Sorley has written an outstanding 16-page prologue. It describes Starry’s life, beginning with his early days in the Army as a cadet at West Point and his first duty station in Europe with the 63rd Heavy Tank Battalion, 1st Infantry Division, where his battalion commander was then-LTC Creighton W. Abrams Jr. The prologue covers Starry’s second tour in Europe in command of the 1st Medium Tank Battalion, 32nd Armor, and then describes his two tours in Vietnam, one with great distinction as the commander of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, where he proved to many nonbelievers that a mechanized force could be of great advantage in the jungles of Southeast Asia. As a redeployment planner for GEN Abrams, Starry saw what he considered a grave error on the part of GEN William C. Westmoreland, then the Army Chief of Staff. Abrams wanted to redeploy intact units and argued fiercely for this approach, but Westmoreland decided to redeploy by individuals, so as to return those who had been in Vietnam the longest. Abrams told Starry: “I probably won’t live to see the end of this, but the rest of your career will be dedicated to straightening out the mess this is going to create.”

In May 1973, Starry received his second star and was posted to take over the Armor School, with this guidance from Abrams: “Don’t screw up the tank program. Just start with the doctrine, describe the equipment requirements, reshape organization. And get the Army off its ass!” Starry was blessed with a most unusual but equally smart boss, GEN William E. DePuy, commander of the newly formed Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). Working together, these two would frame the operational concepts for how the U.S. Army would prepare to fight the next likely war—against the Soviets.

Later in 1973, the Yom Kippur War hit the front pages. Realizing that this war would provide important lessons, Abrams sent Starry and then-BG Bob Baer, the program manager of what would become the Abrams Tank, to Israel. They walked the battlefields and talked to the Israeli leaders, coming away with a clear view of the armored battlefield of that war. In Press On!, Starry cites several lessons from that war: the density and lethality of modern weapons; the advantages of long-range antitank guided missiles; the problems with command and control; and the winner will be the side that seizes the initiative and holds it. DePuy wanted to focus on the tactical level of war first, then deal later with the operational level. He had learned his lessons in both World War II and in Vietnam, where he saw inadequate tactics being employed and poor leadership and training at the small-unit
level. Starry agreed with this approach, and he coupled their concerns with the lessons of the Yom Kippur War to come up with an operational concept that could be implanted in the minds of Army combat leaders.

Led by DePuy, but authored in critical parts by Starry with support from the TRADOC school commandants, the Army produced in 1976 Field Manual (FM) 100-5 Operations, which spelled out how to fight when outnumbered and win against the Warsaw Pact. This version of FM 100-5 encompassed what became known as the Active Defense doctrine. It focused on the key Soviet concepts of mass, momentum and continuous land combat. Using this new doctrinal approach, U.S. Army Europe now was able to form an approach to combat at the tactical level of war, which offered a reasonable potential for success.

When DePuy retired in 1977, Starry—having spent 16 months as the commander of V Corps in Europe, where he followed the essence of Active Defense—now returned home to become the next commander of TRADOC. No one was better suited for this key Army job. He knew exactly what needed to be done to move to the next stage in rebuilding the Army. He saw the need at the time to modify the Active Defense approach and look at the broader scope at the operational level of war. His operational concept was to see deep to find the follow-on echelon, move fast to concentrate forces, strike quickly to attack before the enemy can break our defenses and finish the fight quickly before the second echelon closes. Frequently called the Extended Battle, Corps Battle or Deep Attack, Starry put the TRADOC staff and commandants to work on revising FM 100-5. He coupled this operational concept with Army 86 changes to the heavy division and the corps. These changes encompassed the addition of five new major weapons systems that would be critical to what became the AirLand Battle doctrine, which was well laid out in the 1982 version of FM 100-5.

Starry got the Army leadership and the TRADOC commandants to understand that going to war must begin with an operational concept for why you are going to war, what the purpose is, and how you plan to organize and fight it. This, to Starry, was simply fundamental in the business of warfare. From the operational concept, doctrine on how to fight is then derived. Starry had one immutable principle: doctrine rules. All else—such as combat developments, force and organizational design, and training—must derive from and be driven by doctrine. He also insisted that those who teach in the TRADOC schoolhouses must also be the ones who will write the doctrine—there was to be no ivory tower for the doctrine writers. Starry created the position of deputy chief of staff for doctrine and put in that position a perfect fit, BG Don Morelli, whose job it was to develop TRADOC’s concepts and then to “ride herd” on the schoolhouses and Fort Leavenworth, Kan., where the doctrine would be written and taught. Starry would say that “doctrine is what you teach.”
The Army never goes to war without the other services, particularly the U.S. Air Force. Hence, Starry engaged his counterpart at the then-Tactical Air Command, Gen. Wilbur L. Creech, in a number of initiatives to seek the best possible agreements for offensive air support, battlefield air interdiction, suppression of enemy air defenses and joint attack of the second echelon, always seeking what he knew Army forces needed in a fight—things they did not always get. Creech was a strong supporter of what Starry wanted, but often the Air Staff in the Pentagon had other ideas. Starry longed for the day when the U.S. Air Force would give the Tactical Air Command the same responsibility for developing doctrine as he had in the Army.

Following his four years at TRADOC, Starry was assigned to U.S. Readiness Command (REDCOM), the forerunner of today’s Central Command. While there, he felt that joint doctrine was something that he could handle better than the Joint Staff. He tried hard to get this responsibility but lost out to parochial interests on the part of the Joint Staff. Even today, the Joint Staff is reluctant to provide this authority to the current counterpart to REDCOM, Joint Forces Command.

Press On! has a wealth of information for those who want to understand better how to build and train an army. Starry’s principles are just as applicable today as they were in the 1970s and 1980s. A zealot for the armored force, his “Tanks Forever” article that ran in ARMOR magazine, July-August 1975 (included in Press On!), is a masterpiece in explaining why tanks are necessary. Always believing that the secret to winning is not in numbers but in mobility, he steadfastly sought to restore mobility to battle. He advocated that “properly employed, the tank not only can survive on the battlefield, [but] it will dominate the battle.” As in many of his speeches, he ends that article with the statement that “the clear lesson of war is that in the end, the outcome of battle depends on the excellence of training, the quality of leadership and the courage of our soldiers. It is also quite clear that the side that thinks it will win, usually does.”

On more than one occasion when Starry gave a talk on leadership or discussed values, he used four Cs to express his personal views. These were competence, commitment, candor and courage. Those four words speak volumes about GEN Donn A. Starry. He has a legion of devoted followers, and I count myself as one of them.

Note: Press On! is not commercially available. The Army is placing sets in its major libraries and research facilities. Other needs are being met by making the entire work accessible online at http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/carl/resources/csi/csi.asp.

GEN William R. Richardson, USA Ret., is a former deputy chief of staff for operations and plans, and Training and Doctrine Command commanding general.

Evolution of WWII Pacific Strategy

Allies Against the Rising Sun: The United States, the British Nations, and the Defeat of Imperial Japan. Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. University Press of Kansas. 458 pages; maps; black-and-white photographs; index; $39.95.

By COL Stanley L. Falk
AUS retired

The possible participation of British armed forces in the final assault on Japan was one of the most contentious issues to be settled between the United States and its World War II British allies. Both sides wrestled with this question, both within their own military and political quarters and with each other. If British ground, air and naval forces were to be involved, how, when and where would they be committed and with what types and size of forces? This problem has been addressed in a few previous publications, but Nicholas Sarantakes, who teaches at the U.S. Naval War College, has written probably the most detailed description of the arguments and negotiations within and between the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada: Allies Against the Rising Sun.

This comprehensive, widely researched account focuses on three crucial issues. Why, in the first place, did Britain want to take part in the invasion of Japan and in operations leading up to it? Secondly, why did the Commonwealth nations, with little popular support at home for their inclusion, nevertheless insist on joining in? Finally, why did the United States accept British and Commonwealth participation despite strong military arguments against this?

Sarantakes argues that the primary motivations of all the allies were political rather than military. Both London and Washington ultimately understood that postwar cooperation between the two allies would rest in large measure on British contributions to the decisive operations of the war. British attempts to simply regain their lost Asian colonies rather than joining the final assault on Japan could well turn American public opinion against continuation of the successful wartime collaboration between the two nations. The British also hoped to demonstrate to the Australians their willingness to stand with them to defend their interests. The Commonwealth nations, in turn, hoped to increase their influence and standing with Great Britain while also strengthening Britain’s ability to promote their interests in world affairs. The United States understood that heavy American casualties that might have been alleviated by British participation in the anticipated bloody Japanese invasion would be disastrous politically at home. And all concerned basically realized that a cooperative effort against Japan would serve the interests of all the allies, not simply those of any particular one.

These conclusions were not easily reached, however. The arguments within the British government between
Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his senior military leaders were particularly acrimonious. Churchill continued to insist on regaining Britain’s lost Far East possessions. “I have not become the King’s First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire,” he declared. He consistently argued for operations in Southeast Asia, particularly the recapture of Singapore, rather than focusing on invading Japan. The British chiefs of staff in turn viewed such operations as peripheral, arguing for what they insisted was the more proper and efficient use of British forces to assault Japan directly.

The struggle in London continued throughout the war—Churchill clinging stubbornly to his views, then appearing to yield to the chiefs’ arguments, and then reversing himself shortly afterwards. Not until the eve of the July 1945 Potsdam Conference did the prime minister finally acquiesce in the chiefs’ view of Pacific strategy. It had been a long, hard struggle that constantly infuriated his military advisors.

The disagreements within the American government were mild by comparison. President Franklin D. Roosevelt favored British participation and left it to his Joint Chiefs to work out the strategic details. With one exception, all favored British inclusion in the final operations. Only ADM Ernest J. King, the chief of naval operations, strongly opposed the introduction of British fleet units into the Pacific, a position he held without success throughout the war. Other questions that had to be ironed out concerned command and control, logistics, the utilization of British airpower, and the precise use to be made of British and Australian forces, but these were ultimately settled by the American chiefs of staff and their British counterparts.

In describing these developments, Sarantakes provides detailed biographical portraits of all the key individuals involved—Britons, Americans, Australians, New Zealanders and others. He goes deep into the discussions in London and Washington as well as in the capitals of the British dominions. Also, to show some of the pressures on Japanese and American leaders, he offers detailed chapters on the firebombing of Japan and the fierce land and sea struggle for Okinawa. Other chapters cover the roles of British fleet units in supporting the Okinawa campaign and in other late operations.

Concentrating as it does on the great strategic decisions about British involvement, Allies Against the Rising Sun has practically nothing to say about earlier important British and Australian contributions to the war against Japan. British operations opposing large Japanese formations in Burma and the crushing defeat inflicted on the latter are scarcely mentioned. Nor is there a single reference to the essential role of Australian forces in halting and turning back the initial Japanese offensive in New Guinea in 1942—not to the continued efforts of Australian and New Zealand land, sea and air forces to hold and destroy Japanese forces in that area.

Indeed, at one point most of the divisions in GEN Douglas MacArthur’s Southwest Pacific Area command were Australian. Finally, Sarantakes has nothing at all to say about the vital Anglo-American collaborative efforts in communications intelligence or, for that matter, in the development of the atomic bomb that ultimately brought about Japan’s surrender.

These omissions are disappointing but not critical to Sarantakes’ main theme. Allies Against the Rising Sun is an important volume that throws considerable new light on the evolution of Pacific strategy in World War II. For American readers, it is particularly valuable for showing the difficult, acrimonious relationship between Churchill and his chiefs of staff. That picture alone is worth the price of the book.

COL Stanley L. Falk, AUS Ret., Ph.D., is the author of Seventy Days to Singapore and other books on World War II in the Pacific.
Six-and-a-half decades after V-E Day, the campaign in northwest Europe following D-Day still fascinates us. There has not been a comprehensive account to address the Battle of Normandy from D-Day to the liberation of Paris since John Keegan’s Six Armies in Normandy, which was published in 1982. Antony Beevor fills the gap with D-Day: The Battle for Normandy. Known primarily as an Eastern Front historian, Beevor is the award-winning author of Stalingrad and The Fall of Berlin 1945. In examining the climactic campaign in northern France, Beevor provides a superb prequel to his Paris After the Liberation.

In compiling his history, Beevor researched more than 30 archives in six countries. D-Day is based on combat diaries and letters, official reports, and personal accounts of the combatants. Excellent maps, strategically placed, greatly enhance the text, as does a glossary of important military terms that facilitates the general reader’s comprehension of acronyms and military organizations.

Dedicating less than one-third of his book to D-Day itself, Beevor’s account of the landing at Omaha Beach is particularly outstanding. Within a few hours after the first troops landed, Omaha Beach was “just one big mass of junk, of men and materials,” one officer reported. A 1st Division soldier from Minnesota wrote home describing the carnage in the first assault wave: “It was awful. People dying all over the place ... I’ve never seen so many brave men who did so much.” Beevor reserves his highest praise for BG Norman Cota, assistant division commander of the 29th Infantry Division, who waded ashore less than an hour after the lead elements of the 29th Division struck Dog White beach. Following a hasty reconnaissance, Cota led a makeshift brigade inland and finally silenced the German defenders opposite the Vierville draw.

Good as his description of the fighting on “Bloody Omaha” is, Beevor’s account of the adjacent landings lacks the detail of Cornelius Ryan’s The Longest Day or Stephen Ambrose’s D-Day. Take the Ranger assault on Pointe du Hoc, for example. Beevor notes, “The guns were lying a little way inland and were soon dealt with.” No mention is made of Rangers Leonard Lomell and Jack Kuhn, who personally destroyed the German battery. Nor is much said about the intense fighting from individual paratroopers who seized the bridge at La Fiere, just west of Sainte-Mère-Eglise.

In examining the subsequent campaign in Normandy, however, Beevor hits his stride. Prone to presenting more narrative than analysis, Beevor excels in his description of conditions within the Falaise pocket as “impossible to imagine if you had not seen it.” One German survivor remembered, “Ambulances packed with wounded were carbonized. Ammunition exploded, panzers blazed and horses lay on their backs kicking their legs in their death throes. The same chaos extended in fields far and wide. Artillery and armor-piercing rounds came from either side into the milling crowd.” Beevor disputes the initial claims of the U.S. Ninth Air Force and of the Royal Air Force that airpower achieved a decisive degree of destruction among the fleeing German forces. Citing operational research reports, Beevor states that of 133 armored vehicles destroyed within the pocket, only 33 had been hit by air attack. Far more effective was the destruction of about 700 soft-skinned vehicles, nearly half of which had been destroyed by air attack, mostly cannon and machine-gun fire.

In addition, Beevor provides the most balanced assessment of the major combatants and the postwar squabble between Allied generals over the conduct of the campaign since Martin Blumenson’s The Battle of the Generals: The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket—the Campaign That Should Have Won World War II. British general Bernard Law Montgomery, in particular, emerges as an egotist whose battlefield performance was mediocre and cautious. “Almost single-handedly,” Beevor opines, Montgomery “managed in Normandy to make most senior American commanders anti-British at the very moment when Britain’s power was waning dramatically.” According to Beevor, Monty’s behavior “constituted a diplomatic disaster of the first order.”

Perhaps Beevor’s greatest contribution to our understanding of “the other side of war” lies in his portrayal of the extraordinary sacrifices endured by French civilians during the campaign in Normandy. Beevor opines that “the cruel martyrdom of Normandy [where 19,890 French civilians were killed and a larger number seriously wounded] saved the rest of France,” since Germany expended so much effort in the summer campaign that it was unable to resist the Allied tide until it reached the Low Countries in the autumn of 1944. These excessively high casualties were in addition to the 15,000 French killed and 19,000 injured during the preparatory bombing for Operation Overlord during the first five months of 1944.

Beevor concludes his narrative with his assessment that the battle for Nor-
mancy did not go as planned. Montgomery’s battle of attrition south of Caen was as unplanned as the Americans’ slog through the bocage in June and July. The Allied High Command, Eisenhower included, severely underestimated the tenacity and discipline of the German Wehrmacht to resist the expansion of the lodgment area. Not surprisingly, in Normandy the average losses per division on both sides exceeded those of the German and Soviet divisions during an equivalent period on the Eastern Front. As German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel noted, the killing fields of Normandy proved to be “one terrible bloodletting.” Still, Beevor posits that even armchair critics can never dispute the eventual outcome, however imperfect. Had the invasion failed, “the postwar map and the history of Europe would have been very different indeed.” It seems a fitting epitaph.

**Varied Fare**

**Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle for a Continent.** David A. Clary. Bantam Books. 624 pages; maps; black-and-white photographs; index; $30.

In *Eagles and Empire*, historian David A. Clary writes, “Anglo historians rediscovered the war in Mexico when their own country got into other conflicts.” His examination of the Mexican War appears at a time when the United States is involved in two wars. Unlike the more admiring or conspiracy-theorist American-authored assessments of the conflict with Mexico, *Eagles and Empire* presents a balanced view of the events and covers much that occurred before and after the war, delving into the long-term causes and effects of the fighting.

James K. Polk took the presidential oath of office in March 1845. Stubborn and driven, he limited himself to a single term in office and “set out to enlarge his country to the limits, and once his mind was set on that, there was no diverting him.” First up was the annexation of Texas. Polk considered this a done deal, but the interim president of Mexico at the time and the interference of the British did not pave the way for smooth negotiations. Nonetheless, the Texas Congress voted for annexation on July 4, and “Polk backed the claim that Texas extended all the way to and up the Rio Grande,” a “groundless” assertion, according to Clary.

The Texas border question was connected to U.S. claims against Mexico, Mexico’s national debt and the future of California, which Polk meant to add to the union by the end of his term. The War Department ordered Zachary Taylor to move into Texas on June 15, 1845. With his “Army of Observation,” he sat in Corpus Christi, and inevitable problems arose concerning a restless Army in a smuggler’s town.

In February 1846, “Old Rough and Ready” Taylor marched out of Corpus Christi, leaving 900 sick behind. Taylor’s army arrived at the Rio Grande
and camped out across from the Mexican town of Matamoros in a ploy of Polk’s to intimidate the Mexicans into starting a war or giving up the disputed territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. In April, Mexican soldiers attacked a small party of U.S. soldiers, and Taylor “simply told the adjutant general that ‘hostilities may now be considered as commenced.’”

The war proceeded, mismanaged and bungled most of the way by Polk on one side and Antonio López de Santa Anna on the other. “The war would be decided on land,” Clary writes, “by the differences between the two nations”—one with 22 million citizens, a legitimate government, a booming industrial economy and a population of hunters who knew how to handle weapons; the other with 7 million people who were “illiterate and downtrodden,” did not become familiar with firearms until joining the army and whose government was in a constant state of revolt.

The U.S. Army “enjoyed increasing professionalism because of the military academy at West Point,” whereas young officers wanting to advance in the Mexican army had to attach themselves to more established officers on the rise.

Meanwhile, relying heavily on his guide Kit Carson, John C. Frémont headed expeditions around California and the Oregon Territory, disregarding his official Army commands in favor of pleasing his influential father-in-law, Senator Thomas Hart Benton. Judging by the looks of Frémont and his scragglily men, Clary deadpans, “Manifest destiny wore a long beard and buckskin breeches.” Frémont organized the Bear Flag revolt in California in June 1846, foreshadowing the territory’s eventual absorption into the United States and the resultant inrush of settlers.

Finally, in 1848, after gruesome battles and horrendous atrocities, the U.S. and Mexican governments ratified the treaty ending the war. “Calculating the total butcher’s bill for the struggles among Anglos, Mexicans and Indians, if it could be added up, would run into the tens of thousands.” The United States gained a massive chunk of territory, though mistakes made in the treaty required resolution years later with the Gadsden Purchase, which brought even more land under the Stars and Stripes. After Santa Anna’s departure to Colombia, a new government populated with a variety of Mexicans—criollos, mestizos and indios—rather than the heavily criollo governments that had been a remnant of New Spain, ushered in an era in which “Mexico had become Mexican at last.”

Well-researched and colorfully written, *Eagles and Empire* tells the chaotic story of the Mexican War from many perspectives—U.S., Mexican and Indian. Clary brings to light the complexities of a war that has affected the United States’ relations with its southern neighbor ever since.

—Sara Howey

**West Pointers and the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace.** Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh. *University of North Carolina Press.* 304 pages; maps; index; $30.

In the latest edition of the Civil War America series edited by Gary W. Gallagher, Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh explores how the professionalization of the U.S. Army during the first half of the 19th century affected the conduct and eventual outcome of the American Civil War. Hsieh currently serves as assistant professor of history at the U.S. Naval Academy and has served with the U.S. State Department on a provincial reconstruction team in Iraq.

In *West Pointers and the Civil War,* Hsieh begins his analysis with GEN Robert E. Lee’s surrender to LTG Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, stating that Lee’s rejection of irregular warfare as an alternative to capitulation demonstrated “how much the antebellum U.S. Army’s patterns and habits of thought still remained among its veterans.” Hsieh believes that “in committing themselves to a struggle of nation-state armies,” both Union and Confederate armies came to depend on the small group of Regular Army veterans, many from West Point, “who had monopolized professional military expertise” in the decades preceding the Civil War.

Tracing the evolution of military professionalism from the War of 1812 to the Civil War, Hsieh examines the pivotal contributions of Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, West Point superintendent Sylvanus Thayer and Brevet LTG Winfield Scott in advancing the cause of “military science.” According to Hsieh, the U.S. Military Academy became the heart and soul of an Army determined to redeem itself from the early humiliations suffered during the War of 1812. By the Mexican-American War of 1846–48, commanding general Scott expressed his fixed opinion “that but for our graduated cadets, the war between the United States and Mexico might, and probably would, have lasted some four or five years.”

Hsieh cites West Point personnel files that indicate that when civil war erupted in 1861, of the 487 graduates with some level of affiliation with slave states, 173 graduates remained loyal to the Union, while 251 supported the South. The remaining graduates did not actively serve during the war. Of the 301 graduates of the states that actually seceded from the Union, 200 graduates supported the Confederacy, 60 remained loyal to the Union, 5 serving officers resigned, and 36 did not return to military service during the conflict. Hsieh dedicates more than 10 percent of his text to detailed notes based on extensive research at West Point and military archives.

In exploring why the Civil War lasted as long as it did and why it remains this nation’s bloodiest conflict, Hsieh opines...
that neither side professed an inherent advantage over the other in terms of training, cohesion and leadership. The dominance of West Pointers in high command of both the Union and Confederate armies created an equilibrium of military competence. This balance extended into areas of technology, organization and tactical development.

During the first two years of the war, Hsieh posits that Lee and Union MG George B. McClellan left their respective legacies on the armies that each commanded. While Lee bequeathed an aggressive culture of command among his talented officers, the Army of the Potomac under McClellan was characterized by “caution” and a “chronic civil-military dysfunction.” The subsequent commanders of the Army of the Potomac remained cautious because McClellan only appointed “McClellan loyalists” to corps and division command. Not surprisingly, each of the officers who subsequently commanded the North’s most important army served under McClellan during his tenure as commanding general.

The North eventually emerged victorious only when Grant received his appointment as general-in-chief of all Union armies. Hsieh lauds Grant’s tactical flexibility, which included a combination of frontal assaults, envelopments, cavalry raids, unorthodox mining operations and regular siege tactics. By maintaining the strategic offensive, Grant successfully brought the war to a close.

Hsieh concludes his study with the suicide of MG Emory Upton, “hero of Spotsylvania and one of the most esteemed officers of the postwar U.S. Army,” in March 1881. Upton found the postwar Regular Army’s return to “isolated constabulary functions” very unsatisfying. Yet even Upton did not call for revolutionary reforms in making the Army a more professional force. According to Hsieh, Upton’s proposals for an expansible Regular Army, rotation between staff and line positions, a comprehensive program of education for officers and a reformed general staff were reminiscent of reforms advocated during the antebellum period. It would be left to Upton’s successors to complete the process of military professionalism.

Hsieh posits that the same military ethic that “made peace so unsatisfying to Upton made it the only available alternative to Lee at the close of the Appomattox campaign.” Thus, the old Army that existed prior to the Civil War served the nation both in war and peace.

—COL Cole C. Kingseed, USA Ret.