

THE PROFESSIONAL BULLETIN OF ARMY HISTORY

ARMY HISTORY

SPRING 2021

PB20-21-2 No. 119

WASHINGTON, D.C.

NIXON'S "LAOTIAN GAMBLE"

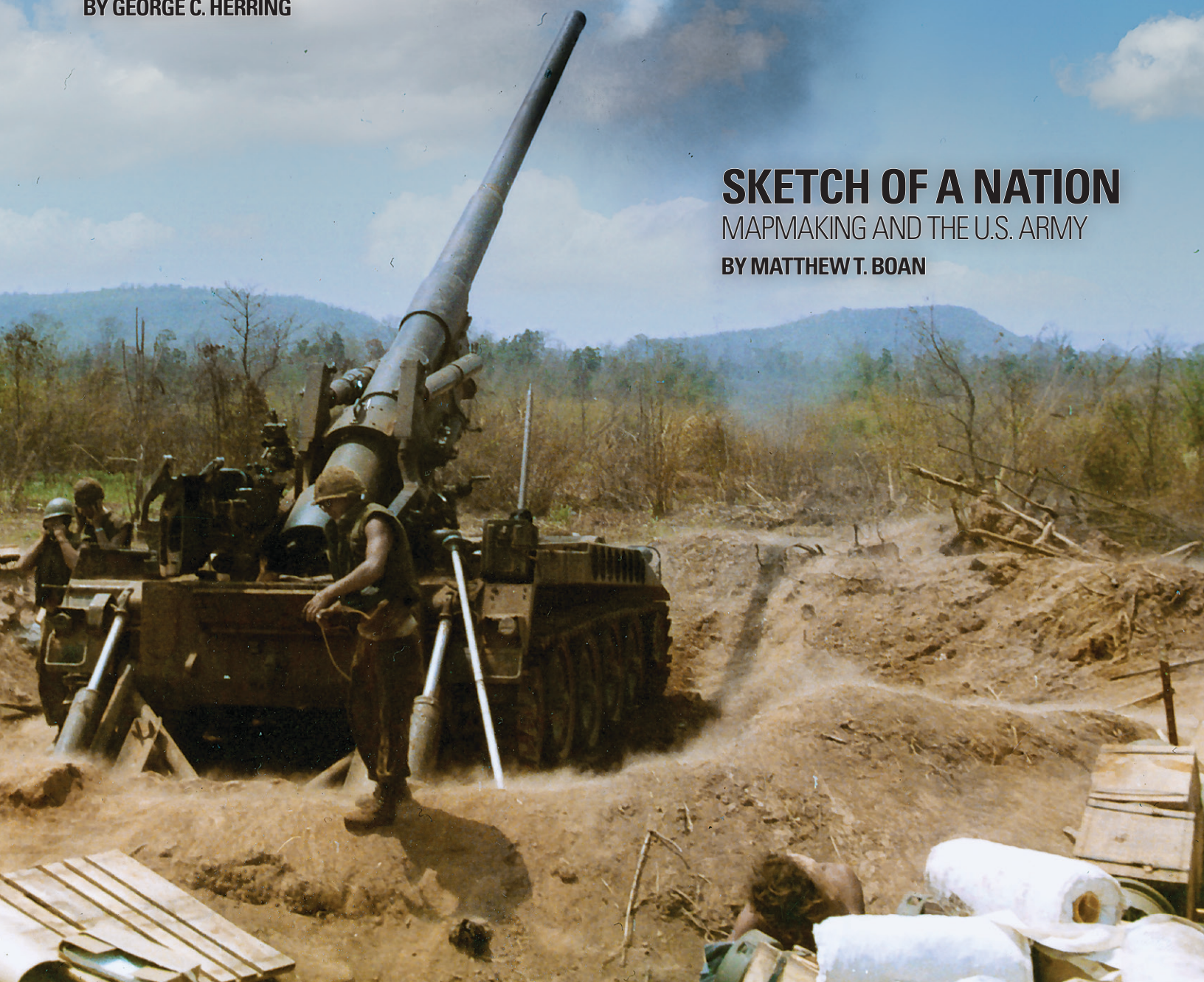
LAM SON 719 AS A TURNING POINT
IN THE VIETNAM WAR

BY GEORGE C. HERRING

SKETCH OF A NATION

MAPMAKING AND THE U.S. ARMY

BY MATTHEW T. BOAN



ARMY HISTORY

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The U.S. Army Center of Military History publishes *Army History* (ISSN 1546-5330) quarterly for the professional development of Army historians and as Army educational and training literature. The bulletin is available at no cost to interested Army officers, noncommissioned officers, soldiers, and civilian employees, as well as to individuals and offices that directly support Army historical work or Army educational and training programs.

Correspondence, including requests to be added to the distribution of free copies or to submit articles, should be addressed to Managing Editor, Army History, U.S. Army Center of Military History, 102 Fourth Ave., Fort Lesley J. McNair, DC 20319-5060, or sent by email to usarmy.mcnaair.cmh.mbx.army-history@mail.mil.

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Front cover: American artillery fire at targets in Laos, 4 March 1971. (U.S. Army)

Back cover: View of a firebase in Laos from the door gunner's position on a UH-1D Iroquois helicopter (U.S. Army)

EDITOR'S JOURNAL

In this Spring 2021 issue of *Army History*, we present two excellent articles, a crop of engaging book reviews, a riveting Artifact Spotlight, and a new addition to the journal, the Army Museum Feature, which will highlight various Army field museums from around the world.

The first article, by eminent historian George Herring, examines Operation LAM SON 719, the South Vietnamese-led invasion of Laos in 1971. The operation, widely considered a failure, was intended to destroy North Vietnam's ability to launch offensives in the south, provide the United States more bargaining chips at the peace talks in Paris, and give the Vietnamization program more time to be implemented. Herring details not only the ground invasion and the air and logistical support provided by the United States, but the failures in South Vietnamese and U.S. leadership, the increase in antiwar demonstrations, and the political fallout for the Nixon administration. He argues that the botched invasion was decisive in determining the eventual outcome of the war.

The second article, by Center of Military History (CMH) cartographer Matthew Boan, looks at the evolution of Army mapmaking. From the early days of the hand-drawn maps of the American Revolution to the use of satellites, GPS, and computer software, Boan chronicles the development of Army maps and the technology used to make them.

As I write this, the small staff of *Army History* has been teleworking for a full year now, and it has been a trying period for many of us. However, this past year has also presented us with new opportunities.

One that I am particularly excited about is our partnership with the monthly journal *Military History*, the leading military history magazine in Greece. The magazine, now in its twenty-fifth year of publication, is printed by Govostis Publishing, which has been producing books, monographs, and a number of other periodicals since 1926. Govostis contacted me in July of this past year with a request to translate and reprint one of our articles in their forthcoming January issue, with the possibility of more to follow. Viewing this as a unique opportunity to reach a new audience and broaden *Army History*'s exposure, we wholeheartedly agreed. The editors at *Military History* chose Douglas E. Nash Sr.'s "Kesternich: The Battle That Saves the Bulge," an article that appeared in our Fall 2018 issue and was later nominated for a Pulitzer Prize by one of our readers.

As January neared, I was shown proof pages of what the article would look like in Greek. I was particularly impressed by the layout and design. *Military History* is a handsome publication, and none of the elements that make *Army History* what it is have been "lost in translation." The issue displays the *Army History* logo on its cover and contains a publisher's note introducing *Army History* to *Military History*'s readership.

I'm happy to report that, since this first request, a real partnership has developed. The folks at Govostis have already published another *Army History* article, and they have asked for an additional six, which they plan to publish throughout 2021. Knowing that *Army History* is continuing to grow and literally reach around the world makes me incredibly proud.

BRYAN J. HOCKENSMITH
MANAGING EDITOR



SPRING 2021

ARMYHISTORY

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THE CHIEF'S CORNER

CHARLES R. BOWERLY JR.

ARMY HISTORIANS: TORCHBEARERS OF FACT AND TRUTH

In the wake of the 6 January 2021 assault on the United States Capitol by an insurrectionist mob bent on subverting the electoral process as defined within the Constitution, one of the many talking points that has emerged in the public square is the idea that we now live in a “post-truth” world. A common refrain is that we are in “unprecedented” times, an idea that unmoors us from any sense of perspective that could be gained from studying the past. But even this is not new or without precedent. In 1992, political scientist Francis Fukuyama published *The End of History and the Last Man*, which argued that with the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, humankind had reached not just “the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: That is, the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”¹ Fukuyama took much of his inspiration from the political theories of Karl Marx and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who themselves saw human history as a linear progression from an initial state to a final state.² The thinking goes that post-truth narratives and the instantaneous feedback loops of social media have eroded the belief that there is indeed a single set of facts related to any question, and that we exist in a time that is unconnected to what came before.

Concurrently with these wider public dialogues, historians have carried on an internal debate about whether or not true objectivity, a dispassionate analysis of the past based on a coherent set of facts and events, is even possible. Army historians, museum professionals, and archivists continue to participate in this debate. The recent opening of the National

Museum of the United States Army has moved the discussion into the public sphere, as visitors and critics examine the museum’s treatment of the Army’s past. The rest of the Army Museum Enterprise has been doing this for years. Command historians advise leaders and conduct analysis and research that supports wider programs and operations. Command historians, military history detachments, and archivists create and maintain the tools of this research in the form of paper and electronic records. Teaching historians in our schools create historical mindedness. In this environment, our program’s responsibility to serve as the institutional memory of the Army—by maintaining records of activities, lineages, and honors; preserving material culture; publishing works of official history; providing staff support; and growing critical thinking skills in our people—remains critically important.

All of this is to say that with the help of its historical program, our Army can remain a place where truths and facts, and a sense of objectivity about those truths and facts, can coexist with an environment of intellectual curiosity, humility, analysis, and self-criticism. These are the core qualities that inform my charge to all of us to Educate, Inspire, and Preserve.



NOTES

1. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
2. “The End of History and the Last Man,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_End_of_History_and_the_Last_Man [accessed on 15 Jan 2021].

NEWSNOTES

NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM CMH

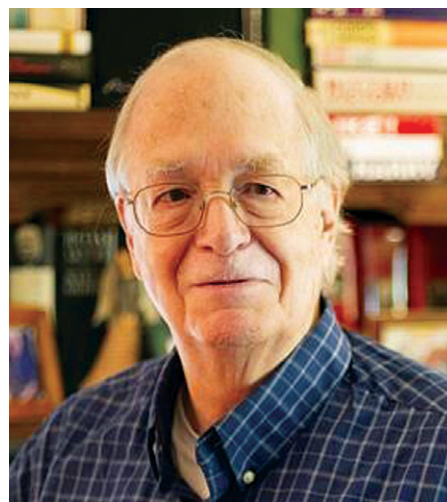
The Center of Military History (CMH) recently released two new publications. The first of these is a revised version of *The Staff Ride* by William G. Robertson. Peter G. Knight has updated this new edition, titled *The Staff Ride: Fundamentals, Experiences, and Techniques*, for the twenty-first century. Among other improvements, it includes information on virtual staff rides. This title has been issued as CMH Pub 70–21, and a PDF version is available for download on the CMH website.

The second new publication is *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, May 2005–January 2009*. In it, authors Brian F. Neumann and Colin J. Williams show how the United States Army balanced its ongoing commitment to combating terrorist and insurgent activity in post-Taliban Afghanistan with the expanding American war in Iraq. They tell how the Bush administration relegated Afghanistan to an economy-of-force effort and sought to transition responsibility for supporting the fledgling Afghan government to an international coalition. They also describe how a growing insurgency against coalition forces and the Afghan government threatened to derail these efforts. This led to a three-year period defined by minimizing American commitment and achieving unity of effort among the coalition partners. This title has been issued as CMH Pub 70–131–1. A PDF

version is also available for download on the CMH website.

LT. COL. CARLO WINTHROP D'ESTE (1936–2020)

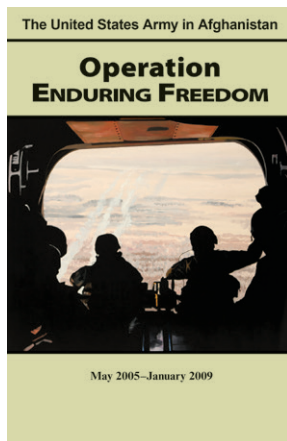
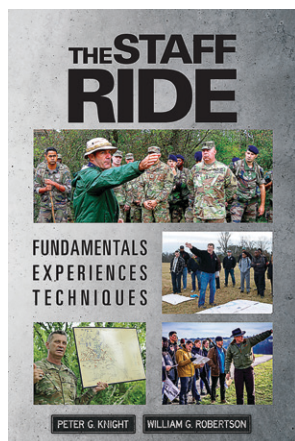
The military history profession has lost a true giant. In a variegated career, Carlo D'Este was a decorated Army officer, a great friend of Army history, and one of the most distinguished World War II historians of his generation. Born to two accomplished musicians in Oakland, California, D'Este graduated from Norwich University in 1958, was commissioned as an ordnance officer, and served two combat tours in Vietnam and three overseas tours in Germany and England. He was an honor graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and received his master's degree from the University of Richmond in 1974. He earned the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star with Oak Cluster, among other awards. After retiring from the Army in 1978, D'Este turned to history writing, composing a ground-breaking analysis, *Decision in Normandy* (1983), before writing *Bitter Victory* (1988) on the invasion of Sicily, *World War II in the Mediterranean* (1990), and *Fatal Decision* (1992) on the Battle of Anzio. Turning to biography, he wrote what is arguably the best portrayal of General George S. Patton Jr. in *Patton: A Genius for War* (1995), followed by *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* (2002) and *Warlord: A Life of Winston Churchill at War* (2008). For his work, D'Este received the American Veterans Center's Andrew



Carlo Winthrop D'Este

Goodpaster Award, an honorary doctorate in humane letters from Norwich, and, in 2011, the Pritzker Literature Award for Lifetime Achievement in Military Writing. In 1995, he was a cofounder of the William E. Colby Military Writers Symposium, which brought together leading military historians and security experts for discussions on global issues. He often lectured at the Command and General Staff College, the service war colleges, and on television. He served on the Department of the Army Historical Advisory Committee from 1994 to 1997, a crucial time for the Army Historical Program, which was under pressure to make severe budget cuts.

Carlo will be missed as a historian and, perhaps even more so, as a person. In the tradition of prominent military historians like Martin Blumenson and Forrest Pogue, he made a point of being accessible to young scholars and he encouraged them with an easy informality and humor devoid of arrogance. He was a major supporter of his community library in Mashpee, Massachusetts. Finally, Carlo will be remembered as a devoted husband to his wife, Shirley, and a loving father and grandfather to his four children, nine grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.





NIXON'S "LAOTIAN GAMBLE"

LAM SON 719 AS A TURNING POINT IN THE VIETNAM WAR

A U.S. Army helicopter sets down to pick up ARVN troops for the assault on Tchepone in Laos, 5 March 1971.

(U.S. Army)

BY GEORGE C. HERRING

Fifty years ago this past winter, South Vietnamese armed forces, with U.S. air and logistical support, invaded southern Laos in Operation LAM SON 719—so named for the birthplace of the fifteenth-century Vietnamese emperor Le Loi, a legendary figure who fended off one of the many Chinese invasions of Vietnam. The intent of the operation was to cripple North Vietnam's offensive capabilities, at least temporarily, and to buy time for President Richard M. Nixon's Vietnamization policy to gain traction. However, the ploy backfired. The South Vietnamese inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy forces and substantial damage to their logistics, but the incursion was aborted before its goals were achieved. A humiliating and costly retreat from Laos made clear the continued vulnerability of South Vietnam's Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and the limits of Vietnamization. LAM SON 719 exposed the frailty of the asymmetrical alliance between the American superpower and

its newly independent and still quite fragile client state, South Vietnam. It also deepened antiwar sentiment at home, forcing the United States into a more conciliatory negotiating position with North Vietnam. Often minimized in importance or even forgotten, the failed incursion into Laos decisively influenced the outcome of the war.¹

From the start to the finish of their conflict, North Vietnam and the United States treated Laos as a pawn in a high-stakes game. Laos was landlocked, sparsely populated, impoverished, and important mainly for its location. Upon its independence from France in 1953, Laos was as factionalized as its Vietnamese neighbor. In the late 1950s, the threat of a leftist Pathet Lao takeover provoked alarm in Washington, D.C. President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned his successor, John F. Kennedy,

that Laos might be the most dangerous foreign policy crisis he would face. In 1961, Kennedy briefly contemplated military intervention there. He chose neutralization instead, but an agreement negotiated in Geneva, Switzerland, proved short-lived. Laos was soon drawn into the rapidly escalating war next door. North Vietnam supported the Pathet Lao's efforts to overthrow the Laotian government. The fabled Ho Chi Minh Trail, by which Hanoi sent troops and supplies to the South, cut across southern Laos near the border town of Tchepone before splitting along different routes. Because of Laos's nominal neutrality, the United States, from 1965 to 1971, waged a war on Laotian territory that was kept secret from the American public and Congress. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed the fragile government and armed and trained Hmong hill farmers in northern Laos, in time supporting them with helicopter gunships, to fight the Pathet Lao. The CIA also oversaw



massive bombing campaigns in northern Laos to assist the Hmong and in southern Laos to disrupt North Vietnam's lines of communications and logistics. In all, U.S. aircraft would dump 1.2 million tons of bombs on Laos, more explosives per square mile than have been dropped on any other nation in the history of warfare.²

The 1971 U.S.–South Vietnamese invasion of Laos took place at a perilous juncture in the Vietnam War. North

Vietnam's *People's Army of Vietnam* (PAVN), and especially the Viet Cong insurgents in South Vietnam, had been mauled in the 1968 Tet Offensive and by the allied counteroffensives that followed. The carnage of Tet soured already restive Americans on the war, forcing President Lyndon B. Johnson to scale back the bombing of North Vietnam, open peace negotiations in Paris, and decline to run for reelection in November of that

year. When Richard Nixon defeated Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey by a slim margin in the 1968 presidential election, he inherited an intractable dilemma. Steps he might take to win the war in Vietnam could further unsettle the home front, but measures to quiet domestic unrest likely would weaken the U.S.–South Vietnamese position in the war. Nixon's solution was to initiate the phased withdrawal of U.S. troops and gradually shift the burden of the fighting to a by-then larger, better-equipped, and presumably more battle-worthy South Vietnamese army. To bolster this policy, known as Vietnamization, Nixon sent U.S. and South Vietnamese forces into Cambodia in April 1970 to disrupt North Vietnam's logistics and deprive its forces of sanctuaries. The Cambodian operation narrowed the president's already thin margin for error. Militarily, it was hailed as a success, but it also sparked virulent antiwar demonstrations that led to the killing of student protesters at Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State College in Mississippi and prompted the closure of numerous other campuses. The Cambodian incursion also stirred a heretofore quiescent Congress to consider placing limits on U.S. military activity outside South Vietnam.

Nixon himself took the initiative on LAM SON. He believed that Johnson had erred by refusing to attack the North Vietnamese sanctuaries, and he was determined not to repeat that mistake. He sought to keep the enemy guessing, and for a time in 1969 he even pondered a drastic escalation of the war, including threats of using nuclear weapons. As early as May 1970, at the height of the uproar over the Cambodian incursion, Nixon directed General Creighton W. Abrams Jr., Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), to prepare plans for an offensive in Laos. By late in the year, the urgency of such an operation appeared to have grown. Following its rout in Cambodia, North Vietnam had shifted the center of its logistical operations to Laos and mounted a huge logistics buildup and a counteroffensive that put Laotian forces on the run. By this time, U.S. troops in South Vietnam had been reduced to about half the number they had been when Nixon took office. Disruption of enemy supply operations in Laos could ease the threat to South Vietnam and provide more



President Nixon

(Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum)



General Abrams

(U.S. Army)

time to expand and improve its armed forces. It might even persuade Hanoi to accept a peace proposal calling for the total withdrawal of U.S. troops in return for a cease-fire and the release of prisoners of war held in North Vietnam.³

The plan for LAM SON 719, devised at Nixon's request, called for a three-pronged dry season offensive. ARVN contingents would attack a North Vietnamese installation near the Chup rubber plantation in the "Fishhook" region of Cambodia, which U.S. and South Vietnamese troops had invaded the previous May. Commando raids and naval forays against North Vietnam itself would divert Hanoi's attention and perhaps shake its resolve. The centerpiece of the plan would be an assault by South Vietnamese forces numbering close to 20,000, backed by massive U.S. air and artillery support, into the southern panhandle of Laos near Tchepone to disrupt enemy logistics, destroy supplies, and thereby ease the threat to South Vietnam. Should the North Vietnamese respond in force, American planners reasoned, U.S. airpower could pummel them. The operational planning originated in MACV. The South Vietnamese had their own ideas about how the operation should be conducted, preferring a quick strike to Tchepone, but U.S. planners left scant room for these modifications. Given the patron-client relationship between the United States and South Vietnam, and



General Lam

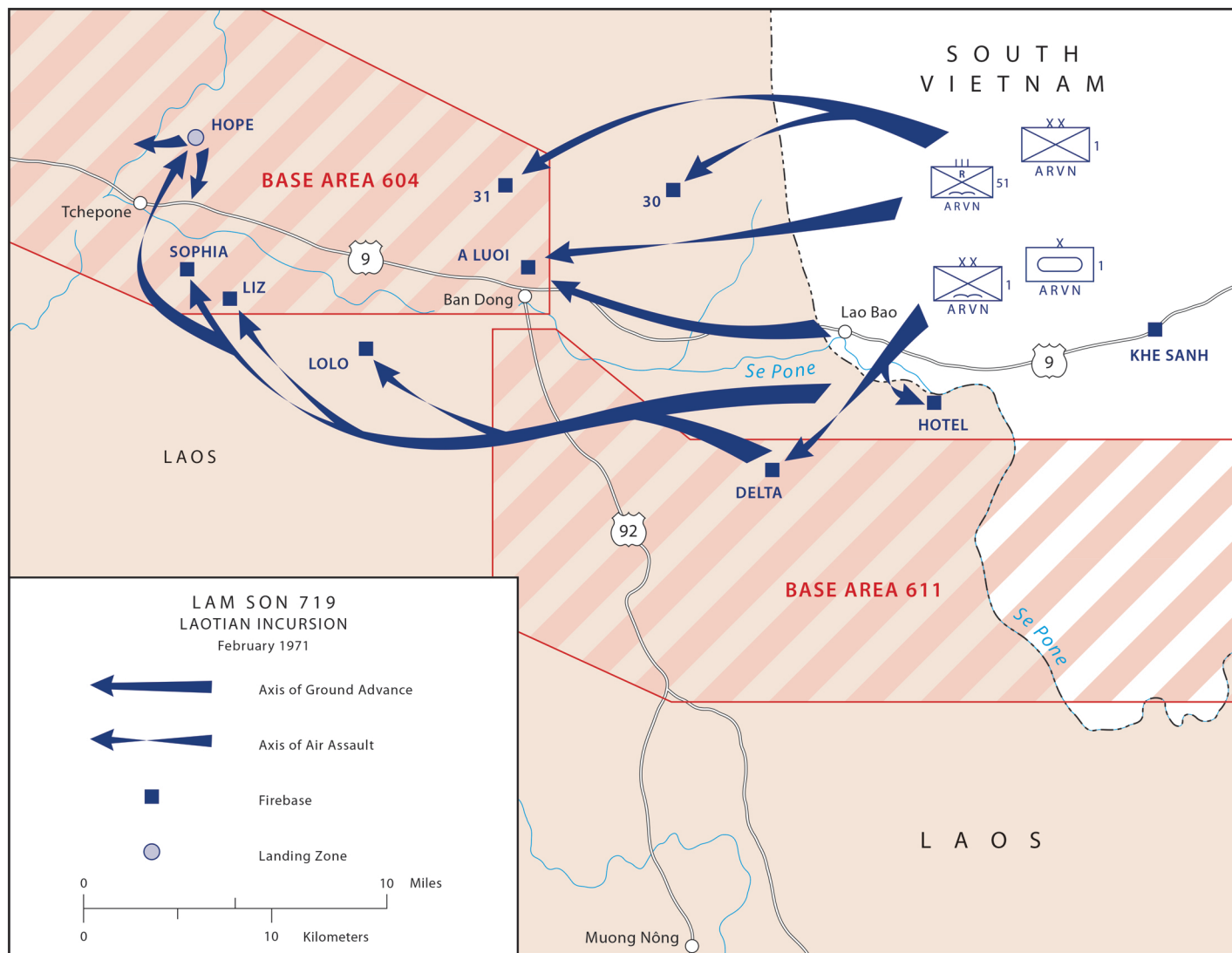
(U.S. Marine Corps)

because they still depended on U.S. funds, the South Vietnamese saw little choice but to go along with MACV's plan.

As devised, the plan posed major problems. The operation was to be carried out on ground familiar to the enemy: mountainous terrain with heavy vegetation. The likelihood of bad weather might severely limit helicopter operations. The

ARVN commander, Lt. Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam, was a political general with no command experience. The South Vietnamese units, accustomed to fighting much smaller operations in support of pacification, would be going into battle without U.S. advisers for the first time. Allied confidence of success rested on two points: the ARVN's solid performance in Cambodia the previous year and the "fatal expectation," drawn from that operation, that the PAVN would not stand and fight. The plan was "rushed, based on an imperfect strategic understanding of the situation, and overly reliant on North Vietnamese compliance," historian Andrew Wiest has concluded.⁴

Some U.S. officials did voice reservations. Army Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland, Abrams's predecessor from 1964 to 1968, questioned whether ARVN forces could manage operations of such magnitude and complexity without U.S. advisers. He proposed instead hit-and-run attacks by South Vietnamese mobile units against enemy logistics installations in Laos. Secretary of State William P. Rogers pointedly observed that the United States was asking the ARVN to do something that U.S. forces had not tried, and he worried about the possible domestic political repercussions of another operation outside South Vietnam. Rogers insisted that Vietnamization could work without going into Laos. A CIA analysis conceded



that “lucrative” targets might be found in the southern part of the country, but presciently warned of the perils of fighting on the enemy’s turf. The CIA speculated that if an ARVN incursion sufficiently threatened North Vietnam’s vital interests, the PAVN would go all out to win. Incredibly, the White House silenced a possibly skeptical Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird by keeping him in the dark about the operation until it was a *fait accompli*.⁵

Most top U.S. military and civilian officials in Saigon and Washington were remarkably bullish. The allied response to the enemy’s Tet Offensive and the perceived success of the Cambodian incursion fed a confidence that proved to be unwarranted. Abrams spoke of the dry season offensive as “potentially decisive,” expressed “growing faith” in the ARVN’s capabilities, and reported that Americans in Saigon were “extremely enthusiastic.” Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas

H. Moorer echoed Abrams. Belatedly informed of the operation, Laird convinced himself that LAM SON 719 could help Vietnamization. Following a visit to Saigon, Nixon’s military assistant, Brig. Gen. Alexander M. Haig, claimed that the allies had “turned a corner on the war” and were “within an eyelash of victory.” Less optimistic, but no less committed to decisive action, National Security Advisor Henry A. Kissinger insisted that “the only chance we have is to initiate bold moves.” South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu was “not overly enthusiastic” at first, fearing that heavy casualties might threaten his reelection, but the Saigon government’s dependence on the United States left him little choice but to acquiesce. After U.S. air support was assured, Thieu persuaded himself that the operation might bolster Vietnamization and perhaps even his election campaign.⁶

Stung by the public uproar over Cambodia, an angry and embattled

Nixon was more defiant than optimistic about his plan for the operation in Laos. “We have come this far” and “we must find a way for South Vietnam to survive in the long run,” he assured Kissinger. “We cannot go out with a whimper.” Nixon continued to stress the need for boldness. “The greatest failure is not trying,” he told Haig. “If you try and don’t succeed, it’s not a failure. . . . You keep trying.” He acknowledged that another move outside South Vietnam might provoke public and congressional reaction, but, as with Cambodia, he would “take the heat—take the risk, and then, when [the] heat is at [its] highest level,” calm things down by announcing additional U.S. troop withdrawals.⁷ As the planning proceeded, the president seems to have been buoyed by the optimism around him. He believed that North Vietnam had been weakened and South Vietnam had made progress. The enemy buildup in Laos threatened South Vietnam, and LAM SON 719 could



Left to right: Secretary of State Rogers, National Security Advisor Kissinger, Secretary of Defense Laird, General Haig, and President Nixon

(Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum)

deter future North Vietnamese offensives. It could even prove decisive. “Right now there’s a chance to win this goddamn war,” Nixon observed in early December.⁸ He gave preliminary approval to the dry season offensive, including Laos, on 22 December 1970—the same day, ironically, that Congress approved the Cooper-Church Amendment, which cut off funds for U.S. ground forces and advisers in Laos and Cambodia and symbolically repealed the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that had deepened U.S. involvement in southeast Asia.

II

Preparations for the invasion of Laos began in late January. At one point, Abrams had second thoughts and proposed delay or cancellation. Thieu also demurred, apparently because his astrologer warned of danger. Despite such misgivings, on 29 January 1971, U.S. troops, in what was called Operation DEWEY CANYON II, began to flock into I Corps Tactical Zone, the northern military sector of South Vietnam. Artillery personnel established firebases at Quang Tri and Dong Ha, and engineers began clearing Route 9 to the Laotian border, building new airstrips, and restoring old ones at Khe Sanh, the scene of an epic early 1968 battle between U.S. Marines and PAVN forces. Soon after, American and South Vietnamese

pilots flew 600 sorties to bring in some 12,000 ARVN troops and 4,600 tons of supplies. A harbinger for the operation itself, chronically bad weather delayed or even forced cancellation of some of the construction deemed important to success.⁹

On 2 February, Nixon ordered the execution of Phase 2 of LAM SON 719, scheduled to last into April. It called for an advance to Tchepone and, from there, forays in various directions to destroy enemy supplies and cut logistics routes.

Three days later, two ARVN divisions gathered near Khe Sanh to start the incursion. The task proved difficult. The only means of traverse was Route 9, a deeply rutted one-lane dirt road that was all but impassable in heavy rains. Weather further slowed the advance. On 8 February, engineers moved into Laos to work on the road. They were followed by 4,000 ARVN troops, 62 tanks, and 162 armored personnel carriers. Ranger units were inserted by air to establish



American helicopters and trucks bring in supplies at Khe Sanh, 1 February 1971.

(U.S. Army)



An M113 armored personnel carrier crosses the Laotian border on Route 9, 11 February 1971.

(U.S. Army)

firebases to protect the northern and southern flanks of the main force while giant B-52 bombers and tactical aircraft flew support missions. At the border, the invaders encountered signs with the message, “NO U.S. PERSONNEL BEYOND THIS POINT.” (A wit had scrawled on the other side, “NO NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS PERMITTED BEYOND THIS POINT.”) The armored column advanced six miles into Laos the first day, slowed only by rain and bomb

craters in the roads, with little sign of the enemy. The only casualties came from cluster bombs errantly dropped by aircraft from the USS *Ranger*. By the end of the first day, 6,200 South Vietnamese troops had crossed the border.¹⁰

North Vietnam responded deliberately to the allied challenge. Viet Cong and PAVN forces had been battered during Tet and its bloody aftermath. Hanoi feared that Nixon’s Vietnamization policy might prolong the war and alter it from a struggle against

foreign aggression to a civil war, making eventual reunification more difficult. The North Vietnamese knew of LAM SON 719, partly from leaks in the U.S. press, but also from informants inside the South Vietnamese government and from the sudden appearance of massive allied forces near the demilitarized zone.¹¹ This advance warning did not indicate exactly what the South Vietnamese planned to do. Hanoi waited. Once allied intentions became apparent, North Vietnam recognized a possibly dire threat to its most vital logistics operations but also saw a unique opportunity for a “strategically decisive battle” to inflict a major defeat on the invaders, discredit Vietnamization, further complicate Nixon’s problems at home, and even sway the peace negotiations in Paris. In a huge gamble fraught with risk, the Communist Party of Vietnam’s Central Committee dispatched additional forces to the area and instructed its commanders to defend supplies and supply routes, “annihilate enemy forces,” defeat the U.S. “Vietnamization plot,” and “crush the American imperialist and puppet military adventure.”¹²

On 10 February, with better weather, the ARVN resumed the push along Route 9. Road conditions remained bad, and the armored units moved slowly. Two helicopters were shot down by North Vietnamese antiaircraft guns, but the South Vietnamese encountered only scattered enemy resistance. Armored and air mobile forces met at A Luoi just inside Laotian territory. Once settled, they sent patrols into surrounding areas seeking out PAVN troops and supply depots and enjoying some success. B-52s pounded North Vietnamese artillery and supplies. By this point, the ARVN had advanced twelve miles inside Laos with only limited losses.¹³

The next day, in a fateful move, General Lam ordered a halt. He justified his inaction on grounds of inadequate U.S. air support, but the reasons appear to have gone much deeper and they highlight the major differences between U.S. and South Vietnamese approaches to the operation. American planners envisaged a direct advance to Tchepone. Thieu depended on his ally in many ways, but he was never an American puppet. Concerned about his prospects in the approaching September presidential election and fearful of heavy casualties, an embarrassing defeat, or the loss of army units critical to his hold on



ARVN tanks move along Route 9 toward Laos, February 1971.

(U.S. Army)



ARVN soldiers on an M113 armored personnel carrier navigate a part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos.

(U.S. Army)

power, he favored a more cautious, step-by-step advance. He reportedly instructed Lam to “take his time” and also indicated that if ARVN casualties reached 3,000, the incursion should be canceled. Lam’s halt made clear the lack of U.S. operational control. The Americans who planned the incursion were in I Corps, powerless to challenge Lam’s actions. Abrams was in Saigon, and apparently at times was

ill-informed about what was going on. With the troops still stationary after five days, Abrams flew to Dong Ha to prod Lam into restarting the drive toward Tchepone. Lam warned Thieu that a further advance would be risky. The president urged his general to be careful, which Lam interpreted to mean stay put.¹⁴

To an enterprise whose prospects had been dicey from the start, Lam’s halt proved

fatal. It surrendered the initiative to the enemy and left ARVN troops exposed and surrounded by PAVN forces on three sides. What was supposed to have been a steady advance became a slugfest, with the enemy enjoying a huge advantage in numbers. Smelling a decisive victory, Hanoi moved four divisions, an estimated 60,000 troops, into the area, along with new Soviet tanks, artillery, and antiaircraft guns. The result was a pitched battle along Route 9—sometimes involving tanks against tanks—in which the attackers inflicted heavy losses of personnel and equipment on their stalled enemy. At times, as the battle raged, the PAVN had as much as a six-to-one advantage in troop strength, and the number and deadliness of the tanks and antiaircraft guns caught the South Vietnamese off guard. Bad weather and communication problems caused by the absence of U.S. advisers and the language barrier with American pilots produced huge helicopter losses, hampering reinforcement, resupply, and medical evacuation. At one point, only 32 of the ARVN’s 133 helicopters were operable.¹⁵

A battle on 20 February at the Ranger base north of Route 9 produced one of the most indelible images of the war. South Vietnamese forces fought valiantly and to the death against vastly superior numbers. When U.S. helicopters arrived to evacuate the remaining troops before they were slaughtered, journalists photographed the South Vietnamese soldiers clinging to the skids of fully loaded choppers. These widely disseminated images, which depicted desperate acts of self-preservation by troops who had fought well against an overwhelming enemy force, became instead, for many Americans, symbols of the ARVN’s cowardice and ineptitude and, more broadly, the futility of the war.¹⁶

By late February, the South Vietnamese were threatened all along Route 9. The Ranger firebase to the north was near collapse, and another base, just to the south, was embattled. Forces along Route 9 remained stalled and under ferocious enemy fire. At this point, an increasingly nervous Thieu dramatically changed course. The ARVN was to revert to its original goal of taking Tchepone. It could then declare victory and get out of Laos as quickly as possible and at the lowest cost.¹⁷

Between 3 and 6 March, U.S. pilots and South Vietnamese troops executed some of the heaviest airmobile assaults of the war.



ARVN troops move down Route 9 into Laos.

(U.S. Army)

They hopscotched troops by helicopter across four landing zones (LZs)—each named by a South Vietnamese military planner for a Hollywood starlet—en route to Tchepone.¹⁸ Nine helicopters were destroyed and eleven were damaged in the landing on LZ LOLO, “a poorly planned, uncoordinated blunder.”¹⁹ Henceforth, landings were preceded by intensive bombing of surrounding areas. South Vietnamese troops landed in the nearly deserted town of Tchepone on 7 March. The ARVN could thus boast that it had achieved a major goal of LAM SON 719, which gave its battered troops a boost in morale. The new arrivals also claimed to have found and destroyed large quantities of food and military equipment, though others disputed this assertion.

At this moment of contrived success, the divergence of aims and priorities between the two allies was blatantly exposed. In a meeting with Lam and Thieu on 9 March, Abrams and U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth F. Bunker pressed the South Vietnamese to bring in reinforcements, stay in Tchepone for the remainder of the dry season (about a month), keep attacking enemy forces, and continue to destroy supplies and cut logistics routes. A now uneasy Nixon pressed his allies to remain at least through 7 April, when he was scheduled to give a major speech announcing additional U.S. troop withdrawals. The South Vietnamese, however, were convinced that they had achieved their main goal by taking Tchepone. Their troops were scattered on numerous firebases and LZs and along Route 9, all the way from Tchepone to the South Vietnamese border. Lam thus proposed to Thieu that they return to their South Vietnamese bases. The enemy was rapidly adding troops and seemed prepared to fight to the finish. Thieu was unwilling to risk additional forces, especially the elite Republic of Vietnam Airborne Division on which he depended for his safety. When pressed hard by the Americans, the South Vietnamese agreed to remain only if reinforced by two U.S. divisions, a proposal they knew would be rejected and that Abrams affirmed would “happen under no circumstances.” The withdrawal began on 11 March.²⁰

The withdrawal plan, based on wishful thinking rather than hard realities, called for ARVN forces to fight their way out of Laos, inflicting heavy losses as they



North Vietnamese soldiers advance across Route 9 in southern Laos during Operation LAM SON 719.

(U.S. Army)



American helicopters pick up South Vietnamese marines at Khe Sanh to airlift them into Laos, 6 March 1971.

(U.S. Army)

departed and destroying enemy supply caches. By this time, the PAVN had close to a three-to-one advantage in troop strength and was also better acquainted with the terrain. When Hanoi saw its opponents retreating, it went for the jugular, ordering its forces to “win” this “decisive battle” no matter “how many troops and how much equipment and supplies we have to mobilize to do it, and no matter how great our losses.”²¹ A military withdrawal is one of the most difficult maneuvers to execute. By dallying around Tchepone several additional days in search of more enemy supplies, the hapless Lam made a hard task even more perilous.

In time, the withdrawal turned into a rout. More media images of ARVN soldiers clinging to helicopter skids—again—told only part of the story. Many units fought valiantly under extremely difficult circumstances. At now Firebase LOLO, a single ARVN regiment held off vastly superior forces for four days, allowing other units to escape. A week later, South Vietnamese marines at Firebase DELTA turned back four enemy assaults and killed an estimated 2,000 PAVN soldiers before withdrawing.²² By mid-March, there was heavy fighting all along the escape routes. U.S. pilots performed herculean feats by helping extract South Vietnamese soldiers and by inflicting huge losses in personnel and supplies on the enemy. On 19 March alone, they flew 686 helicopter gunship sorties, 246 tactical air sorties, and 14 B-52 strikes. Even so, the undeterred North Vietnamese surrounded isolated firebases and pounded them with artillery, mortar, and rocket fire. They blocked escape routes and pursued retreating forces with tanks and armored vehicles. ARVN troops, having been under fire for more than a month, were exhausted and short of food and ammunition. In time, sheer numbers prevailed, and the withdrawal turned into a “full-scale, disorderly retreat.” As one South Vietnamese marine sadly admitted, “We ran out like wounded dogs.”²³ The withdrawal was all but complete by 25 March, a full two weeks after it began. Thieu had followed his plan, but had not achieved his hoped-for results.

The numbers for LAM SON 719, although disputed, underscore the ferocity of the six weeks of combat. Official South Vietnamese estimates claimed 1,160 ARVN killed, 4,270 wounded, and 240 missing. Other, perhaps



Wounded ARVN troops prepare to be evacuated by American helicopters.

(U.S. Army)

more reliable, sources counted 3,800 dead, 5,200 wounded, and 755 missing—a casualty rate as high as 50 percent. Two hundred fifty-three Americans were listed as killed in action or missing, with an additional 1,149 wounded. The United States and South Vietnam claimed 19,000 enemy dead. North Vietnam later admitted to 10,000 casualties. Losses of equipment

on both sides were staggering. The ARVN lost an estimated 211 trucks, 87 combat vehicles, 54 tanks, 96 artillery pieces, and numerous engineering vehicles and equipment. The United States reported 6 destroyed fighter-bombers and 107 lost helicopters, with 601 additional helicopters suffering damages. Allied sources claim to have destroyed 1,963 North Vietnamese



South Vietnamese troops captured in southern Laos are led to a detention camp, ca. April 1971.

(U.S. Army via a North Vietnamese source)

crew-served guns, 106 tanks, 2,001 vehicles, and 170,436 tons of munitions, as well as huge quantities of food and other supplies.²⁴

Information from the battlefield was sparse and often murky during LAM SON 719, and among top U.S. officials the mood shifted as events unfolded. Nixon had pinned his hopes for the success of his Vietnamization policy on the outcome of the operation. “We can’t lose,” he observed on 18 February. “We can lose an election, but we’re not going to lose this war.”²⁵ In the early days, America’s military leadership hailed the “professionalism” of ARVN soldiers. They grew nervous when North Vietnam took the offensive with massive numbers of troops, but they found comfort in reports that the South Vietnamese and U.S. aircraft were inflicting heavy casualties. A booster of LAM SON 719 at first, Kissinger had even claimed responsibility for it taking place. By 1 March, with ARVN troops stalled and the enemy pounding them, he expressed his “profound concern.” He then declared the seizure of Tchepone a “landmark move,” even by “South Vietnamese standards.” The news that South Vietnam intended to stay there only briefly provoked alarm and anger. Kissinger pressed Abrams and Bunker to “put some starch” into Thieu and warn him that this was South Vietnam’s “last chance” for large-scale U.S. assistance. Even with the ARVN in retreat, U.S. officials insisted that the South Vietnamese must stay in Laos and continue to attack enemy logistics until the end of the dry season in early April. On 18 March, still convinced that the ARVN would conduct spoiling operations on the way out, Kissinger expressed “mystification and confusion” that the plans had been changed without consulting or even informing the United States. A rapid pullout was “intolerable,” he warned Bunker. Thieu must not “dissipate” Nixon’s confidence and squander this “last crack at massive U.S. support.” The issue was settled when Haig, then visiting Dong Ha, informed Washington that the ARVN had “lost its stomach for further operations in Laos.” The best hope was for an orderly withdrawal.²⁶ In rare moments of candor following the South Vietnamese withdrawal, top U.S. officials admitted that LAM SON 719 had failed.

III

It did not take long for the fault-finding and recriminations to begin. Haig conceded that the planners had underestimated the

PAVN’s strength and staying power and had overestimated the ARVN’s capabilities. He blamed South Vietnamese leaders for not exploiting an early edge and for not shifting forces when they were stalled and under fire. Thieu’s “interference” had been disastrous. Kissinger declared to Westmoreland that his cautionary advance assessment of the LAM SON proposal had been “clairvoyant”; the South Vietnamese had shown themselves incapable of executing such a complex operation.²⁷ Nixon and Kissinger fixed on Abrams as the scapegoat, especially after the general candidly admitted to journalists that the operation had been a failure. “I don’t know what possessed Abrams to tell the truth,” the national security adviser snarled. “Why doesn’t he just shut up,” the president agreed. In their view, Abrams had given the South Vietnamese far too much leeway in managing the operation. They considered replacing him, but feared such a step would only confirm that LAM SON 719 had been a disaster. Nixon and Kissinger toyed with the idea of appointing a second-in-command to keep Abrams “from drinking too much and talking too much,” but doing so seemed pointless with U.S. military operations nearly at an end. Abrams’s behavior may have angered the president,

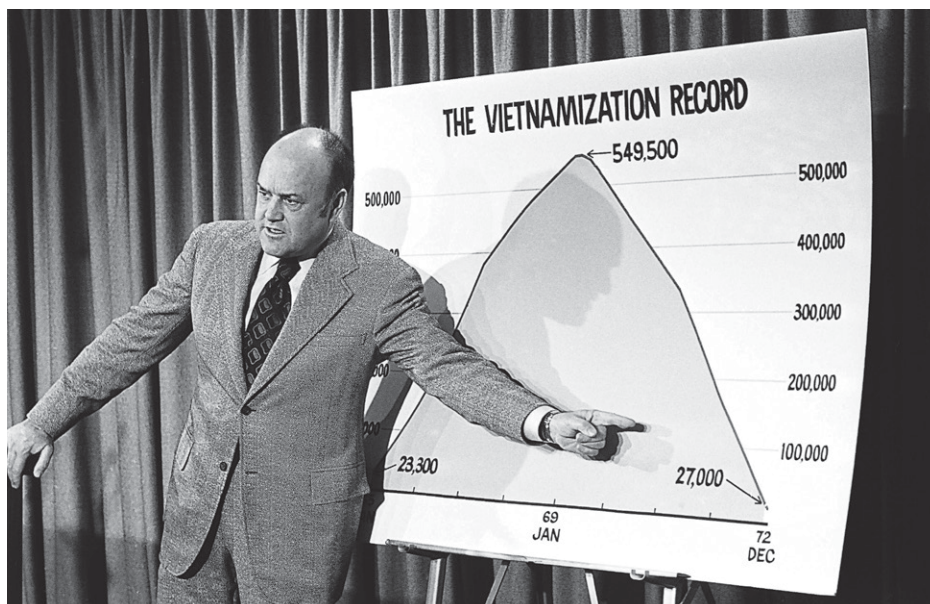
but Nixon felt even more animosity toward the press—long his mortal enemy—for portraying an unsuccessful military operation as a complete debacle.²⁸

Long before LAM SON 719 ended—and whatever the facts happened to be on the ground—the president had resolved to proclaim victory. “I can’t emphasize [this] too strongly,” he told Kissinger in March. “I don’t care what happens there [in Laos], it’s a win.”²⁹ The final phase of the operation was thus a major effort at spin and damage control. Nixon and Kissinger repeatedly insisted that the incursion had inflicted huge personnel losses on the PAVN, done great damage to its logistics, and thus had delayed another North Vietnamese offensive by as much as a year. The ARVN gained invaluable experience in large-unit operations, they claimed, thus demonstrating progress in Vietnamization. To sympathetic listeners such as California governor Ronald W. Reagan and Rev. William F. “Billy” Graham Jr., Kissinger claimed that “we [had] achieved what we were after.” In his major address televised on 7 April, the president implemented the public relations plan discussed weeks earlier. “Vietnamization has succeeded,” he confidently but falsely affirmed. “The South Vietnamese demonstrated that



Captured PAVN weapons and supplies found in Laos during Operation LAM SON 719, 22 March 1971

(U.S. Army)



Secretary Laird gives a briefing crediting declining U.S. troop levels to the success of the Vietnamization policy.

(National Archives)

without American advisers they could fight effectively against the very best troops North Vietnam could put in the field.” He then played his trump card, announcing that the success of LAM SON 719 permitted the withdrawal of an additional 100,000 American troops between 1 May and 1 December 1971.³⁰ South Vietnamese officials also publicly claimed success, although privately they would go no further than to say that LAM SON “to some extent could be considered a victory.” The South Vietnamese government rewarded returning soldiers with extra pay for each day spent in Laos, and held celebration parades in Hue and Saigon.³¹

Nixon, Kissinger, and Thieu knew that the truth was far more complex. With the indispensable help of U.S. airpower, the ARVN had indeed inflicted enormous losses on the enemy. Their attacks had disrupted the PAVN’s logistics network, possibly delaying another major offensive. Yet this did not add up to the sort of victory they had hoped for. The South Vietnamese themselves suffered huge losses, and their performance in battle was “at best uneven.” The retreat from Tchepone was a disaster, for reasons that seem clear in retrospect. However impressive the plans for the operation might have been on paper, Kissinger conceded, they “in no way accorded with Vietnamese realities.”³² The plans assumed far too much and asked far too much of

units that simply were not up to the task. The operational headquarters were too far from the combat zone, making it difficult to coordinate the movement of troops in the field. Leadership, especially at the top and in the person of Lam, had always been and would remain the ARVN’s fatal flaw. Thieu seemed more concerned with his reelection prospects and in staving off a possible coup than with the outcome of the battle. The South Vietnamese had come to depend on U.S. advisers and fared poorly in these first battles on their own. Moreover, the language barrier made communication between ARVN troops on the ground and American pilots difficult.

For South Vietnam and for the policy of Vietnamization, LAM SON 719 was a catastrophe. As much as some Americans might proclaim victory and South Vietnamese might celebrate it, the troops on the ground knew better. The retreat from Laos had an especially devastating impact on the morale and confidence of ARVN units. In a culture in which proper burial was paramount, leaving fallen comrades behind caused much grief. LAM SON made abundantly clear—to those willing to see—that Vietnamization had made minimal progress. The operation raised serious questions about South Vietnam’s ability to fight without massive U.S. support. Thieu’s political rivals mounted fierce attacks against him. When

his subsequent efforts to fix the presidential election in his own favor provoked his foes to drop out, Thieu was left in a one-man race that cost him and his government credibility in South Vietnam, the United States, and the world.³³

North Vietnam also made mistakes, but it secured a costly victory through its willingness to take risks and expend resources. Once North Vietnamese leaders grasped the allied intent, they seized the opportunity to engage proactively. In a gamble at least equal to that taken by Nixon, North Vietnam poured enormous manpower and materiel into the battles. As on so many other occasions, the PAVN fought doggedly and without apparent concern for losses, a phenomenon that the Americans in particular could never quite grasp. Its leadership did what it set out to do—they had stalled Vietnamization—and in doing so the North Vietnamese forces raised major questions about South Vietnam’s ability to win the war. The victory, as historian Pierre Asselin has written, was a “testament to Hanoi’s resourcefulness and cunning more than ARVN weakness.”³⁴

However the Nixon administration might have packaged LAM SON 719, top officials privately acknowledged that it had “cost them very, very seriously” in terms of public support.³⁵ Though the Laotian incursion did not provoke protests like those after the Cambodian venture, it contributed to something even more threatening—a surge of broad and generalized frustration with a war that seemed never to end.³⁶ Vietnam had “eroded America’s confidence,” the president conceded to Kissinger in late April. “The people are sick of it.” A March poll showed that only 41 percent of Americans approved of Nixon’s handling of the war, while 46 percent disapproved. Polls taken later in the spring revealed that 61 percent of Americans believed that sending U.S. troops to Vietnam had been a mistake, and 73 percent favored bringing all troops home by the end of the year. In Congress, opponents of the war stepped up their attacks on the administration. Ominously for Nixon, the situation in Laos opened a widening split among his fellow Republicans on the conduct of the war in Vietnam. Even former hawks like Michigan representative Gerald R. Ford were “badly shaken” by the incursion. The Republican leadership was reportedly “sick of Laos, sick of Vietnam, and disenchanted with the president’s exit



A former U.S. service member throws his medals onto the Capitol grounds during the protest dubbed Operation Dewey Canyon III.

(National Archives)

plan.”³⁷ Between April and July, Congress held seventeen votes on various kinds of antiwar resolutions, some even setting a date for U.S. withdrawal.

Especially disconcerting to Nixon was the well-publicized, late April protest of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War in Washington. Calling their “operation” Dewey Canyon III, an obvious allusion to Laos, these veteran protesters proclaimed a “limited incursion into the country of Congress,” simulated search-and-destroy operations, and confessed to their own war crimes. In a powerfully symbolic finale, they tossed their medals and decorations—their “symbols of shame”—onto the Capitol lawn.³⁸ After the protest ended, Nixon obsessed over what could be done about the lack of public support, yet tensions over the war escalated sharply with the violent May Day protests in Washington, where police arrested thousands of antiwar demonstrators.³⁹

IV

Nixon’s “Laotian gamble,” designed to facilitate the U.S. exit from Vietnam, significantly shaped the way the war was fought in its final years—and how it ended. The fragility of public opinion at home, combined with the upcoming South Vietnamese presidential election and the demonstrated weakness of Vietnamization, extinguished—or at least sharply lessened—the fleeting U.S. hopes that the war could

somehow still be won and that the United States could extricate itself in such a way that would leave South Vietnam intact and with a reasonable chance to survive. Nevertheless, Nixon was firmly set on the course of Vietnamization and U.S. withdrawal, and his administration had little choice but to persist, seeking any means available to get the United States out of Vietnam under the best possible conditions.

LAM SON 719 widened the already gaping chasm between Washington and Saigon, these “peoples quite apart,” as South Vietnamese diplomat Bui Diem once called them. During the debacle itself, Nixon bemoaned South Vietnam’s “goddamn poor [military] execution.” Kissinger charged “those sons of bitches” with “bugging out,” adding that “it’s their country, and we can’t save it for them if they don’t want to.”⁴⁰ Nixon and Kissinger’s combined disdain for the South Vietnamese president was heightened by Thieu’s stubborn independence during the Laos incursion. In top-level discussions of major policy matters afterward, there was little mention of South Vietnam and little apparent concern for its fate. Nixon and Kissinger’s main concern in shaping a policy of withdrawal was for U.S. prestige and Cold War credibility, not for South Vietnam’s government or people. They rarely consulted Saigon on matters of importance or even divulged to Thieu what they were doing. Kissinger was “content to

speak for the allies [in the secret U.S.–North Vietnam talks then taking place] in Paris because he held them in such contempt,” historian Robert Brigham has written.⁴¹ The Americans agreed that South Vietnam should be given what it needed for defense but that, ultimately, it would be responsible for its own survival.

The allied failure in Laos drove Nixon and Kissinger to make major concessions—at South Vietnam’s expense—in the peace negotiations with Hanoi. On 26 March, just as the last ARVN troops were leaving Laos and without any word to Saigon, Nixon and Kissinger proposed resumption of the secret negotiations in Paris. When the two sides actually met in the summer, Kissinger presented the most generous U.S. proposal yet in the form of concessions he and Nixon admitted were “outlandish”: an American withdrawal that would permit North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South. This was a “pivotal concession,” Asselin concludes, a “direct consequence” of the Laos operation, and a major blow to Saigon that all but scrapped the long-standing U.S. goal of an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam. As usual, the United States made these concessions at Saigon’s expense and without consulting or even informing its allies. The South Vietnamese leadership concluded, not surprisingly, that the real purpose of Vietnamization had been not to solidify their country for the long term but to help cover America’s withdrawal.⁴²

Somehow—perhaps through sheer wishful thinking—Nixon and Kissinger persuaded themselves that North Vietnam would also be eager for a deal. Even during the darker days of LAM SON 719, they believed that the battering being inflicted on their foe could not but spur its eagerness to negotiate. “What the hell is their choice?” the president asked. Late in the operation, he and Kissinger exulted that bombing the “livin’ bejeesus” out of the North Vietnamese in Laos must have “scared them.” As the poker-playing Nixon opined, “those bastards, they’ve got to look at their hole card now.”⁴³ The two hoped that the generosity of their summer 1971 proposal would entice the North Vietnamese into a settlement. The remarkable progress of their possibly game-changing diplomacy with North Vietnam’s main backers, the Soviet Union and China, could further weaken Hanoi’s bargaining position with the United States. And there was always *their* hole card: a massive bombing



Stretchers piled near a UH-1D medevac helicopter at Khe Sanh, February 1971

(U.S. Army)

campaign against North Vietnam itself that they had considered implementing in 1969. Kissinger even drew on recent history for reassurance: Viet Minh leaders had needed peace in the war with France in 1954, and to achieve it they had settled at the Geneva Conference. “They need peace now,” he reasoned, and “it’s only got to have an effect on Hanoi.” He was “ecstatic” when North Vietnam agreed to resume the secret talks in Paris.⁴⁴

Nixon and Kissinger badly misjudged their foes. The North Vietnamese admitted to making mistakes in the Laos campaign, but they correctly claimed a huge victory. By inflicting “large-scale annihilation” on some of the ARVN’s best units, they exposed the deficiencies of Vietnamization, provided a “concrete demonstration” that they could defeat Nixon’s strategy, and, after three years of frustration and military failure, gained a much-needed morale boost. The North Vietnamese leadership was further emboldened by the resurgence of antiwar sentiment in America. Kissinger’s reference to 1954 was more apt than he realized, but it worked counter to the way he presumed. The former Viet Minh, now the leaders of North Vietnam, believed that they had been forced

by the Soviet Union and China into a premature compromise at Geneva in a settlement that denied them the fruits of their hard-won military victory. This was a mistake that hardline party secretary Le Duan had vowed not to make again. The North Vietnamese negotiators countered Kissinger’s offer with a nine-point proposal that was conciliatory enough to keep the talks alive but did not offer enough to bring about a settlement. Building on their military success, the North Vietnamese mounted a political agitation campaign to undermine the Saigon government. They managed to squeeze additional military aid out of the Soviet Union and China, and, in a mood of confidence, began planning for yet another end-the-war offensive in 1972.⁴⁵

Operation LAM SON 719, Nixon’s “Laotian gamble,” did not pay off for the president or for the United States. Though the operation was designed to boost the United States and South Vietnam and, with luck, even win the war, it instead shifted momentum toward the enemy and pointed toward North Vietnam’s eventual victory.



AUTHOR’S NOTE

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable assistance of Drs. Terry Birdwhistell, John Carland, and Merle Pribbenow in getting essential sources for this article.

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NOTES

1. The best accounts of the LAM SON 719 operation are James H. Willbanks, *A Road Too Far: Operation Lam Son 719 and Vietnamization in Laos* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014) and Robert D. Sander, *Invasion of Laos 1971: Lam Son 719* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

2. Alfred W. McCoy, “America’s Secret War in Laos, 1955–1975,” in *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, ed. Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 283–314.

3. Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundations of the Post-Vietnam Military* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015), 175–76.

4. Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam’s Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 200. See also Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 32–49; Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh, *Lam Son 719, Indochina Monographs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1979), 34, 57; and Thomas A. Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger and American Power* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2020), 121–22.

5. Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 176–77; Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 259; Memo, Central Intelligence Agency, 2 Feb 1971, sub: Probable Reactions of Various Concerned Parties to a Possible Invasion in South Laos, authors files, courtesy of Dr. John Carland.

6. Memo, Alexander M. Haig for Henry A. Kissinger, 15 Dec 1970, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Vol. VII, Vietnam, July 1970–January 1972* (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, 2010) (hereinafter *FRUS*), document (doc.) 89; Memo, Haig for Kissinger, 22 Dec 1970, *FRUS*, doc. 93; Nguyen Phu Duc, *The Viet Nam Peace Negotiations: Saigon's Side of the Story* (Christiansburg, VA: Dalley Book Service, 2005), 256.
7. Telecon, Richard M. Nixon with Haig, 23 Dec 1970, *FRUS*, doc. 96.
8. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 255.
9. Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 70–73; Sander, *Invasion of Laos*, 99–108.
10. Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 77.
11. The leaks broke an embargo and infuriated U.S. officials in Washington and Saigon, heightening an already volatile White House relationship with reporters.
12. Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 65–66, 82–83; Merle L. Pribbenow, trans., *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1974*, Military History Institute of Vietnam (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 278; Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold Schecter, *The Palace File* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 96–97.
13. Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 82–86.
14. *Ibid.*, 87–90.
15. *Ibid.*, 87–114; Sander, *Invasion of Laos*, 123–40; Duc, *Viet Nam Peace Negotiations*, 253–55.
16. Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 98–99.
17. *Ibid.*, 117–18.
18. LZ LOLO was named for Gina Lollobrigida, LZ LIZ for Elizabeth Taylor, LZ SOPHIA for Sophia Loren, and LZ HOPE for Hope Lange. See Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 121.
19. Sander, *Invasion of Laos*, 165.
20. Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 187–89; Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 129.
21. Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 148.
22. *Ibid.*, 151–53.
23. Quoted in Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 153. For the withdrawal, see also Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, 217–23; Sander, *Invasion of Laos*, 174–91; and Duc, *Viet Nam Peace Negotiations*, 256.
24. Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 162–63; Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, 224.
25. Telecon, Nixon with Kissinger, 18 Feb 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 131; Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger*, 123.
26. Memo, Kissinger for Ellsworth F. Bunker, 1 Mar 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 142; Memo, Kissinger for Bunker, 9 Mar 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 147; Memo, Kissinger for Nixon, 15 Mar 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 150; Memo, Kissinger for Bunker, 18 Mar 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 156; Memo, Haig for Kissinger, 3 Mar 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 158.
27. Telecon, Kissinger with William C. Westmoreland, 12 Apr 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 178.
28. Telecon, Kissinger with Nixon, 18 Apr 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 186; Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 196.
29. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 261.
30. *Ibid.*, 262–63; Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 193.
31. Memo, Kissinger for Nixon, 10 Apr 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 176; Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia” (national address, Washington, DC, 7 Apr 1971), 2 Sep 2017, nixonfoundation.org/2017/09/address-nation-situation-southeast-asia-april-7-1971.
32. Quoted in Gregory A. Daddis, *Withdrawal: Reassessing America's Final Years in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 173.
33. Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, 224–27; Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 162–77; Hinh, *Lam Son 719*, 82–88, 141; David Prentice, “Ending America's Vietnam War” (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 466–67, author's files.
34. Pierre Asselin, *Vietnam's American War: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 185.
35. Telecon, Nixon with Kissinger, 21 Apr 1971, in Douglas Brinkley and Luke A. Nichter, *The Nixon Tapes, 1971–1972* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), Kindle.
36. The lack of protests could be explained, in part, because the operation took place during the American winter and also because no U.S. ground forces were involved.
37. Melvin Small, *The Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for American Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington, DE: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 135; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 262–63, 312–14; Andrew L. Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 293–96.
38. Small, *Antiwarriors*, 139–42.
39. Telecon, Nixon with Kissinger, 21 Apr 1971, in Brinkley and Nichter, *Nixon Tapes*.
40. *Ibid.*; Willbanks, *Road Too Far*, 134.
41. Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2018), 99.
42. Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 28; Duc, *Viet Nam Peace Negotiations*, 286, 299.
43. Telecon, Nixon with Kissinger, 18 Mar 1971, *FRUS*, doc. 157.
44. Telecon, Nixon with Kissinger, 28 Apr 1971, in Brinkley and Nichter, *Nixon Tapes*.
45. Pribbenow, *Victory in Vietnam*, 278; Asselin, *Bitter Peace*, 28–29; Asselin, *Vietnam's American War*, 185; Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 208–15.

MUSEUM FEATURE



A LOOK INSIDE THE UNITED STATES ARMY AIRBORNE AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS MUSEUM

BY JAMES BARTLINSKI

Established in August 2000, the United States Army Airborne and Special Operations Museum (ASOM), located in Fayetteville, North Carolina, is the nation's only institution devoted exclusively to the history of the U.S. Army's airborne and special operations forces. This award-winning museum boasts a dynamic collection of more than 5,000 artifacts, from the early origins of America's airborne and special operations forces to the current war on terrorism.

One of the highlights of the museum is a life-size depiction of a village in Normandy, France, soon after Hitler's "Atlantic Wall" was breached on D-Day (5–6 June 1944) by the fearless and determined paratroopers of the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions. Included in this dynamic diorama is a vintage World War II C-47 "Skytrain" airplane, suspended over the Nazi-occupied village with an American paratrooper in the door, poised to jump into history.

Another "must see" exhibit is the dramatic re-creation of the action on Hill 420, near the Korean village of Wonton-ni. On 31 May 1951, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team paratrooper Cpl. Rodolfo "Rudy" P. Hernández, despite being severely wounded, continued to deliver deadly fire into the ranks of the onrushing Communist assailants. After a cartridge ruptured in the chamber of Hernández's M1 rifle, he jumped from his foxhole, bayonet fixed, and charged the enemy. He killed six aggressors before falling unconscious because of his wounds. Hernández's attack momentarily stalled the enemy advance, enabling his unit to launch a counterattack and retake lost ground. For his actions on Hill 420, Corporal Hernández was awarded the Congressional

Medal of Honor. Before his death in December 2013, Hernández worked directly with the museum staff to ensure the diorama's historical accuracy.

Equally compelling is a reproduction of a Viet Cong prisoner of war (POW) camp in the dense jungle of South Vietnam's U Minh Forest, also known as the "Forest of Darkness." Here, visitors see Special Forces 1st Lt. James "Nick" N. Rowe held in a bamboo "tiger cage." In December 1968, after five years of captivity, Lieutenant Rowe escaped his Vietnamese captors. Because of his experience as a POW, Rowe was selected by the Army to design its Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training program, which is now an integral part of the Special Forces Qualification Course.

The ASOM recounts these stories and many more in its efforts to preserve the history and material culture associated with the extraordinary feats of these elite airborne and special operations soldiers. By doing so, the museum stays true to its primary mission to educate and professionally develop our soldiers while also providing the nation an accessible and innovative venue to explore the Army's airborne and special operations past, present, and future.



JAMES BARTLINSKI is the director of the U.S. Army Airborne and Special Operations Museum.



Statue in front of the museum titled "Iron Mike"



Korean War Gallery: "The 'Rakkasans' in Korea" exhibit features Cpl. Rodolfo "Rudy" P. Hernández where he earned his Medal of Honor on 31 May 1951.



The museum's lobby with a World War II paratrooper mannequin descending



World War II Gallery: An American-made CG-4A Waco glider offloading a Jeep



Vietnam War Gallery: The “Five Years to Freedom” diorama depicts Green Beret 1st Lt. James “Nick” Rowe in captivity.



World War II Gallery: The exhibit “Just Landed” shows a paratrooper landing in North Africa.



World War II Gallery: The Operation OVERLORD exhibit



Global War on Terrorism Gallery: "Leading the Northern Alliance" exhibit



Vietnam War Gallery: "The Courage and Compassion" diorama depicts the action on 8 November 1965 where Sp5c Lawrence Joel earned his Medal of Honor.

U.S. ARMY ARTIFACT SPOTLIGHT

A MAD DOG'S TALE

BY ROBERT D. MITCHELL

As the United States became more deeply involved in the war in Vietnam, the Army realized it would need to mount larger and more capable weapons on its helicopters for both defensive purposes and offensive missions. The Army commissioned studies to determine which airframe would provide the best platform for these modifications, and the UH-1 "Huey" once again demonstrated its versatility. Modified into gunships, these Hueys would go on to become the most iconic weapon of war flying over the jungles of Vietnam.

The Army Aviation Museum in Fort Rucker, Alabama, recently restored one of these legendary Hueys, a C Model UH-1 gunship, for exhibition. As curators researched the history of Aircraft 67-15156 (also known simply as 156), searching for evidence of involvement in the conflict, they found many small sheet metal repairs which made it obvious that 156 had "been there." Upon further investigation, the curators determined that the aircraft had been used by the 240th Assault Helicopter Company in-country in 1968. The museum then contacted Terry Morris, a good friend of the museum and a retired Army Aviation major who had served in the 240th as a warrant officer. Using the actual logbook entries, Morris was able to confirm that he had flown 156 on a number of missions in 1968. The 240th was composed of troop transport Hueys, known by the call sign "Greyhounds," and gunships, like 156, that went by the name "Mad Dogs."



The 240th was known as a hard luck company, and on 18 August 1968, that moniker would prove to be true. Warrant Officer Morris was flying cover that day in 156 while the Greyhounds were extracting a long-range patrol under extreme enemy fire. After the extraction was complete, someone noticed a body, assumed to be that of an American soldier, in the landing zone (LZ). Another nearby Greyhound had been monitoring the radio chatter and volunteered to recover the fallen soldier. Morris warned him of the enemy presence, but they both knew that



leaving someone on the battlefield was not an option. Morris stayed to provide cover while the Greyhound landed his Huey. And then all hell broke loose.

The Greyhound's copilot was hit in the head and unconscious; the door gunner and crew chief were both wounded. As the aircraft touched down, an enemy sapper appeared from a spider hole and shot the pilot at point-blank range. Seeing all this, and knowing the other crewmembers had been hit, Morris was amazed to see the Greyhound's Huey start a climb out from the LZ. Trailing in 156, Morris watched the other aircraft fly for a short distance and then land on an abandoned airstrip.

Later, it was determined that when the Greyhound pilot saw the sapper emerge, he initiated a climb but was killed almost immediately. Meanwhile, the injured co-pilot regained consciousness, took the controls, and safely grounded the aircraft. Morris landed 156 behind them. After confirming that the pilot was dead, Morris released the egress handles on the seat, removed the pilot's body, and placed it in the cargo area of 156 for the flight to the hospital. Morris later noticed that one of the two mini guns on his aircraft had been shot off during the intense fight. The body that had been in the LZ, which turned out *not* to be American, was not recovered by the 240th.



Aircraft 67-15156 is now on display next to the ceremony stage in the Army Aviation Museum. Terry Morris comes to the museum every two weeks to speak to students in the Basic Officer Leaders Course as part of their historical studies curriculum.



ROBERT D. MITCHELL is a retired Army Aviation warrant officer and flight instructor and is currently the director of the Army Aviation Museum at Fort Rucker, Alabama.



NOTE: All images are of 156 and Terry Morris.



SKETCH *of a* NATION

MAPMAKING AND THE U.S. ARMY

BY MATTHEW T. BOAN

EARLY BEGINNINGS

A map is a conventional picture of a portion of the earth's surface as seen from directly above, showing more or less completely the various features of the country represented.¹

The long history of Army mapmaking dates back to the Continental Army. In January 1777, General George Washington wrote to Congress, explaining that “the want of accurate maps of the country, which has hitherto been the scene of war, has been obliged to make shift with such sketches as I could trace out from my own observation and that of gentlemen around me. I really

think, if gentlemen of known character and probity could be employed in making maps from actual survey, of the roads, of the rivers, and bridges and fords over them and of the mountains and passes through them it would be of the greatest advantage.”² As a surveyor and cartographer, Washington knew well the importance of having accurate maps during battle.

His letter to Congress worked. In July 1777, the position of Geographer and Surveyor General of the Army—later known as Geographer of the United States—was born. The man Washington trusted with this important position was Robert Erskine, an

inventor, engineer, ironmaster, and land surveyor. Born in Scotland in 1735, Erskine came to America to run the American Iron Company in Ringwood, New Jersey, in 1771. Siding with the Colonial cause, he used the ironworks to manufacture products for the Continental Army and soon became acquainted with Washington. In June 1775, Erskine organized some of his workers into a militia to protect the Ringwood ironworks from the British, which allowed the company to continue to supply iron products for the Colonial cause.

During his time as Geographer and Surveyor General, Erskine and his

team produced more than 200 maps, but it was Erskine's detailed map of Hudson Highlands—with its roads, rivers, mountains, fords, marshes, and other significant geographical features—that had the most impact during the war.³ In July 1779, Brig. Gen. Anthony Wayne assembled a light infantry unit to conduct a surprise attack on the British fort at Stony Point, New York. Wayne's elite group was

made up of hand-selected soldiers from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina. The Hudson Highlands map showed the fort, which was situated between New York City and West Point, on a rocky bluff on the western bank of the Hudson River, surrounded by the river on three sides and a swamp on the fourth. After studying the map and carefully planning their approach, Wayne's

forces maneuvered through the swamp in the dark of night and surprised the British with a nocturnal assault on the fort. The British had no choice but to surrender the fort to General Wayne and his elite group of map-savvy soldiers.⁴

In September of 1780, Erskine fell ill. He died the following month of what was believed to be pneumonia.⁵ Erskine's successor, New Yorker Simeon De Witt, served as Geographer and Surveyor General of the Army for the remainder of the Revolutionary War.⁶ In 1781, Thomas Hutchins, who worked alongside De Witt, became Geographer and Surveyor of the Southern Army (one of three operational armies of the Continental Army).⁷ Most of the maps Washington used during the war were made by Erskine and Hutchins.⁸ At the end of the war, the position of Geographer and Surveyor General of the Army was demobilized; De Witt moved back to New York to pursue other things; and Congress named Hutchins Geographer of the United States. As Geographer of the United States, Hutchins established what is now known as the Bureau of Land Management.⁹

EARLY TOOLS OF THE TRADE

It has sometimes been said that topographers are born, not made. It is undoubtedly true that some men possess much greater ability than others in making maps and sketches that represent faithfully the county mapped.¹⁰

In a 1917 article in the *Infantry Journal*, Maj. C. D. Herron stated that "it is just as absurd to say that 'the way to learn to read a map is to make one,' as it is to say that 'to read the English language one must first write it.'"¹¹ Map-reading and mapmaking are two distinct skills. The two essential elements that any surveyor needs to create an accurate survey for mapmaking are direction and distance. In order to establish the direction, or angle, of a measurement, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century surveyors used a circumferentor, also known as a surveyor's compass. By placing the circumferentor atop a Jacob's staff (which acted as a tripod), the surveyor had a stable platform from which to establish the correct direction to begin measuring. The most common tool for measuring distance was the Gunter's chain. A total of sixty-six



Map of New York's Orange and Rockland counties, including Stony Point, by Robert Erskine and Nathanael Greene, 1799

(Library of Congress)



Portrait of Simeon de Witt by Ezra Ames

(Rutgers University)

feet in length, the chain was divided into ten sections of ten 7.92-inch links each, which could be detached for use when the entire chain length was not needed. It took eighty Gunter's chains to measure a path of one mile. Two people stretched the chain along the desired path, until the surveyor, using the compass, confirmed that the chain was straight and along the correct path. Then, the chain men staked the end of the Gunter's chain in place and recorded the measurement. Keeping the last end anchored, another chain was then stretched along the desired path, and the process repeated until the chosen end was reached. In this way, the Gunter's chain was the forerunner of today's measuring tape.¹²

WAR OF 1812 AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS

A military map is one which shows the relative distance, direction, and elevation of all objects of military importance in the area represented.¹³

With the War of 1812 came the need for military maps once again. Congress saw

this need and appointed eight topographic engineers to the U.S. Army in 1813.¹⁴ After the end of the war, in May 1815, Congress adjusted the organization of the Army, converting the nine wartime military districts into two divisions: the Northern Division, with four territorial departments, and the Southern Division, with five territorial departments.¹⁵ Under this new Army organization, all but two of the topographical engineers were given honorable discharges from the Army. Maj. John Anderson and Maj. Isaac Roberdeau remained in the Army to complete surveys of Lake Champlain and the northern frontier. In April 1816, Congress passed an act that restored the topographical engineer duty position within the Army. There would now be three topographical engineers assigned to the general staff of each of the two divisions and one assistant topographer assigned to each brigade within a division. In July 1818, the War Department moved the topographical engineers to the newly established Topographical Bureau, which was part of the Engineer Department, alongside the Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Military Academy, and the Board of Engineers

for Fortifications. This arrangement, understandably, led to some jurisdictional issues between the various engineers. Major Roberdeau was the first chief of the Topographical Bureau, which operated only as a depository for instruments, reports, memoirs, and publications, not as an administrative bureau that conducted surveys.¹⁶ The Engineer Department, by contrast, was run by officers from the Corps of Engineers, whose personnel worked mostly as fortification engineers. These engineers eventually began conducting surveys related to internal improvements, and once they grew more comfortable conducting their own surveys, they crossed into the duties of topographical engineers.

In 1819, Maj. Stephen H. Long of the topographical engineers was conducting a survey of the trans-Mississippi West while, at the same time, two Corps of Engineers officers, Brig. Gen. Simon Bernard and Maj. Joseph G. Totten, were conducting a survey of the lower Mississippi. Corps of Engineers officers typically were chosen from the top ranks of West Point graduates, while topographical engineers were selected from the second tier of graduates. As a result, the Corps of Engineers officers believed that greater skills were needed to plan and construct fortifications than to do the same for civil works, and, further, that these were skills which the supposedly less capable topographical engineers did not possess. Further, because the Engineer Department was run by officers of the Corps of Engineers, all correspondence between the topographical engineers and the War Department had to pass through the Corps of Engineers officers first. When the colonel in charge of the Engineer Department was absent, he routinely appointed a Corps of Engineers captain or lieutenant to be in charge in his stead, passing over Major Roberdeau, who, according to rank, should have been the next in command. Tensions arose and animosity grew as the topographical engineers continued to be treated as second-class citizens within the department.¹⁷

Eventually, the topographers were able to break free of the Corps of Engineers. Under the direction of Bvt. Maj. John J. Abert since 1829, they became an independent bureau of the War Department in 1831, reporting directly to the secretary of war.¹⁸ Born in 1788, Abert had left the Army shortly after graduating from West Point in 1811, but he returned in 1814 to serve as a topographical engineer during the War



Gunter's chain and surveyor's compass

(Courtesy of the New Hampshire Historical Society)



Colonel Abert

(U.S. Army)

of 1812.¹⁹ With the Army Reorganization Act of 1838, Abert witnessed his ultimate goal come to fruition. The bureau became the Corps of Topographical Engineers, with now Colonel Abert in charge of the newly formed corps.²⁰ Under Abert's leadership, which would last an impressive thirty-two years, soldiers in the Corps of Topographical Engineers were transformed from mere map clerks into true surveyors who created maps and were placed in charge of new civil works.²¹

The first large-scale survey of the Great Lakes, a notable project of the corps, began in 1841. The topographers surveyed about 6,000 miles of shoreline, determined latitude and longitude, surveyed and measured the discharge of rivers into the lakes, developed charts and maps, and marked points of danger for the Great Lakes (see the map of Lake Erie, pp. 30–31). The survey was led by Capt. George G. Meade from 1857 to 1861. In 1859, Meade established nineteen weather stations on the five lakes to gauge and attempt to predict the weather.²²

At the age of 72, after forty-six years of service, John Abert retired in 1861.²³ Two years later, the Corps of Topographical Engineers was downgraded, yet again becoming a branch within the Corps of Engineers.²⁴

THE CIVIL WAR PROCESS

The Civil War brought about new difficulties in mapmaking. In his *Report*

on the Organization and Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan wrote:

Correct local maps were not to be found, and the country, though known in its general features, we found to be inaccurately described, in essential particulars, in the only maps and geographical memoirs or papers to which access could be had; erroneous courses to streams and roads were frequently given, and no dependence could be placed on the information thus derived. This difficulty has been found to exist with respect to most portions of the State of Virginia, through which my military operations have extended. Reconnaissances, frequently under fire, proved the only trustworthy sources of information.²⁵

With so much of the Civil War being fought on the doorsteps of the Confederate soldiers, who had firsthand knowledge of the countryside, the Union Army marched in blind. This led to the need for current and accurate maps of the South. The topographical engineers worked with the U.S. Coast Survey to create accurate maps, beginning in June 1861 with the first project, a 38-square-mile survey of northern Virginia. Establishing a process that would be used throughout the remainder of the war, the Coast Survey compiled the data and the topographical



Captain Meade

(U.S. Army)

engineers drew the maps. The first edition of the map of northern Virginia was completed in January 1862, and it had a significant impact on future Union activity in the area.²⁶ The new map would “guide the operation of parties in the field, give positive information about the country in advance, and serve not only as a basis for planning all military movements but also for directing artillery fire. In connection with the latter, it should be noted that in modern warfare the target is seldom visible to the gunner and the direction and range which are required in the aiming of the

(Library of Congress)

[illegible]

The Course and Basings are Magnetic.

Part of the sheet above art of *P. P. Public* and the *Foundations* inside of *Lake*.
The rest of the sheet above art of *P. P. Public* is from *manuscripts* and *illustrations* of the works of *Geographical Engineers* in *Italy*.
The work of art of *P. P. Public* is reduced from the larger sheet according to the scale of 1/100 and 8.
The *anatomies* are expressed in *feet*.
The *direct surface* in the *West End* and *East End* represent the *bed* of the *Lake* and the *level* in the *Lake* *ground* 19 *feet*.
Horizontal *lines* are drawn through the *3rd*, *6th*, *9th*, *12th*, *15th*, *18th*, *21st*, *24th*, *27th*, *30th*, *33rd*, *36th*, *39th*, *42nd*, *45th*, *48th*, *51st*, *54th*, *57th*, *60th*, *63rd*, *66th*, *69th*, *72nd*, *75th*, *78th*, *81st*, *84th*, *87th*, *90th*, *93rd*, *96th*, *99th*, *100th*, *101st*, *102nd*, *103rd*, *104th*, *105th*, *106th*, *107th*, *108th*, *109th*, *110th*, *111th*, *112th*, *113th*, *114th*, *115th*, *116th*, *117th*, *118th*, *119th*, *120th*, *121st*, *122nd*, *123rd*, *124th*, *125th*, *126th*, *127th*, *128th*, *129th*, *130th*, *131st*, *132nd*, *133rd*, *134th*, *135th*, *136th*, *137th*, *138th*, *139th*, *140th*, *141st*, *142nd*, *143rd*, *144th*, *145th*, *146th*, *147th*, *148th*, *149th*, *150th*, *151st*, *152nd*, *153rd*, *154th*, *155th*, *156th*, *157th*, *158th*, *159th*, *160th*, *161st*, *162nd*, *163rd*, *164th*, *165th*, *166th*, *167th*, *168th*, *169th*, *170th*, *171st*, *172nd*, *173rd*, *174th*, *175th*, *176th*, *177th*, *178th*, *179th*, *180th*, *181st*, *182nd*, *183rd*, *184th*, *185th*, *186th*, *187th*, *188th*, *189th*, *190th*, *191st*, *192nd*, *193rd*, *194th*, *195th*, *196th*, *197th*, *198th*, *199th*, *200th*, *201st*, *202nd*, *203rd*, *204th*, *205th*, *206th*, *207th*, *208th*, *209th*, *210th*, *211st*, *212nd*, *213th*, *214th*, *215th*, *216th*, *217th*, *218th*, *219th*, *220th*, *221st*, *222nd*, *223rd*, *224th*, *225th*, *226th*, *227th*, *228th*, *229th*, *230th*, *231st*, *232nd*, *233rd*, *234th*, *235th*, *236th*, *237th*, *238th*, *239th*, *240th*, *241st*, *242nd*, *243rd*, *244th*, *245th*, *246th*, *247th*, *248th*, *249th*, *250th*, *251st*, *252nd*, *253rd*, *254th*, *255th*, *256th*, *257th*, *258th*, *259th*, *260th*, *261st*, *262nd*, *263rd*, *264th*, *265th*, *266th*, *267th*, *268th*, *269th*, *270th*, *271st*, *272nd*, *273rd*, *274th*, *275th*, *276th*, *277th*, *278th*, *279th*, *280th*, *281st*, *282nd*, *283rd*, *284th*, *285th*, *286th*, *287th*, *288th*, *289th*, *290th*, *291st*, *292nd*, *293rd*, *294th*, *295th*, *296th*, *297th*, *298th*, *299th*, *300th*, *301st*, *302nd*, *303rd*, *304th*, *305th*, *306th*, *307th*, *308th*, *309th*, *310th*, *311st*, *312nd*, *313th*, *314th*, *315th*, *316th*, *317th*, *318th*, *319th*, *320th*, *321st*, *322nd*, *323rd*, *324th*, *325th*, *326th*, *327th*, *328th*, *329th*, *330th*, *331st*, *332nd*, *333rd*, *334th*, *335th*, *336th*, *337th*, *338th*, *339th*, *340th*, *341st*, *342nd*, *343rd*, *344th*, *345th*, *346th*, *347th*, *348th*, *349th*, *350th*, *351st*, *352nd*, *353rd*, *354th*, *355th*, *356th*, *357th*, *358th*, *359th*, *360th*, *361st*, *362nd*, *363rd*, *364th*, *365th*, *366th*, *367th*, *368th*, *369th*, *370th*, *371st*, *372nd*, *373rd*, *374th*, *375th*, *376th*, *377th*, *378th*, *379th*, *380th*, *381st*, *382nd*, *383rd*, *384th*, *385th*, *386th*, *387th*, *388th*, *389th*, *390th*, *391st*, *392nd*, *393rd*, *394th*, *395th*, *396th*, *397th*, *398th*, *399th*, *400th*, *401st*, *402nd*, *403rd*, *404th*, *405th*, *406th*, *407th*, *408th*, *409th*, *410th*, *411st*, *412nd*, *413th*, *414th*, *415th*, *416th*, *417th*, *418th*, *419th*, *420th*, *421st*, *422nd*, *423rd*, *424th*, *425th*, *426th*, *427th*, *428th*, *429th*, *430th*, *431st*, *432nd*, *433rd*, *434th*, *435th*, *436th*, *437th*, *438th*, *439th*, *440th*, *441st*, *442nd*, *443rd*, *444th*, *445th*, *446th*, *447th*, *448th*, *449th*, *450th*, *451st*, *452nd*, *453rd*,

Printed and bound by the
Printers to the Admiralty
at the Admiralty Press, London







William E. Merrill, shown here as a captain
(National Archives)

gun are very often taken directly from a topographic map.”²⁷ In this sense, the map itself became an essential catalyst in obtaining a superior artillery advantage.

In addition to using land surveys for creating accurate maps, topographers, now assigned to units throughout the Army, conducted field reconnaissance. Using a process that is much like the current process of making a map, the cartographer (or mapmaker) would first make a skeleton map using the most reliable base available. The skeleton map would include known features like rivers, terrain, roads, and railroads. A set of grid lines was then placed on top to create a set of common reference points. The field topographer, or scout, using a sketch pad with identical grid lines drawn on it, would sketch out the various additional features such as roads, rivers, significant landscape or terrain elements, and enemy locations. The sketches from the field topographer were then transmitted to the topographical engineers, who transferred the data to the skeleton map that would later become a finished map.²⁸

Unlike today’s military maps, Civil War maps relied on hatches—short, diagonal shading lines—to represent changes in elevation. The topographic engineer in the field would commonly use contour lines and shading on his field survey, which would later be turned into hatches by the cartographer. When Col. William E. Merrill submitted his battlefield survey of Chickamauga, Georgia, using contour lines and shading, he explained that “this map



Map titled “S. E. portion of Virginia and N. E. portion of Nth Carolina,” by Thomas J. Cram and Charles Worret, ca. 1864

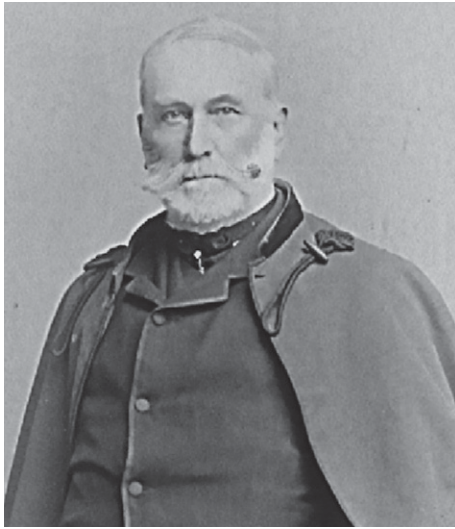
(Library of Congress)

was prepared as a guide to the draftsman who might be employed to prepare the complete map of the battle of Chickamauga [sic]. By carefully studying the contour lines and tints on this map, an accurate map with hatchures [sic] may be made of the ground.”²⁹

To obtain information about the location, size, and movement of enemy forces and military obstacles, cavalry parties frequently probed the countryside, relaying that information to the topographers to add to the maps. In addition to the cavalry probes, the Union Army began using a new intelligence-gathering device, the observation balloon.³⁰ In the spring of 1862, in the midst of the Peninsula Campaign, General McClellan was attempting to make his way to the Confederate capital at Richmond. One of his first obstacles was Yorktown, Virginia. Topographical engineer Lt. Col. Thomas J. Cram drew

an impressive map of the peninsula using maps prepared by the U.S. Coast Survey and Revolutionary War-era schematics of Yorktown. McClellan used Cram’s map to plan the siege, intending to use the Warwick River as a protective left flank.

The Coast Survey had mapped the river near the coast, where it flowed parallel to the coastline, but the Warwick actually cut across the peninsula farther inland than the map portrayed. The inaccuracy of the Coast Survey map carried over into Cram’s map—an error that resulted in the river impeding McClellan’s advance instead of protecting it. As McClellan’s Army of the Potomac moved inland toward Richmond, they were unable to use maps made by the Coast Survey, which meant that the field topographers would need to do reconnaissance in order to map the Confederate countryside. To gain



Thomas J. Cram

(National Archives)

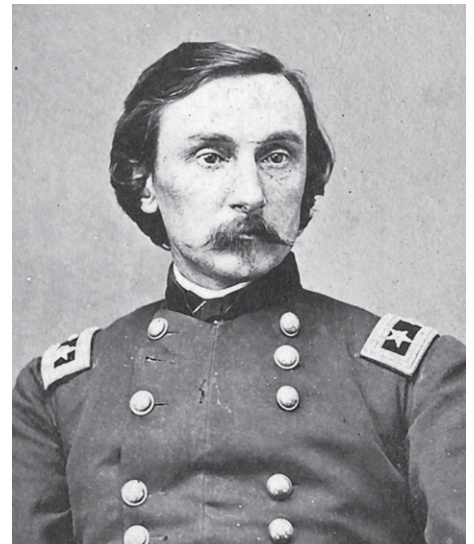
firsthand sight of the enemy forces ahead, the observation balloon was developed as a safer means of reconnaissance than riding through the countryside on horseback.

Thus it was that George A. Custer, then a lieutenant, found himself flying higher and higher in a hot air balloon above the Virginia peninsula one spring morning in 1862. With

a bird's-eye view of the countryside, Custer used the map-drawing skills that had been taught to him at West Point to sketch out the location of woods, streams, roads, terrain features, tents, artillery, and fortifications. This information, and Custer's ability to sketch with accuracy, proved so valuable that the topographical engineers sent him up several more times to map out the road ahead.³¹

GETTYSBURG: TRANSFORMATION FROM BATTLEFIELD TO NATIONAL PARK

In June 1861, a man from Copesville, Pennsylvania, named Emmor B. Cope enlisted in the Union Army, joining what would become Company A, 30th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry (First Pennsylvania Reserves). He quickly gained rank and was transferred to the Topographical Engineers in December 1862. With a keen interest and skill in art, Cope soon became known as an exceptional cartographer. Brig. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren, chief engineer of the Army of the Potomac, assigned Cope, then a sergeant, to lead the work party to



Gouverneur K. Warren, shown here as a major general

(Library of Congress)

survey the Antietam battlefield, a position normally given to commissioned officers.

One account places Cope at the Battle of Gettysburg, alongside the famous general, in 1863. A soldier of the 155th Pennsylvania Infantry who had been atop Little Round Top recounted that: "Before daylight on the 5th Meade and all his staff were awake and alert for action. General Warren, accompanied by Captain E. B. Cope, A.D.C., was dispatched to make observations of the enemy's movements from Little Round Top as soon as daylight would allow a view." Following the Battle of Gettysburg, General Warren assigned Cope the task of making the first comprehensive topographical map of the field of battle. While working on the Gettysburg map, Cope was also able to put the final touches on the Antietam map. Cope sent the Antietam map to the War Department in Washington via one of his assistants, who subsequently took credit for the map and was rewarded for "his" excellent work.

Meanwhile, Cope estimated and drew the Gettysburg field's physical features and elevation, using hatched lines. General Warren was so pleased with the work Cope had done on the Gettysburg map that he wrote in the margin, "This is a photograph from a map mainly made by Major (then Sergeant) E. B. Cope of my force (while the Chief Engineer of the Army of the Potomac) and under my direction. It is valuable as showing how a good topographer can represent a field after a personal reconnaissance. It was



Inflation of the observation balloon *Intrepid* during the Battle of Fair Oaks, 1 June 1862

(Library of Congress)



Map of Gettysburg Battlefield, surveyed and drawn by Emmor Cope, completed in 1905.

(Library of Congress)

mostly made from horseback sketches based upon the map of Adams County, Pa.”³² Now a prominent fixture of Warren’s staff, Cope was promoted to captain and aide-de-camp in April 1864 and then to major in January 1865. Less than a year later, Warren recommended Cope for a brevet promotion to lieutenant colonel, citing his “gallant conduct in [the] Battle of Five Forks in which he had a horse killed under him”

after missing a turn while trying to ride to the Gravelly Run Church and instead riding directly into the Confederate lines.

A little more than thirty years after the Battle of Gettysburg, in July 1893, E. B. Cope became the first topographical engineer of the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association (GBMA). From 1864 to 1893, the GBMA preserved and rehabilitated the battlefield area, which

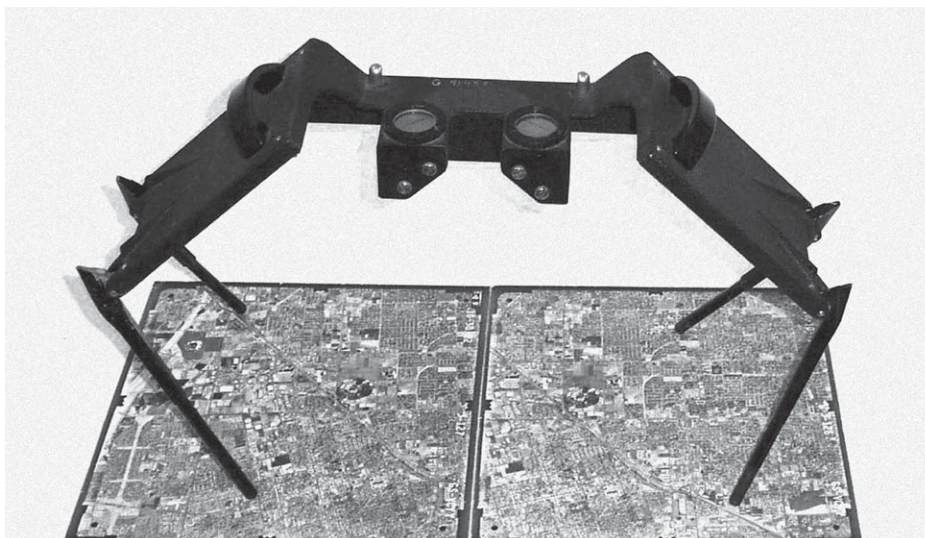
would become the Gettysburg National Military Park in 1895. Along with the other three commissioners, Cope:

transformed the muddy “cowpaths” of the GBMA into over twenty miles of semipermanent “telfordized” avenues, which to this day provide the base for the macadamized avenues. Defense works were resodded, relaid, and rebuilt where necessary. Cast iron and bronze narrative tablets were written and contracted for to mark the positions of each battery brigade, division, and corps for the armies as well as the U.S. Regulars. More than 300 condemned cannon were mounted on cast-iron carriages to mark or approximate battery sites where convenient. Five steel observation towers were built at key overlook points to assist in instructing military students in the strategy and tactics of the battle. More than 25 miles of boundary and battlefield fencing was constructed, as well as 13 miles of gutter paving. In excess of five miles of stone walls were restored or rebuilt, and nearly 17,000 trees were planted in denoted parts of the field, including Ziegler’s Grove, Pitzer’s Woods, Trostle Woods, and Biesecker Woods. More than 800 acres of land were acquired, including Houck’s Ridge, the Peach Orchard, and several significant battlefield farms and their structures (McPherson, Culp, Weikert, Trostle, Cordori, Frey, etc.).³³

All of this work, plus Cope’s most complete survey of the Gettysburg battlefield, was completed in a mere ten years, 1895 to 1905. Cope lived and worked on the battlefield for more than three decades, keeping detailed journals, which paint the picture of how the park transformed during his time there.³⁴

TWENTIETH-CENTURY TOPOGRAPHY AND THE ARMY MAP SERVICE

In his 1908 publication, *Military Maps Explained*, Capt. H. E. Eames, an instructor of engineering at the Army Service Schools in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, argued that a higher degree of training in map reading was required so that soldiers could properly use contoured maps. While the previous technique of hachuring (using hatched lines) allowed personnel with extensive map-reading experience as well as less-



Stereoscope designed for the U.S. Army

(U.S. Geological Survey)

trained individuals to interpret maps and understand significant changes in topography, the contoured maps preferred by the U.S. military were not as widely understood. Eames advocated for increased map training for all military personnel and demonstrated the superior utility of maps with contoured lines. Eames compared the uncontrored map to a smoothbore flintlock, the hachured map to the earliest rifled breechloader, and the contoured map to a modern high-powered rifle.³⁵

The Army topography branch, still part of the Corps of Engineers, evolved again in 1909, when the map reproduction unit was formed. Initially housed in a warehouse at the Army War College on what is now Fort McNair in Washington, D.C., the unit was renamed as the Map Printing Plant of the Engineer School in 1910 and again renamed as the Central Map Reproduction Plant in 1917. Because of the abilities of overseas mapping facilities and the static nature of warfare at the time, the Central Map Reproduction Plant did not see an overwhelming amount of work during World War I. In 1919, after the war had ended, the Central Map Reproduction Plant reorganized and changed its name once again. The main mission of what was now known as the Engineer Reproduction Plant (still under the control of the Corps of Engineers) was to fill the mapping needs of a peacetime Army. With cartographic requests low and little map work to do, the topographers at the Engineer Reproduction Plant shifted their focus to study the process of mapmaking, experimenting with new

techniques that would soon revolutionize military mapmaking.

Just as Custer had used a balloon to see the landscape from the air, the U.S. Army began to use aerial photography to accurately identify key locations and transfer the information onto maps. An airplane with a special set of cameras installed flew over the target area in an overlapping grid pattern, taking images from at least two camera angles. Once the images had been developed, the cartographers would use a stereoscope to interpret the images using a process known as photogrammetry, which functions comparably to the 3D glasses used today at many movie theaters. With each eye viewing the picture at a slightly different angle, the mind interprets the image it sees in three dimensions, creating depth. The trained cartographer extracts pertinent information from the images and transfers it onto a map to be used by the intelligence community to make operational decisions.³⁶

When the United States entered World War II in December 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Army once again needed a robust mapping organization. By merging the Engineer Reproduction Plant and the War Department's library and cartographic sections, the Army Map Service (AMS) was created in 1942. The AMS began the task of gathering, cataloging, and reproducing foreign maps to aid the forces in the field overseas. To accomplish this task, and to expedite the making and shipping of maps, the AMS created multiple departments and arranged them within a newly built facility in Brookmount, Maryland. The AMS was made up of cartographers, photographic draftsmen,

artists, print-plate makers, press operators, and shippers. The AMS produced such a large number of accurate maps throughout the war that they had secured their place as a vital part of the Army structure.³⁷ "Map making is primarily the field of the engineer," the civil engineering professor J. K. Finch wrote in his introduction to his 1920 book on topographic maps, "and in modern warfare they [maps] are usually prepared by a special engineering force trained and equipped for this purpose and assisted by airplane observers. Accurate up-to-date maps were found to be so important on the western front that specialists were developed in all the branches of the work from the purely engineering features of surveying to the interpretation of aerial photographs and the printing of the final map."³⁸

The majority of the staff of the AMS were men, so it was no surprise when the AMS became shorthanded as their workforce was called up to fight overseas. To combat this shortage, the Geography Department at the University of Chicago began offering a course in military mapmaking at women's colleges throughout the East and Midwest. The course was such a success, with 200 women completing it in the first year, that AMS created an additional four-week training course for graduates of the program, who became known as the "Military Mapping Maidens" or the "3Ms."³⁹

One such Military Mapping Maiden was Bea McPherson, a graduate of Kent State



Recruiting poster, ca. 1943

(National Geospatial Intelligence Agency)

University in Ohio, who joined the AMS in 1943 and worked in the Charles Ruth building at the AMS facility in Brookmont, Maryland. Using foreign maps, aerial photos, and other information, McPherson and her colleagues created maps that charted strategic locations such as churches, schools, land contours, bodies of water, and roads. Some of the maps were printed on silk handkerchiefs that the troops could carry into the field to use as survival tools.

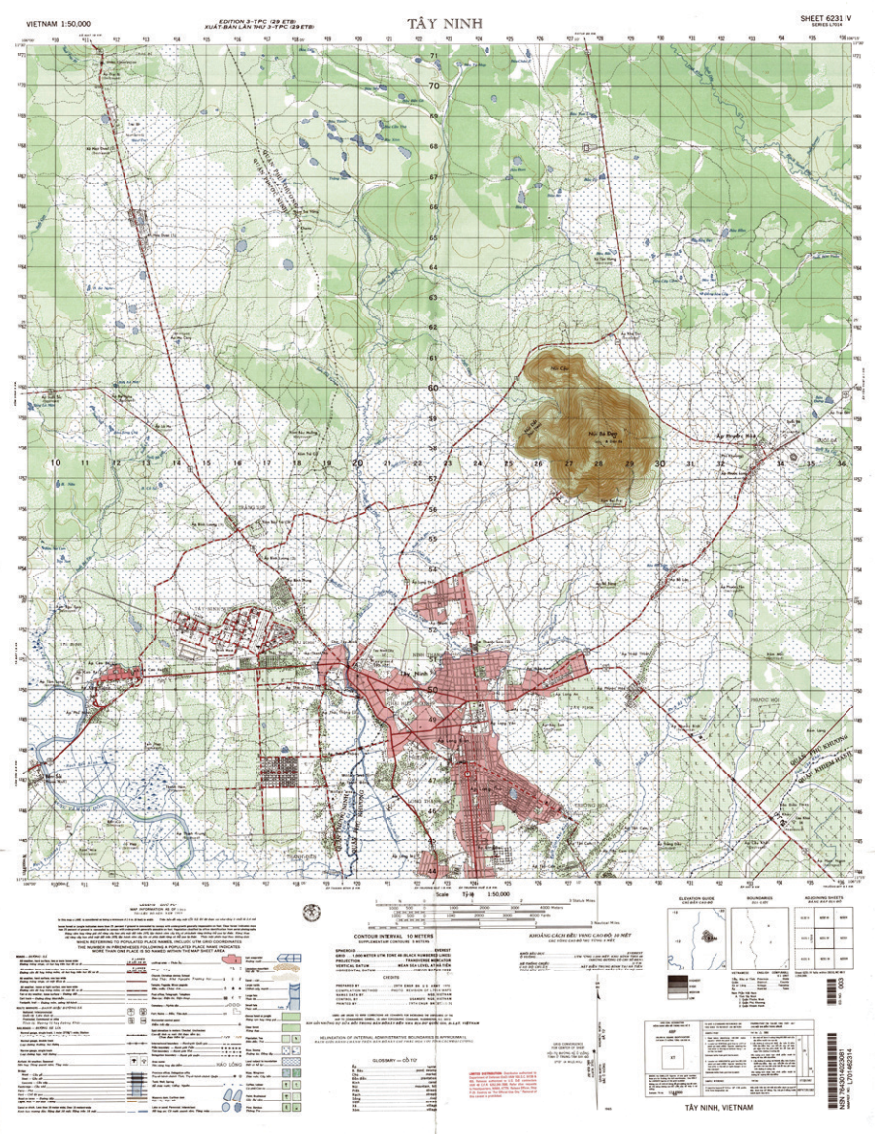
McPherson helped “develop various maps for the Battle of the Bulge and initiatives in and around Fiume, Italy.”⁴⁰ In the spring of 1944, McPherson recalled, “Generals and Colonels kept coming into the cartography room. We were told to drop what we were doing, and work on this special project. We worked round the clock. After they landed [on D-Day], we heard about the invasion [of Normandy] on the radio, and they told us we’d been working on [maps of] the Utah and Omaha beaches.”⁴¹ In 2016, the Military Mapping Maidens were inducted into the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency’s Hall of Fame, an event which McPherson attended on behalf of the incredible women cartographers of World War II.⁴²

TECHNOLOGY AND THE VIETNAM WAR

In the 1950s, with the American involvement in Southeast Asia ramping up, the need for up-to-date military maps of the region became evident. The best maps of that region, the AMS realized, had been drawn by the French during their colonial rule in Indochina (1887–1954). With few other topographic source maps, the AMS devised a new plan to create timely and accurate maps. In 1956, the AMS joined with the newly formed Republic of South Vietnam in a mapping agreement that ultimately would benefit both groups by producing a large library of regional maps. Using aerial photos and surveys conducted by both American and Vietnamese cartographers and surveyors, the AMS was able to produce, print, and ship out more than 200 million maps to Vietnam between 1959 and 1965.⁴³ Though field survey work was abandoned in 1962 because of increased Communist activity in Vietnam, the AMS was still able to complete its map revisions before the United States sent troops to Vietnam. This feat marked the first time that the U.S. military had been able to complete such a large-scale mapping operation before the commitment of combat forces.⁴⁴ The maps



A 40th Topographic Company draftsman at work
(U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)



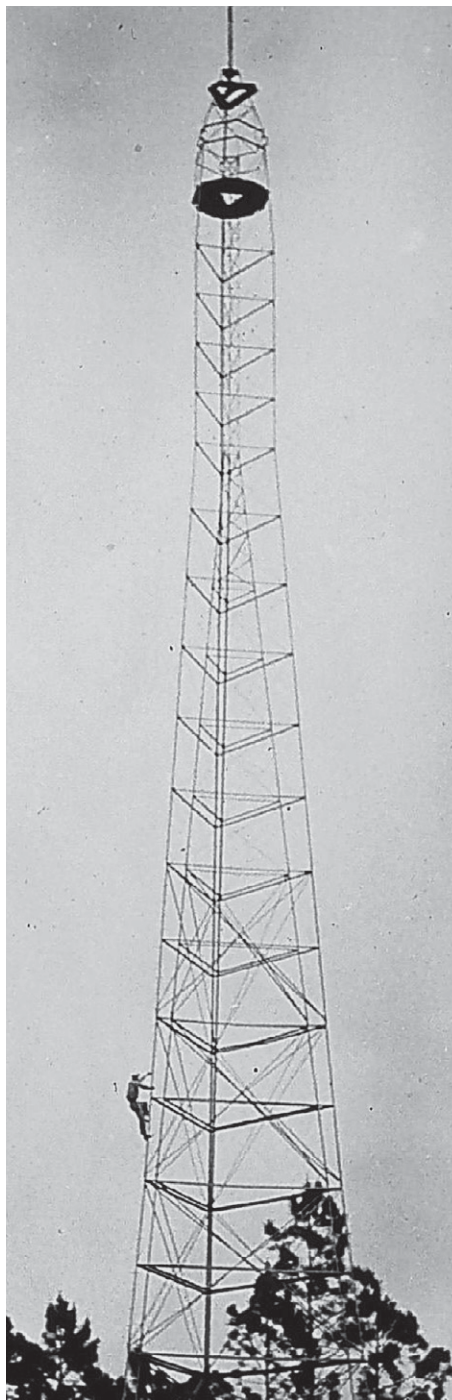
Map of Tay Ninh, South Vietnam, produced by the Army Map Service, 1970
(U.S. Army)

proved critical for building supply routes and for coordinating more accurate artillery strikes.⁴⁵

While the technology used by the Army topographic engineers during the Vietnam conflict was drastically different from Revolutionary War-era technology, the science behind it remained relatively the same. The 66th Engineer Company (Topographic) was one of two topographic-geodetic surveying companies tasked with creating highly precise topographic surveys of Vietnam. The 66th was composed of two specialized groups, the geodesists and the surveyors. The geodesists computed distance and direction over the curvature of the earth, operating, for the most part, from air-conditioned trucks at base camp. The field surveyors, meanwhile, were the “men on the ground,” routinely venturing into the jungles of Vietnam to take accurate latitude and longitude horizontal positions.

Because the first of twenty-four NAVSTAR (navigation system with timing and ranging) satellites would not launch until 1978, the field surveyors did not have the ability to use GPSs (global positioning systems) for establishing control points.⁴⁶ Instead, they relied on old French geodetic control monuments and established new control monuments to determine the accurate elevation of the country. They used theodolites to measure angles, electronic distance measurers (EDMs) to measure distance, and differential levels combined with measuring rods to measure elevation changes.⁴⁷ To establish first- and second-order geodetic controls, the field surveyors measured from one point between two other distant points, making a triangle with very long sides in order to obtain the most accurate latitude and longitude coordinates.

To overcome the challenges presented by the dense jungles and rugged terrain of Vietnam, the topographers built what was called a Bilby tower from which they could establish the clear lines of sight they needed to obtain high accuracy surveys of the region. Each Bilby tower was 113 feet tall and consisted of two towers—an inner one that kept the instruments stable during operation, and an outer one where the topographers worked without disturbing the accuracy of the delicate instruments. After a Chinook helicopter flew a crated Bilby tower to the desired location, a crew of six field surveyors would travel to the site



A Bilby tower

(National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

of the required survey, usually without any infantry support for security, and begin to rebuild the tower, working in sixteen-foot sections, starting with the inner tower.

Each tower had a light on its highest point, which the surveyors used to observe angles between towers at night. (Lower-precision observations were made during daylight.) The Bilby towers proved to be popular targets for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, who often shot



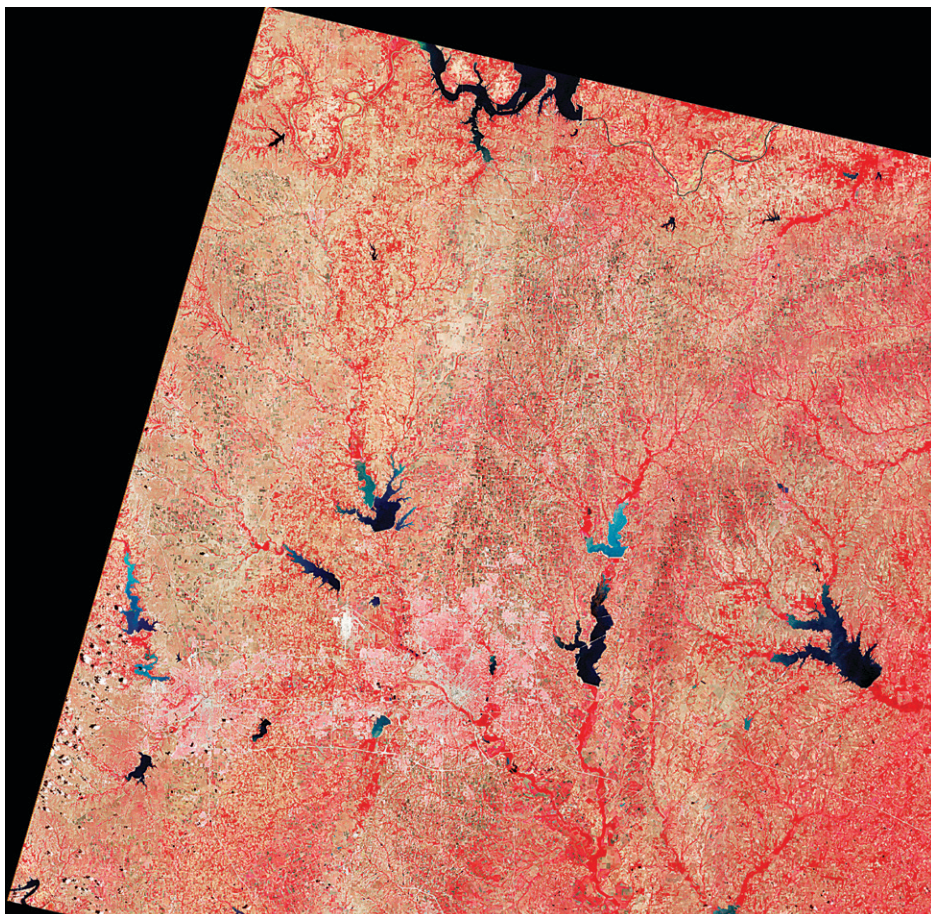
The Army of the Republic of Vietnam's 1st Engineer Group is trained to erect a Bilby tower by the 66th Topographic Company.

(U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

at the lights at night. After one incident in which an Army of the Republic of Vietnam soldier was killed with a mortar round while on a Bilby tower, Sgt. Russell Novotny Jr. occupied the unstable Bilby tower for two days. Novotny waited until the wind died down enough so that he could repair the shrapnel holes and make the tower stable enough to resume measuring horizontal angles between two distant control stations. While on a survey mission in September 1968, Novotny was seriously wounded during an ambush when shrapnel from a grenade launcher explosion hit the femoral vein of his left groin. He survived the injury, and after his recovery, he served another four months with his topographic engineer company.⁴⁸

CONSOLIDATION AND THE FUTURE

Hand in hand with the development of the science of war has advanced the science of topography; and as war emerged from the domain of art into the cold, true atmosphere of science, soldiers have placed more and more reliance upon the cartographer's



Landsat 1 satellite image of Dallas, Texas, 25 July 1972

(National Aeronautics and Space Administration)

representation of the theater of operations.⁴⁹

In July 1972, Congress merged the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center of the Air Force, the Naval Hydrographic Offices' oceanographic and charting service, and the AMS into one organization designated as the Defense Mapping Agency (DMA).⁵⁰ This merger took the Army's mapping service away from the Corps of Engineers at long last and placed it in the Department of Defense.

The aerial component of mapmaking technology has come a long way from its origins of a person in the gondola of a balloon sketching battlefields from above. In the 1970s, map data collection practices evolved once again. The first Landsat satellite was launched into Earth's orbit in 1972, giving cartographers the ability to create new and innovative maps using images of the earth's surface captured from space. The Department of Defense launched the first NAVSTAR satellite from Vandenberg Air Force Base

in 1978, marking the first use of what is now known as GPS. Twenty-four NAVSTAR satellites have been fully operational in the GPS constellation since 1993.⁵¹ To better utilize these technologies, the Army created

the Army Geospatial Enterprise (AGE) in 2008. The AGE integrated all of the geospatial technologies into one warfighting function in an attempt to better inform military decision-making and data tracking. The Army Geospatial Center (AGC) became a component of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2009 to manage the AGE. The AGC manages the Army's LandWarNet/Battle Command systems, and disseminates geospatial information throughout the Army.⁵²

From lessons learned during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, the Clinton administration made the decision to realign the DMA, and in October 1996, the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA) was formed. NIMA unified a host of agencies and offices: the Defense Mapping Agency, the Central Imagery Office, the Defense Dissemination Program Office, the National Photographic Interpretation Center, parts of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Defense Airborne Reconnaissance Office, and the National Reconnaissance Office. Reflecting the ever-changing needs and rapidly evolving technologies of global mapmaking, NIMA became the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in 2003. It continues to produce map products of national and global importance.⁵³

Throughout the history of mapmaking in the U.S. Army, the field topographer has been central to both the collection of geographical data and the creation of mapping products, and this remains



A geospatial engineer warrant officer uses mapping software to create a three-dimensional video representation of military operations.

(U.S. Army)

the case in current battlefield operations. Under the Army's current structure, the Geospatial Engineer (12Y) is that field topographer, whose position is now defined as follows:

Geospatial engineers are responsible for using geographic data that supports military/civilian operations for Disaster Relief and Homeland Security. They collect, analyze, and distribute geospatial information to represent the terrain and its possible effects. Geospatial engineers extract geographic data from satellite imagery, aerial photography, and field reconnaissance; create geographic data and compile them into maps; help commanders and staff officers visualize the battlefield and advise them on topographic operations and special map product planning; create and maintain multiple geospatial databases; and prepare military-style briefs covering all aspects of the terrain.⁵⁴

Geospatial engineers use satellite imagery as the base upon which they build operational maps. From this base, they can add any number of layers of data collected from multiple sources across the battlefield to create a battlefield overview for the ground commander. Unlike the topographical engineers of past generations, the current geospatial engineers use highly specific computer software, known as a geospatial information system (GIS), to create and manage data and maps. Using the GIS, geospatial engineers analyze battlefield data and turn it into the best possible visual representation that soldiers at all levels can interpret and understand. The geospatial engineer works with the AGC and ground forces to obtain geospatial data that is available for use across the Army.

Although the role of the Army topographer has developed over time in tandem with the ever-changing technological advances of the world, it is a position as old as our nation itself. The tools and techniques of mapmaking have evolved alongside the position, but the principals and purpose of military cartography—to provide our Army with the maps it needs to win each fight—have remained the same.



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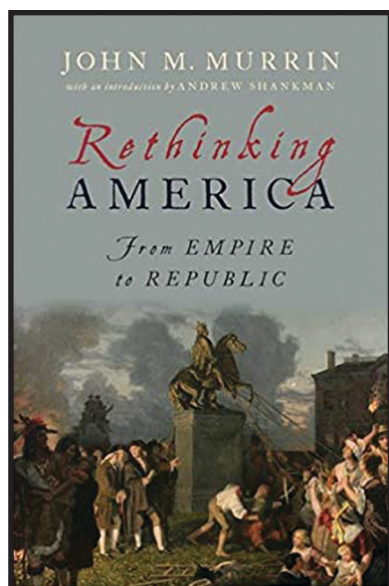
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BOOKREVIEWS



RETHINKING AMERICA: FROM EMPIRE TO REPUBLIC

BY JOHN M. MURRIN

Oxford University Press, 2018

Pp. ix, 407. \$34.95

REVIEW BY JOHN J. GURNER

Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic is a collection of essays that showcase the long career of John Murrin, a historian of early American history and colonial political ideology. Murrin's work focused on some of the most challenging interpretations of America history, and, as Andrew Shankman explains in his introduction, this book collects Murrin's most thought-provoking essays in one volume. Within it Murrin explores the rise and fall of the British Empire, colonial origins of class conflict, origins of American federalism, and "the great gulf of outcome and intention produced by those who sought a republic, created a democracy, and talked in bold ways about expanding liberty and equality" (2).

Rethinking America is organized in ten chapters, each a stand-alone essay, which combine quite remarkably to emphasize different themes. Essentially, Murrin says to

understand the American colonies and the Revolution which produced a separate nation, one must have "a fuller understanding of the British colonial and British imperial world from which they emerged" (3). Throughout the book, several essays do come back to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 as the historical pivot that changed the course of colonial development within the emerging empire. This means that any scholar of early America must have a firm understanding of not only what produced the events of 1688 when James II was forced, with minimal violence, to vacate the throne, but also an understanding of the personal rule of Charles I that initiated the first of many seventeenth-century political crises in England.

Fortunately, Murrin's first chapter, "The Great Inversion or Court versus Country," does an excellent job of condensing the major ideological viewpoints into more relatable terms. This chapter is the key to understanding much of Murrin's view of early American politics, as well as how other historians have written about the period. Murrin analyzes the main historiographical schools—particularly the Imperial and the Progressive—to show how each interpretation, depending on the scholar in question, overlooked key aspects to understanding early American political thought. He says, "[t]he historian's task should not be the defense of one of these themes to the exclusion of the other. If at all possible, he should try to explain both" (37). Indeed, Murrin seeks a synthesis of the various interpretations, one that combines economic self-interest, political aims, and the various localisms that all colonies faced, with a more coherent interpretation of the forces that coalesced, perhaps amazingly so, into the United States of America.

In Chapter 3, "The French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the Counterfactual Hypothesis," Murrin explains the use of the counterfactual argument as a process of understanding that must be applied systematically and carefully.

Another central point Murrin explores is what he sees as the "Anglicization" of

the American colonists. In Chapter 6, he argues that American national identity was not a unified entity but "many distinct colonies that differed as dramatically from one another as any of them from England" (189). Murrin argues that American national identity, not to be confused with nationalism, was something quite different and was not a logical culmination of the forces at work from 1763 to 1776.

The conclusion, "Self-Immolation: Schools of Historiography and the Coming of the Revolution," provides an excellent summation for understanding how the Revolution has been discussed among competing schools of thought. Murrin returns to the themes introduced in the first chapter regarding America's Revolution Settlement, or America's revision of the English Bill of Rights. "Once the process has been completed," Murrin explains, "for an indefinite period of future time internal forces alone will not alter the regime or constitutional system in more than in secondary details" (39).

Military historians have much to learn from the ideological aspects of *Rethinking America*. Politics greatly plagued the nascent military during the nation's early years. In "The Great Inversion or Court versus Country," Murrin explains the political issues that affected why and how politicians used, or perhaps misused, the army and the navy at various stages of the Republic. Chapter 10, "War, Revolution, and Nation-Making," will be of some interest for its discussion of the role of war in forging a national identity. Here, Murrin borrows an analytical tool from David M. Potter's article, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa," to see how the nationalism of the Confederacy compares to the notion of supposed American nationalism in the 1770s.

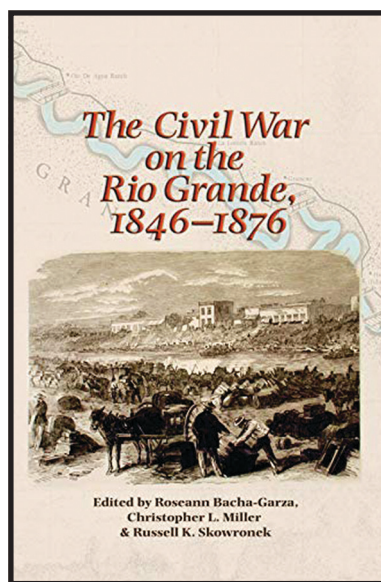
In conclusion, *Rethinking America* is an exploration of issues of historiography that all U.S. historians should revisit. It lacks an index, and there are noticeable typographical errors in a few chapters. Nevertheless, the endnotes show Murrin's thorough use of

sources from a variety of fields and are worth combing through for hidden gems. Murrin's style combines erudition and wit. When he goes on the attack, his careful unraveling of an interpretation is conveyed with precision and respect. Finally, Murrin reminds us to consider how the struggles and ideological issues of our colonial past still affect us, generations later.

NOTE

1. David M. Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice-Versa," *American Historical Review* 67, no. 4 (Jul 1962): 924–95.

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THE CIVIL WAR ON THE RIO GRANDE, 1846–1876

EDITED BY ROSEANN BACHA-GARZA,
CHRISTOPHER L. MILLER, AND RUSSELL K.
SKOVRONEK

Texas A&M University Press, 2019
Pp. xx, 326. \$45

REVIEW BY JOSEPH A. BEARD

This edited work on the history of the Rio Grande Valley from 1846 to 1876 is a useful addition to the fields of Texas borderlands and U.S. Civil War history.

It is the forty-sixth book in the Elma Dill Russell Spencer Series, and a follow-up to the editors' 2018 work *Blue and Gray on the Border: The Rio Grande Valley Civil War Trail*. The editors are educators who are well versed in the history of the Rio Grande Valley and have strong ties to the Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools (CHAPS) Program of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. *The Civil War on the Rio Grande, 1846–1876* is a collection of eleven essays, each concerning the history of the Texas Rio Grande Valley from the Mexican War through the end of the Reconstruction Era. It is an informative and educational book, which delves into a much-neglected area of Texas borderlands and U.S. Civil War history, and many readers will undoubtedly find an abundance of new information within its pages.

The stated purpose of this publication is to increase knowledge concerning the history of the Rio Grande Valley and to inspire further scholarship on how Texas was shaped by the events of 1846–1876. From the outset, the book's editors take exception with the idea that the Rio Grande Valley was merely a peripheral part of the American Civil War and Reconstruction eras. They contend that after the Civil War, the Rio Grande Valley (and the American West in general) was an important component of U.S. history during the era they redesignate as the "Greater Consolidation" (xv).

In Chapter 1, "Prelude," Christopher L. Miller sets up the ten essays that follow, giving background history of the Rio Grande Valley. Miller discusses how the region transformed from the Seno Mexicano Frontier to the Nueces Strip Borderland during the period of 1846–1876. He argues that although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo officially made the Rio Grande River the boundary between Mexico and the United States in Texas, it was not until after the Civil War that the region went from being a frontier to a border. Douglas A. Murphy's essay goes into further detail concerning the effects of the Mexican and Civil Wars on the Rio Grande Valley. He maintains that during the Civil War, both the Union and the Confederacy were inspired by the legacy of the Mexican War. Murphy concludes, however, that following the Civil War, the Mexican War (and, therefore, the Rio Grande Valley) took a back seat in collective memory and U.S. historical study.

The essay by M. M. McAllen seems primarily an economic history focusing

on trade along the Rio Grande during the Civil War. The author discusses a myriad of other topics such as the Cortina Wars and the region's cosmopolitan culture. McAllen goes into considerable detail concerning influential figures in the area, including her great-grandfather John McAllen who became a successful merchant, mainly through cotton smuggling. Karen and Tom Fort's essay also examines trade along the Rio Grande during the Civil War, concentrating chiefly on Confederate cotton smuggling. The writers give a detailed description of the process that cotton smugglers used to get their product through Matamoros and beyond the Union blockade. The essay also touches on events in Mexico at the time, steamboat travel on the river, and the salt trade in the region.

Roseann Bacha-Garza's essay explores race and ethnicity along the Rio Grande following the Civil War. She demonstrates that the community along the river was a racial melting pot, pointing out that members of that community were forced to choose between the Union and the Confederacy during the Civil War. Bacha-Garza especially centers on relations between White, Black, Hispanic, and indigenous people in the Rio Grande Valley, giving specific examples of mixed-race unions and making proficient use of oral interviews. Her argument is that people living in the area saw race differently before the Civil War, and only came to be seen as "Mexican-American" after the war.

Irving W. Levinson's essay concerns the changing narrative about this border area during the nineteenth century and its effect on U.S.-Mexico relations. He points out that the Union saw the Imperialist government of Mexico as pro-Confederate and a continuing threat after the Civil War, which led the United States to aid the Liberals in gaining victory in Mexico. Levinson concludes that U.S. backing of the Liberals ultimately led to increased foreign investment in Mexico.

The essay by Jerry Thompson is a comparison between two important figures in Rio Grande Valley history—Col. José de los Santos Benavides and General Juan Nepomuceno Cortina. While Benavides chose to ally with the Confederates in the Civil War, Cortina eventually sided with the Union, which led to a continuation of the Cortina Wars.

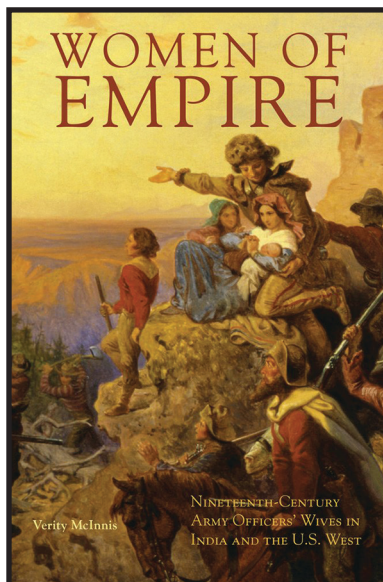
The essay by W. Stephen McBride is a narrowly focused look at the four

U.S. Colored Troops (USCT) units from Kentucky that were stationed along the Rio Grande from 1865 to 1867. McBride gives a considerable amount of information about the experiences of these USCT soldiers, concluding with a brief section on their legacy. James N. Leiker's essay also studies the experience of USCT soldiers stationed along the Rio Grande after the Civil War. He goes into great depth about their specific experiences, especially focusing on relations with Latinos and Anglos. The essay examines how Black soldiers were treated by Mexicans on the border, and Leiker concludes that most of the negative treatment was because of a dislike for the U.S. Army rather than racially motivated. He ends by asserting that Black soldiers' perception of Mexico became more negative during the time they were stationed along the Rio Grande.

Roland Garza's essay confronts the existing confusion about the Battle of Palmito Ranch. In the first half of the essay, Garza provides primary and secondary sources on the subject with some analysis. In the second half, he presents the archeological record of the battle with the aim of giving the reader archeological insights concerning what is considered by many the last battle of the Civil War. The final essay of the book, by Russell K. Skowronek, summarizes the previous chapters and revisits the main argument of the book—that the Rio Grande Valley was not a mere sideshow during the Civil War.

This is certainly a helpful book, but for anyone reading the work straight through, it has a great deal of redundancy. There are noticeable minor flaws such as intermittent typos and occasional citation irregularities, but overall, *The Civil War on the Rio Grande* is a useful work which brings together an abundance of information. It will be valuable to anyone interested in the history of the Texas Rio Grande Valley during the Mexican War, Civil War, and Reconstruction Era.

JOSEPH A. BEARD is a PhD candidate at Texas Tech University whose dissertation focuses on U.S., British, and Chinese relations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He holds a master's degree in history from the University of North Texas. From 2019 to 2020, he worked as a graduate research assistant at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, where he coauthored *The Lincoln Assassination Staff Ride Guide*.



WOMEN OF EMPIRE: NINETEENTH-CENTURY ARMY OFFICERS' WIVES IN INDIA AND THE U.S. WEST

BY VERITY MCINNIS

University of Oklahoma Press, 2017

Pp. xi, 285. \$34.95

REVIEW BY KELLIE WILSON-BUFORD

In this original and welcome addition to both military history and comparative studies of women, gender, and empire, Verity McInnis shines a much-needed light on the central role army officers' wives played in promoting imperial aims in the U.S. West and British India from 1818 to 1910. Drawing on published and unpublished narratives, memoirs, travelogues, and private correspondence written by American and British officers' wives, McInnis illustrates how these women, in both locations, propagated imperial aims by "designing, reproducing, and policing social representations of empire" (4). By adapting and applying middle-class values to militarized spaces on the peripheries of empire, officers' wives negotiated gender, class, and racial boundaries in ways that affirmed their identities as White, middle-class, imperial representatives. In so doing, officers' wives created a "new social reality" within military installations, which, according to McInnis, influenced "the development of imperial formations by cutting across and restructuring race, gender, and class boundaries" (4). Similar in scope and argument to Donna Alvah's pathbreaking

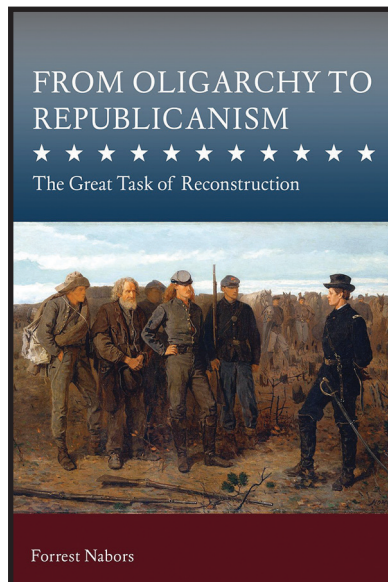
work *Unofficial Ambassadors*, which reveals how U.S. military wives and families served as unofficial ambassadors to potential democratic allies in the Cold War era, McInnis's work highlights the centrality of army officers' wives to U.S. and British imperial goals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

McInnis argues that in both the United States and Great Britain, military academies trained officers to embody Victorian ideals of masculinity. Officers who trained at the Royal military academies of Sandhurst and Addiscombe and the United States' West Point internalized a military code of honor that idealized gentlemanly qualities such as honor, loyalty, virtue, and self-sacrifice. Wives reinforced these gender ideals in their writing by glorifying officers as genteel, honorable imperial gatekeepers while casting themselves as imperial ambassadors who were central to their husbands' units. The long and arduous journeys officers' wives endured to be with their husbands cemented their roles as "intermediaries of empire" (41). Officers' wives managed their fears of dislocation and disorientation through the expression of "extreme patriotic nationalism and racial prejudice" against local inhabitants (10). Cementing their roles as imperial intermediaries, wives appropriated traditionally masculine spaces with their attendance (and performance) at ceremonial functions, tasteful homemaking, hosting of social events within their own homes, and employment of domestic servants to maintain their homes. In all of these venues, officers' wives adapted military customs to garner influence and respect as imperial representatives. By identifying themselves according to their husbands' ranks and titles, for example, wives feminized the military hierarchy and made their respectability as officers' wives contingent upon their class status. Wives' adoption and adaptation of military language and dress had a similar effect. By signifying themselves as "ladies" in opposition to "half-way ladies" (officers' wives of working-class origins) and mere "women" (enlisted men's wives, laundresses, and domestics), officers' wives replicated the class and racial hierarchies on which their own perceived middle-class Anglo superiority depended (69). This evidence seems to suggest, contrary to McInnis's claim, that officers' wives bolstered rather

than restructured class, racial, and gender hierarchies on the outposts of empire.

Though McInnis argues that this unique space on the peripheries of empire enabled officers' wives to create a "distinct military sisterhood" among themselves, it is significant that the bonds of this elite sisterhood hinged upon the exclusion of seemingly less respectable women. While McInnis's study breaks new ground in highlighting the important role officers' wives played in U.S. and British imperial endeavors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, her exclusive focus on the elite "women of empire" has limitations. Officers' wives represented only a small percentage of military wives. Given that the majority of military wives were enlisted men's wives, McInnis's work overlooks the roles that these seemingly less respectable—but no less important—women played as agents of empire. Beyond being the occasional objects of derision in officers' wives' writings, enlisted men's wives performed critical functions for armies that are worthy of sustained scholarly investigation. Though tracing enlisted men's wives' experiences and perspectives is challenging given the paucity of available sources, the result of these efforts would be worthwhile because it would complicate our understanding of how all women—not just the elite—negotiated masculine military spaces on the outposts of empire. Despite these limitations, McInnis's work lays the foundation for future comparative scholarship on the role of military wives in the formation and destabilization of empires in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

DR. KELLIE WILSON-BUFORD is an associate professor of history at Arkansas State University. She received her PhD in history from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in 2014. Her publications have been featured in the *Journal of Homosexuality* and *Military History of the West*, among others, and her edited volumes include *Evolution of Government Policy Towards Homosexuality in the U.S. Military* (Routledge, 2018) and the forthcoming *Managing Sex in the U.S. Military* (University of Nebraska Press, 2021). Her first book, *Policing Sex and Marriage in the American Military: The Court-Martial and the Construction of Gender and Sexual Deviance, 1950–2000*, was published by University of Nebraska Press in 2018 as part of the Studies in War, Society, and the Military series. Her current book project, tentatively entitled *Shattering the Silence: Sexual Violence and American Military Justice from the Korean War to the Present*, traces military courts' efforts to manage service members' crimes of sexual violence since 1950.



FROM OLIGARCHY TO REPUBLICANISM: THE GREAT TASK OF RECONSTRUCTION

BY FORREST NABORS

University of Missouri Press, 2017

Pp. xix, 399. \$45

REVIEW BY CODY R. SCHUETTE

Long before the Southern secession, the United States was divided into separate political regimes: a republic striving for national freedom and restraining slavery and an oligarchy striving for localized freedom and expanding slavery. Forrest Nabors, an associate professor of political science, tells the forgotten history of how the antebellum South's rejection of the founders' ideals ultimately led to the newly formed Republican Party using military force primarily for regime change, not solely for the empowerment of minorities and those enslaved. To provide this historical account, Nabors relies on speeches, floor arguments, and writings of Republicans in the 38th, 39th, and 40th Congresses before, during, and after their congressional service. These primary sources clearly illustrate how they connected the founders' struggle to establish a republic, free of the monarch's rule, and their struggle to reestablish that republic, free of oligarchs' rule.

From Oligarchy to Republicanism: The Great Task of Reconstruction is broken into two parts. Part One provides, as Nabors admits, a largely one-sided account of the Republican Congress's perspective that has been poorly advanced through historical

literature. He shows how Republicans intended to reinstate republicanism and rectify the antebellum South's moral flaw of slavery. The second part concentrates on the goals, shortcomings, and implications of Reconstruction and sheds light on the devious origins of the "states' rights" argument. Taken together, the two parts of this book provide a breadth of knowledge on American history with the depth of often-overlooked details on how Southern character regressed from the American Revolution through Reconstruction.

Nabors begins by describing why Republicans thought the founders' idealistic American republic needed to be reconstructed. Here, as throughout the book, Nabors provides abundant evidence supporting his assertion, this time by highlighting that at the time of the American Revolution, the majority of Northern and Southern founders supported a slow erosion of slavery and the superiority of federal power over states. Republicans emphasized that the leading founders, like Washington, Jefferson, and Adams, did not advocate for the expansion or even the sustainment of slavery, never defended its practice, and thought it repugnant to republicanism. Additionally, the founders took measures to doom the institution. The U.S. Constitution would prohibit the importation of slaves by 1808, and the Northwest Ordinance outlawed slavery on newly organized land. Nabors concludes that these acts, along with states' legislatures restricting and prohibiting slavery, were thought to be sufficient to unite the socially and politically diverse colonies and create a nation that could fulfill the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution.

Republicans also emphasized that the U.S. Constitution required the federal government "guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government" (9). This would become the crux of the Republicans' legal argument against the slaveholding states, which Nabors routinely references to advance his narrative. The foundation of the Republicans' argument was that a slave economy naturally promotes an oligarchy, which is antithetical to republicanism. Here, Nabors uses Aristotle's definition of oligarchy as a political regime in which the natural inequalities of individuals within a society lead to a rank order that justifies the rule of the self-serving rich minority.

Nabors is then able to accentuate a fact frequently forgotten: Republicans believed that the wealthy, politically powerful Southern Whites ruled over and to the detriment of free and enslaved Blacks and the majority poor Whites. Subsequently, Republicans argued that the flourishing and sustaining slave economy was against the founders' vision of the nation, violated the U.S. Constitution, and therefore required federal intervention. However, the prominent Southern statesman, John C. Calhoun, had his own interpretation of the U.S. Constitution that generated a divergent proslavery doctrine and vision for the South.

To no surprise, then, Nabors shows why Republicans viewed Calhoun with such fierce disdain. Calhoun claimed that states were sovereign, separate, and independent. The embodiment of this logic was the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, which allowed states to determine the status of slavery within their borders, replacing the "free-soil" policy of the founders. Overall, Calhoun's ideology cultivated a generation of Southern leaders that used inflated congressional power and suppressive local tactics to expand slavery and drive the South toward succession. Nabors provides detailed historical context as he discusses both the growing dissatisfaction with Calhoun's philosophy and the continual appeasement of oligarchs which led to the formation of the Republican Party. This new party believed the North, like the founders, stood for liberty and republicanism, but the South for slavery and oligarchy. This difference, Republicans argued, required regime change.

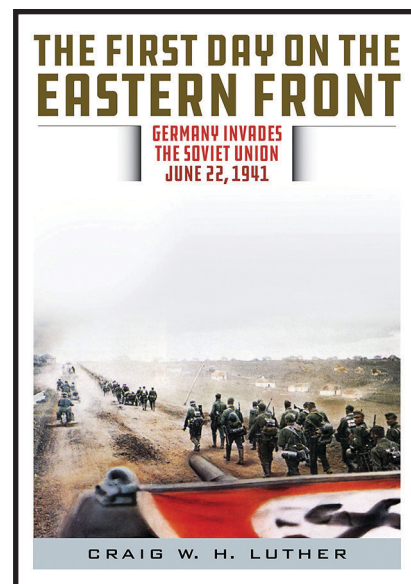
During this detailed historical account, Nabors deliberately de-emphasizes the degrees to which many of the founders benefited from slavery before, during, and after the American Revolution. Instead, he heavily favors their antislavery writings and subsequently labels them as "slaveholding-abolitionist" (146). This devaluation of slavery's positive impact on the founders and their tolerance of slavery's existence was also a necessary oversight made in the Republicans' historical argument that the South constituted a completely different political regime that required complete regime change. Despite this oversight, Nabors unequivocally connects the expansion of slavery to the erosion of republicanism and rise of Southern elites. Substantiated by economic, census, and

other historical data, he shows how slavery concentrated economic power while the restriction of education, voting access, press, speech, and political association concentrated political power to Southern elites comprising only 4 percent of the White population (42).

Nabors devotes only a small portion to the execution of Reconstruction, but covers why it generated only momentary success. Paralleling contemporary examples, Nabors illustrates that successful regime change is difficult to force upon an unwilling population and even more difficult to justify to an unconcerned political base. Additionally, racism and differing political philosophies did not simply evaporate after the Civil War, but transformed into violence and extrajudicial killings of African Americans and those supporting Reconstruction.

In *From Oligarchy to Republicanism*, Nabors provides a fresh and thorough analysis of America's founding documents, exploring the historical link between the American founders and mid-nineteenth-century congressional Republicans and highlighting their shared belief in the preeminence of republicanism and defending it at all cost. This book is an essential read for anyone interested in American history. It is especially relevant to the study of Civil War-era history, as it provides a holistic understanding of slavery, the political compromises that provoked the war, and the Republicans' political objective of regime change. Overall, a well-researched, informative, and persuasive book that is well deserving of the American Political Science Association's 2017 best book award for political thought.

MAJ. CODY R. SCHUETTE is an active duty Army officer and a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science, a master's in national security studies, and a master's of public administration. He currently serves as an Army strategist.



THE FIRST DAY ON THE EASTERN FRONT: GERMANY INVADES THE SOVIET UNION, JUNE 22, 1941

BY CRAIG W. H. LUTHER

Stackpole Books, 2019

Pp. xxxii, 471. \$39.95

REVIEW BY KATHERINE WILSON

The German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941—or Operation BARBAROSSA—is one of the most often written about audacious gambles in military history. In *The First Day on the Eastern Front*, Craig Luther addresses the first twenty-one hours of the operation in a way not previously undertaken. The fury unleashed at dawn by almost three million German troops left the world in awe. This momentous event changed the course of World War II and derailed Hitler's conquest of the European continent. Just as devastating, "the collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire [albeit] decades later actually had its origins in Hitler's attack on [that fateful day]" (341).

Luther organized his book into seven chapters plus a postscript. The first two chapters address the events leading up to the actual invasion, and Luther, understanding the limitations of word count, "examined [those events] in largely general terms" (xxxix). Although the number of pages may be constrained, the amount of detail is more than sufficient to set up the unfolding events. While Luther makes it clear that his work focuses only on the first twenty-one hours of the

operation with a brief introduction to the political and military strategies, a little more discussion on the ideological factors and Hitler's Lebensraum would have added helpful context.

The meat of the book lies in its middle three chapters, wherein Luther recounts the movements of Army Groups North, Center, and South in great detail. It is in these chapters that Luther's extensive research shines. His goal of "[immersing] the reader in the terror, confusion, and horror of a distant time and place, when Adolf Hitler decided to 'play chess with humanity' by unleashing Armageddon—his criminal war of annihilation . . . against the Soviet people" is unquestionably achieved (xxxii). Chapter 6 deals with the air war between the warring nations in more detail than previous works, especially the Russian response to having their airfields blown up and bombers shot out of the sky and the enormity and resiliency of their production efforts. As in the previous three chapters, Luther outlines the Luftwaffe's operations as they pertained to supporting Army Groups North, Center and South. The final chapter focuses on opposing perspectives in the two capital cities, Berlin and Moscow. While the Germans attempted to keep the Soviets in the dark when it came to their plans, numerous communiqués from various sources should have warned Stalin that war was imminent. However, Stalin continued to reject them, even during the first few hours of the invasion.

The well-written postscript is the tie that binds everything together, especially for readers who may have become bogged down in the details of the primary chapters. Luther provides a synopsis at the end of each chapter, and the postscript takes each of these and outlines the common threads found throughout the book. These include the overwhelming Luftwaffe attacks on Soviet airfields, aerial support of ground forces, German underestimation of Russian terrain, road construction (or lack thereof), and Soviet tenacity. German leaders and soldiers alike were shocked that the Red Army soldiers did not act (either in fighting or surrender) as their Western European enemies had. While some retreated, others fought to the death, attacking from the rear, feigning death, ignoring medical insignia, and fighting house to house. Finally, Luther addresses

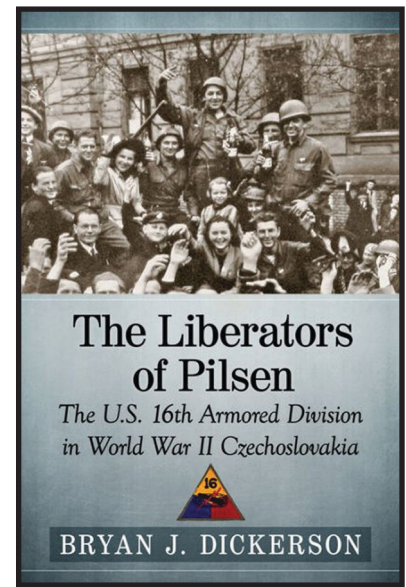
both the ineptness and ruthlessness of Stalin's leadership.

While the chapters are full of incredible and somewhat overwhelming tactical detail, Luther also includes two photo essays that break up the text nicely and provide a reprieve. The pictures are clear and show a wide variety of images, from the individuals involved to the armament used. The textual details, especially regarding the personnel and armament assigned to each Army Group, may be attractive to the antiquarian, but they are too much for the average reader of popular history. This reader could skip these first two paragraphs of each chapter and lose nothing essential to the operations themselves.

Luther uses an impressive depth and breadth of primary sources (documented in sixty-three pages of endnotes), both German and Russian, to bring the reader into the trenches and experience the battles as they raged. Personal stories from letters home and diary entries transport the audience to the battlefield and into the soldiers' hearts and minds. One can feel the excitement, fear, and even, at times, rage, felt by soldiers on both sides as those early hours unfolded. Luther alludes to their fury and hatred without dwelling on either its causes or its effects on the combatants. As with the discussion (or lack thereof) on ideological factors and the Lebensraum, this omission does not detract from the story, though its inclusion certainly would have added even more. Although this work focuses on tactics and fighting, the interwoven personal anecdotes humanize the action.

Overall, *The First Day on the Eastern Front* is a great read. Luther informs and entertains his readers in meaningful ways. Any student of military history, World War II, or Russo-German relations will find this work both beneficial and enjoyable.

KATHERINE WILSON is a freelance historian and former Air Force officer. She holds a master's degree in military history from Norwich University and a bachelor's degree from the United States Air Force Academy. Kathy is a Writing Fellow for Norwich and is currently working on a biography of Lt. Gen. Frank M. Andrews.



THE LIBERATORS OF PILSEN: THE U.S. 16TH ARMORED DIVISION IN WORLD WAR II CZECHOSLOVAKIA

BY BRYAN J. DICKERSON

McFarland & Company, 2018

Pp. vii, 223. \$35

REVIEW BY J. A. HENDERSON

In his first published work, *The Liberators of Pilsen: The U.S. 16th Armored Division in World War II Czechoslovakia*, new author Bryan Dickerson presents the history of the 16th Armored Division during its participation in World War II. Dickerson's stated purpose in writing the book was "to honor the American liberators of western Czechoslovakia and, in particular, those who served in the 16th Armored Division" (5). Overall, *The Liberators of Pilsen* is an informative, if disjointed, read that follows the 16th Armored Division throughout its formation, deployment, combat operations, and demobilization. For his research, Dickerson used an impressively wide range of sources to thoroughly tell the 16th Armored Division's story (5). While the book logically follows a sequential timeline of events, it contains three very different thematic sections.

The first of these sections, which constitutes the majority of the book, is written as a unit history, with Dickerson leaving no detail uncovered. This style of writing, while extremely informative, is difficult to follow. With no introduction, the reader is thrown directly into the lengthy description of the organization

and reorganizations of the 16th Armored Division. This continues for most of the first five chapters, without any visual aids to help the reader comprehend this overwhelming amount of dry information. An early line and block chart depicting the various units' organization would both greatly inform the reader, and negate the need for long passages describing each unit in detail. Dickerson eventually publishes just such a chart on page 90, but this is far too late in the book to be useful.

In addition to the excessive amount of unit information provided in the early chapters, Dickerson presents an equally excessive number of characters. While each soldier has a unique and interesting story, Dickerson's commitment to the detailed descriptions of each of these men's lives leaves no one as a standout for the reader to follow throughout the upcoming narrative. Adding to the confusion of this section, the writing alternates between these descriptions of people and descriptions of unit history, and jumps around in time throughout Chapters 1 and 2. In the penultimate chapter, the author gives a postscript on all of the characters, but it falls flat because the reader has not had the chance to build a rapport with any of these characters. While it serves as an interesting historical detail to see where all of the stories end, it would have been more effective to follow just a few men through the entirety of the book.

The second section of the book dispenses with the cumbersome details of the early chapters and begins a narrative operational history. This section, from Chapter 7 to 14, is where the book shines. The tone of the book changes, and Dickerson sets the scene well, weaving together a coherent narrative drawn from primary source interviews with both U.S. Army soldiers and Czech civilians. Dickerson first discusses the overall situation, and then uses this to frame individual anecdotes of the operations in and around Pilsen. The best of these individual stories describes 2d Lt. Charles Schaeffer unexpectedly receiving the surrender of Lt. Gen. Georg von Majewski and his staff. "Schaeffer was not even supposed to be in Pilsen. 'I was supposed to be going in the opposite direction to turn in some reports . . . but I saw the whole column going out and I just couldn't resist going with them. So that's what I did . . . I was alone and very surprised to find about 25 officers and some

wives,' he later recalled. 'What in the hell was I going to do with them? It was quite a thing'" (113–14). This illustrative writing continues into Chapters 10 and 11, with Dickerson forgoing a conventional timeline, and instead following individual units throughout the entire operation. This was an excellent choice by the author. While following one unit narrative at a time, the reader can still understand the larger situation.

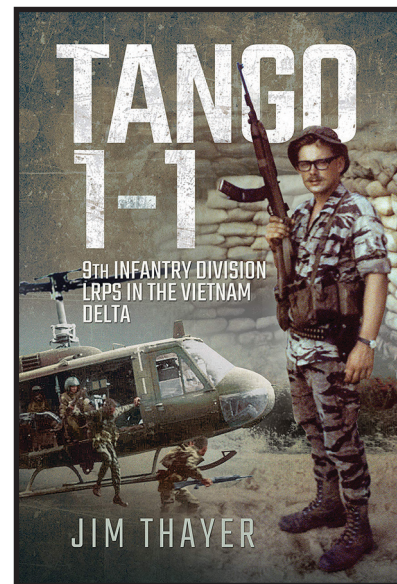
Chapters 12 and 13 return the reader to the larger picture of the war in Europe, but are still rather engaging. Here, and earlier in Chapter 3, the reader would benefit from an overall map of the situation in Europe. Dickerson's hand-drawn maps help the reader follow the action at the local level, but it would be good to depict where these events are happening in the larger context of the European theater. The final chapter of the book's second section describes the harrowing journey of the Pratt Mission. This expedition to secure the surrender of the German garrison in Prague and Welchov is another fascinating vignette, and Dickerson's decision to dedicate an entire chapter to it is commendable.

The final section of the book encompasses only the last chapter, "The Legacy of the 16th Armored Division." In this chapter, Dickerson takes a broad departure from the rest of the book and delves into his own travels to Pilsen during the Pilsen Liberation Festival in 2000, fifty-five years after the city's liberation by the 16th Armored Division. The tone here is different, written almost entirely in first person, which makes the chapter feel out of place. It would have functioned better as an epilogue.

Overall, I would recommend this book to any historian looking for a complete history of the 16th Armored Division. It is well researched, and Dickerson's endnotes will enable years of further research. Conversely, readers looking for an easy read about the liberation of Pilsen will labor through the early chapters and may become discouraged. Dickerson has a hard time deciding what he wants the book to be: a detailed unit history, an engaging narrative, or a personal travel diary.

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TANGO 1–1: 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION LRPS IN THE VIETNAM DELTA

BY JIM THAYER

Pen and Sword Books Ltd., 2020
Pp. v, 168. \$32.95

REVIEW BY ERIK W. FLINT

Formed in Germany in the mid-1950s, Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) units served as the eyes and ears of U.S. Army Corps commanders during the height of the Cold War. Though none of the three formal LRRP companies stationed in Europe in the 1960s deployed to Vietnam, the potential impact of such formations in Southeast Asia became apparent as early as 1965. In that year, specialized patrol units were established through local efforts to meet the specific needs of Army commanders on the ground in Vietnam. In July 1966, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) Commanding General William C. Westmoreland officially authorized each Army combat division to activate a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol company. Westmoreland uniquely understood the utility of such organizations. In 1958, as the commanding general of the

101st Airborne Division, Westmoreland established the Army's first "Recondo" (Recon/Commando) school at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. His intent was to train his paratroopers on advanced patrolling and raiding, skills he believed were lacking in the Army at the time. In Vietnam, the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) established and ran the MACV Recondo School at Nha Trang. Many LRRPs and Rangers graduated from the notoriously rigorous three-week course. The course's graduation exercise was a live operational reconnaissance patrol in which casualties were not uncommon.

Jim Thayer's *Tango 1-1: 9th Infantry Division LRRPs in the Vietnam Delta* is a readable first-person account of one soldier's tour from 1968 to 1969. After a single enlistment in the early 1960s, Thayer left the Army, but he reenlisted in 1968 with the expressed purpose of going to Vietnam and volunteering for the LRRPs. Arriving in-country in the summer of 1968, Thayer was assigned to the 9th Infantry Division headquartered at Tan An, southwest of Saigon. At that time, the Division's subordinate brigades were spread out across the infamous Mekong Delta region and were tasked with conducting the war in the delta's unique aquatic environment. At Tan An, Thayer immediately volunteered for and was accepted into the Division's LRRP Company: Company E, 50th Infantry (LRRP).

The book, like most first-hand accounts, is not an academic work, but an oral history, written to convey to family and friends the author's personal experiences as a reconnaissance soldier in Vietnam. The 168-page book is organized into 54 short chapters, running in length from one to eight pages. Each chapter covers a particular LRRP patrol or personal incident in Thayer's life during his tour. A few chapters share episodes from Thayer's family life, which personalize the memoir and give the reader emotional context for Thayer's experiences in Vietnam. Thayer's tour included dozens of combat patrols, clashes with other soldiers, and multiple wounds. Thayer also witnessed the transition of all Long Range Reconnaissance units to Ranger companies. In 1969, all U.S. Army LRRP units, not just those in Vietnam, were realigned under the 75th Infantry Regiment. LRRP companies were relabeled alphabetically, and these new

organizations were officially designated as "Ranger" units to tie their operational heritage to the Ranger units of World War II and the Korean War.

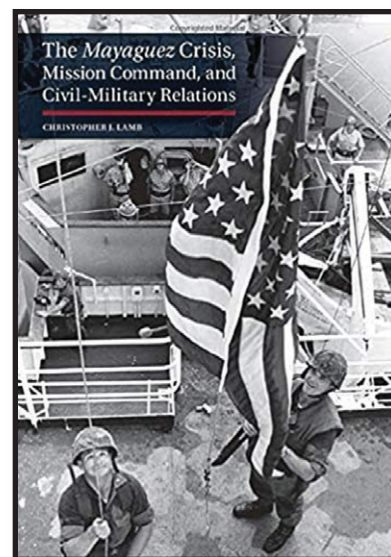
Thayer's company was unique among similar units in that its Mekong Delta area of operations often necessitated insertion and extraction by amphibious means. Swift boats and Patrol Boat Riverines were the most effective means of moving about the delta's maze of rivers, canals, and irrigation ditches. Helicopter and truck transport were also used. Thayer cites numerous examples of each of these methods when recounting specific patrols. During a particularly notable patrol, an unusually large and overwhelmed reconnaissance patrol was reinforced by Col. David H. Hackworth, a line battalion commander in the 9th Division, and his men. (This incident is also recounted in detail by Hackworth in his 2002 book, *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts*.) In the initial stages of the fight, Hackworth and his radio-telephone operator leapt into the fray from a hovering OH-6A "Loach" observation helicopter.

The inherent danger of service in LRRP and Ranger units necessitated that its members be highly trained in patrol tactics and possess both physical and mental toughness. Completion of the MACV Recondo School was a typical gateway. Additionally, many LRRPs and Rangers either had previous combat tours or requested transfer to the specialized companies after service in line infantry units. In this light, it seems unusual that Thayer simply walked right into an LRRP unit. Apart from his age, maturity, and rank (sergeant), he did not have any of the qualifications or experience typical of soldiers in the unit. Though Thayer references his earlier Army enlistment, including a tour at the Presidio in San Francisco, he never specifically mentions being an infantryman. Nevertheless, upon his arrival in Vietnam and assignment to the 9th Infantry Division, Thayer immediately joins the Company E LRRPs and quickly rises to the coveted position of patrol leader.

For students of Vietnam LRRP and Ranger units, as well as those with a more general interest in the war in Vietnam, *Tango 1-1* makes for a quick and fulfilling read. Thayer highlights a wide variety of topics, from patrol techniques to the freedom of choice reconnaissance soldiers had in tailoring their weapons,

uniforms, and equipment to the needs of particular missions. Thayer's *Tango 1-1* honors the unique role LRRP and Ranger units played in the war while humanizing the men who fought and died under often desperate and trying conditions.

ERIK W. FLINT spent thirty-three years in uniform serving as an enlisted U.S. marine, an Army national guardsman, an active duty Army infantry officer, and an Army Reserve officer. He deployed twice to Iraq as a combat historian for U.S. Special Operations Command and holds bachelor's and master's degrees in history. He retired as a lieutenant colonel in 2019 and is currently the director of the Lewis Army Museum on Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State.



THE MAYAGUEZ CRISIS, MISSION COMMAND, AND CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

BY CHRISTOPHER J. LAMB
Office of Joint History, 2018
Pp. xxiii, 284. \$66

REVIEW BY DANIEL R. HART

It may be the humiliating nadir of modern American foreign policy. After 58,000 dead, hundreds of thousands wounded, and billions spent, Americans in South Vietnam were forced to flee with little more than the shirts on their backs. One Air Force pilot, Richard Vandegeer, estimated that he evacuated some 2,000 people in the weeks before the fall of Saigon on 29 April 1975. Vandegeer has the peculiar distinction of being the last U.S. service member to have his name etched on the Vietnam Veterans

Memorial, after his helicopter crashed as part of an ill-fated mission to rescue marines in what is known as the *Mayaguez* crisis.

Though only peripherally connected to the Vietnam War, the *Mayaguez* crisis is often cited as its last battle, commencing less than two weeks after the fall of Saigon when Cambodian Khmer Rouge gunboats seized the SS *Mayaguez*, a U.S. merchant ship carrying a crew of thirty-nine Americans. In *The Mayaguez Crisis, Mission Command, and Civil-Military Relations*, Christopher Lamb examines what U.S. leaders hoped to accomplish in their response to the *Mayaguez* crisis, and how those motivations influenced the manner in which the ensuing drama unfolded. He believes the motives for U.S. behavior have been widely mischaracterized and their significance misunderstood. Lamb, a distinguished research fellow at the National Defense University, has studied the *Mayaguez* crisis for more than thirty years, having written his doctoral dissertation on the subject, which was the basis for his first book, *Belief Systems and Decision Making in the Mayaguez Crisis*. Lamb revisits the crisis in response to other analyses and because of the availability of newly declassified information, including the notes of General John Wickham.

This accessible book is presented in two parts. In the first half of his book, Lamb lucidly recounts the four-day crisis, detailing the words and actions of the four principal players in the crisis: President Gerald Ford, in office nine months when the crisis started; Henry Kissinger, who served as both Secretary of State and National Security Advisor; Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger; and Deputy National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. The second half of the book is an explanation, analysis, and historiography of the crisis. Lamb's analysis is both concise and comprehensive; his 217-page book is supported by more than 50 pages of notes.

The crisis would be the only instance that was managed through the National Security Council (NSC). The reaction was swift: the United States bombed the Cambodian coast and, believing the crew were being held on Koh Tang Island, deployed a Marine regiment and sank several vessels leaving the island. This overwhelming display of force was hurried, and the intelligence was tragically flawed, resulting in unnecessary casualties: twenty-three Air Force police and crew were killed in an accidental helicopter crash in Thailand, and fifteen

marines were killed in action on the heavily defended Koh Tang. An additional three marines were listed as missing in action and, controversially, were later killed in action. Only the competency and bravery of the military forces prevented further carnage. Despite these apparent disproportionate losses, the ship and crew were safely returned, and the United States demonstrated cathartic confidence in the immediate wake of Vietnam. Though the action was initially seen as successful, the handling of the crisis subsequently has been widely criticized by politicians, academics, and military leaders.

Though Lamb's historical account is both gripping in its prose and masterful in his command of the information, his primary motivation is not documenting the events in the White House, but understanding why they unfolded in the manner that they did. Lamb systematically reviews the potential options of the policymakers: a rescue mission, a use of coercive diplomacy against the Khmer Rouge, or a use of military force to avoid a USS *Pueblo*-type prolonged hostage negotiation. Lamb is able to decimate the documentary evidence to show that these options, even the rescue of the crew, were all secondary to the primary objective of the crisis: an overwhelming and rapid use of force to signal the resolve and credibility of the United States to the North Koreans and the international community. Despite this agreement among the principals, the implementation of the policy was strained by an unwieldy NSC, which promoted rivalry and self-interest, and the bureaucratic competition between Kissinger and Schlesinger. In Lamb's narrative, Kissinger emerges as a masterful bureaucratic infighter, eschewing any information that would hinder his aggressive instincts. Kissinger's undue influence on Ford as the American Metternich, a practitioner of realpolitik, is evident, as Ford forgoes both domestic political considerations, and the safety of both the crew and the armed forces, in joining Kissinger's obsession with America's international image. Schlesinger, who eventually would be fired for his conduct during the crisis, is sympathetically portrayed as being unfairly scapegoated, for Schlesinger's interventions were chiefly responsible for saving the crew and preventing more deaths of marines on Tang.

Though the implementation of the policy was fatally flawed, Lamb contends that it was rational and ultimately successful.

He further asserts that other scholars have learned the wrong lessons from the crisis, focusing on the micromanagement of the military and disproportionate loss of American life, citing the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis and the ensuing national humiliation as the exemplar of the lesson not learned. Lamb provides documentary evidence that the message of resolve was received by the nations that Ford and Kissinger were signaling, namely North Korea, China, and the Soviet Union. The policy, like Lamb's analysis, can seem callous, but Lamb emphasizes both the unnecessarily hasty response and the inherent tension and contradiction in hostage situations. The use of force and projection of American credibility, Lamb avers, must be balanced and tempered with competent bureaucracy and methodical execution. He proffers concrete reforms, including improving command and control communication to foster the same candor before and during missions as seen in post operations, and reforming the NSC to allow smaller crisis management teams to respond to specific emergencies.

Lamb suggests in his preface that his work is primarily for the national security community, but he is being modest. This is an exemplary case study of crisis management that is useful for historians, analysts, political scientists, and anyone with an interest in the subject matter.

DANIEL R. HART earned his bachelor's degree in history and government from Bowdoin College. He is currently completing his master's degree in history at Harvard University, where his thesis examines the relationship between Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and President John F. Kennedy during the fall of 1963. He is a regular contributor to the *VVA Veteran*.





Jon T. Hoffman

BOOK PROCESS STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Three years ago, the Histories Directorate (HD) adopted a Book Process Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) with the primary goal of speeding up the production of our official histories. Its main feature is an editorial board that reviews and approves every stage of a project from the prospectus through periodic research reports and individual chapters. The primary members of the board are the chief historian, director of HD, and head of the General Histories Division (which encompasses nearly all the authors). Other authors may be part of the board for a particular project within their area of expertise. With considerable experience under our belts, we believe the SOP has been working as intended. We also have made a concerted effort to minimize additional duties and other tasks for authors so they are able to devote more of their time to research and writing.

Among other benefits, the editorial board helps us identify authors who are facing challenges in the very early stages of a project. We then are able to assist them in solving problems. In a few cases, we have terminated their work so that we do not continue to put resources into a failing effort. In other situations, we have slimmed down the coverage of a volume so it can be completed in a more timely manner.

We now have settled into the SOP routine, so this is a good point to provide an update on HD's current projects.

Vietnam remains our oldest ongoing series. Last year, Mark Bradley completed a draft of the first half of his logistics history (an example of a project broken into two so that we can produce a partial account now and the rest of the topic later). An external panel reviewed the manuscript, and it is now undergoing revision. We hope to get it into production later this year, at which point Mark will return to work on the period of 1968–1973. In January, Andy Birtle completed a draft of the advisory effort during 1961–1965. Because of its size, we will print it as two volumes, with the second half going to an external panel in the next few months. Erik Villard and contractor Kevin Boylan have completed prospectuses for their respective combat operations volumes covering 1968–1969 and 1970–1973, and both are already researching and writing. Their work is based on a lengthy but unfinished manuscript by Dale Andrade, who moved to the Joint History Office a few years ago.

For our Cold War series, Thomas Boghardt has completed a manuscript on Army intelligence in Germany from 1945 to

1949. An external panel reviewed it last year, and it is now in production. He is also doing preliminary work on the volume taking the story through 1961. Don Carter is far along in his history of the institutional Army from 1953 to 1963 and is on track to complete a draft later this year. Julie Prieto is in the early stages of her manuscript on the Army in Latin America from 1945 to 1963. She has completed much of the research and the first two chapters.

The Tan Book series is building momentum. For this group of publications, we generally are assigning authors to write a campaign pamphlet first. That gets an initial short account out to the Army while the author gains familiarity with the subject and the sources and is thus ready to hit the ground running on the official history volume. Travis Moger has completed a monograph on the Army in the Persian Gulf from 1991 to 2001, which sets the stage for all the volumes to follow. It is well along in the production process, and he will soon be working on the campaign pamphlet covering the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Nick Schlosser has completed more than half of the chapters of his official history of the surge in Iraq from 2007 to 2008. Mason Watson is working on the campaign pamphlet covering Operation INHERENT RESOLVE in Iraq, 2014–2018. Mark Folse is in the initial stages of revising the existing campaign pamphlet for Afghanistan covering the years 2001–2002, as preparation for work on the main volume. Contractor John Mortimer is writing the campaign pamphlet for Afghanistan for the years 2009–2011. We will soon assign Kate Tietzen, our newest author, to one of the Iraq campaign pamphlets. Mark Reardon retired last year, but has completed a draft of his volume on building the Iraqi army, spanning the years 2003–2018, and we are in the process of getting it ready for panel review.

We are just beginning to see the fruits of the SOP as projects get into print, and we expect that this enhanced return on investment will continue to merit dedicated Army resources as budgets tighten.





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