

## E S S A Y S

The essays reprinted here illustrate the diversity in military history today. In 1973, Russell F. Weigley of Temple University wrote what many historians consider one of the most important interpretations of American military history. His thesis: There is a distinctive American way of war, and it emerged primarily as a result of American attitudes and resources. Here, in an essay written especially for this volume, Weigley revisits his seminal work. In an important milestone in the development of a social history of the military, reprinted here as the second essay, Richard H. Kohn of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and former Chief of Air Force History, called in 1981 for a history of American military service and its relationship to the larger society. The third essay, written by Alex Roland of Duke University in 1991, emphasizes the need for a broader approach to military technology, one that explores its relationship to American culture and strategic thought. Dennis F. Showalter of Colorado College has long challenged the direction of the "new" military history away from the study of battle; in the fourth essay, written specially for this volume, he revisits his provocative 1975 plea for "drums and trumpets." One of the most important new areas of historical scholarship in recent years has been women's history; in the fifth essay, D'Ann Campbell, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Austin Peay State University in Tennessee and a historian of women and war, examines the ways in which four countries in World War II dealt with the issue of women in combat, and emphasizes the need for scholars to include concepts of gender in the study of war and the society, particularly in regard to modern "total" war in the twentieth century.

### How Americans Wage War: The Evolution of National Strategy

RUSSELL F. WEIGLEY

In a university career of teaching United States military history, I have found again and again that there are two courses sure to draw a more than full enrollment: the American Civil War and the Second World War. Partly the popularity of studying those two wars lies in their being the military-history buffs' wars, the enthusiasts' wars. Gettysburg and the Ardennes, Vicksburg and Guadalcanal exert an endless emotional fascination. So do the technologies of the wars, from Minie balls to Flying Fortresses, and the resultant tactics. But 1861-1865 and 1941-1945 do more than simply tug at our national yearnings to find, in spite of war's horror, a measure of glory and of romance in war. Nearly every American senses also that the Civil War and the Second World War, of all the conflicts in our history, most embody the national image of what war inherently is and ought to be.

Americans fought both wars—in the Civil War, Americans on both sides fought—for causes large enough and vital enough to justify an all-out pursuit of victory, sparing no energies and resources. For most American participants, neither war presented blurred, difficult-to-define objectives, and therefore neither war brought with it only partial, limited commitments of military means to pursue the

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objectives, the kind of limited commitment that was to seem an incomprehensible anomaly to many Americans during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

Long before the Civil War, the struggle against the North American Indians for possession of the continent had nurtured an American perception of war as implicitly a contest for total victory, because European-Americans early concluded that their way of life and that of the Native Americans could not coexist as neighbors, so that the Indians must depart, if not through extermination then to vastly distant places. The Civil War confirmed the American image of war drawn from the Indian wars by again posing total victory as the objective sought by each contestant: The South, the Confederacy, fought to defend its very society and culture, the same values that were at stake against the Indians; the North, the Union, fought for nothing less than the survival of the American experiment in democracy. The superior resources of the North, especially in manpower, then permitted the attainment of the total victory the North had pursued, the surrender of the Confederate armies, the practically complete military subjugation of the South, the consequently apparent malleability of the South to Northern political aims.

After the Civil War, the North's successful quest for nearly absolute military victory stood at the center of American military men's studies of how to wage war, and it shaped American conduct in the two World Wars. Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's strategy of his 1864-1865 campaign aimed at the complete destruction of the fighting power of the enemy armies—preferably by forcing their surrender, as he had done to the Confederate Army of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863; but if not that then by their literal destruction—became the foundation of a confirmed American strategy of annihilation of the enemy armed forces. The supplementary strategy of Grant's favorite subordinate, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, of undermining the enemy's armed forces by attacking the economy and the civilian morale that supported them, also became embedded in American military thought, to be translated in the twentieth century into the ideas of strategic air power. The United States entered the First World War too late, and its military might was only too partially mobilized at the end for this country to do much to shape Allied strategy in the conflict—although General John J. Pershing, commanding the American Expeditionary Forces, attempted to secure a march of the Allied and American armies across Germany to Berlin. In the Second World War, in contrast, the United States came to predominate in the strategic councils of the Western Allies, and the Americans won adoption of a strategy drawn from the experience of their Civil War.

Enjoying, as the North had done in 1861-1865, a preponderance of resources over the enemy, the United States favored against Germany a Grant-like strategy of direct confrontation with the enemy's main Western forces, by means of a cross-Channel invasion of northwestern France, to overwhelm those forces under superior strength and destroy them. The United States also employed a Sherman-like strategy of assault upon the German economy and civilian morale, by means of a strategic bomber offensive. In time, after British preference for peripheral rather than American direct strategy had helped delay the cross-Channel invasion until June 6, 1944, two and a half years after American entry into the war, the American strategic vision was realized, bringing about attainment of a characteristically American goal, Germany's unconditional surrender on May 7-8, 1945.

Against Japan, meanwhile, the United States Navy applied the Grant strategy of annihilation, filtered through the thought of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, seeking a battle of annihilation against the Imperial Japanese Navy and eventually achieving the virtual accomplishment of that destruction, albeit not in a single climactic battle as Mahan had seemed to suggest, but in a campaign of attrition closer to Grant's original methods. The American Army and Marine Corps similarly destroyed most of the Japanese ground forces they confronted. The Army Air Forces and the Naval Air Service applied a Sherman-style campaign against Japan's economy and people, with a hypertrophic climax in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945. Unconditional surrender was again the outcome, arranged on August 14 and formalized on the deck of the battleship U.S.S. *Missouri* on September 2.

By the close of the Second World War, then, there had emerged out of an evolution from the Indian wars through the Civil War and reaching a climax in World War II, a preferred American way of war, which mobilized the material wealth and the plentiful manpower of the United States to overwhelm enemies, bring about the virtual annihilation of their armed forces and the destruction of their home front's economic and moral capacity to sustain war, and secure their unconditional surrender and almost complete malleability in the hands of American policymakers. The image of war and the preferred American form of warring drawn from the Indian wars, the Civil War, and the World Wars remains nearly unquestioned among a large public as the natural approach to the problem of war, as evidenced by the popular discontent generated by waging only limited war in Korea and Vietnam.

In the years since 1945, the classic American way of war identified with Grant, Sherman, and the American chieftains of World War II has served United States national interests much less well than it did against the Confederacy, Germany, and Japan. As long as the Soviet Union existed, through the Cold War, another major hot war would have found the superior resources, at least of manpower and military brute force, in the battalions of America's opponents rather than of the United States and its allies, which posed problems never satisfactorily resolved by American planners of a possible World War III who came out of the tradition of applying superior military power. Meanwhile the hot wars actually fought during the Cold War era were chiefly those controversial limited conflicts in Korea in 1950-1953 and Vietnam in 1965-1973 that grew highly unpopular largely because complex political and military constraints, notably the peril of nuclear war, prevented the United States government from pursuing the unconditional surrender of its adversaries through full-scale application of military might in the familiar style.

With the end of the Cold War and of the Soviet Union, moreover, the prospects for new conflicts on the model of World War II seem more remote than ever. Applications of United States military power are most likely to demand not overweening weight of resources but light, agile, maneuverable, politically sensitive and sophisticated armed forces for peacemaking and peacekeeping roles. Even a repetition of war on the scale of the Persian Gulf conflict of 1990-1991 is improbable, not least because without the stimulus of the Cold War it is not feasible, or sensible, to maintain American forces of the strength that overcame Iraq. Therefore a future

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United States involvement even in a Middle East conflict otherwise resembling the Gulf War will also demand making the most of lighter forces.

To guide American military strategists into this uncertain new era in which the classic American way of war is unlikely to apply, however, United States history is not without models and precedents to study and ponder. The massive Union military power of the Civil War obscured from the vision of American military planners for many generations the preceding period when the United States lacked vast military resources and had to rely more on skill and guile, and on combining political with military strategies.

General George Washington may have been the master strategist of American history, particularly when judged by the magnitude of his accomplishments in relation to the poverty of his resources. Through most of the War of Independence, he avoided major battles while attempting through adroit maneuver to fall upon weak British detachments and win victories at small cost to himself but with accumulating moral weight. His objective was less the enemy than the enemy's psyche; he sought less a military triumph per se than political success drawn from limited military means.

The most successful American military commander between Washington and the Civil War was Winfield Scott. As major general commanding the United States Army, he led a relatively small force, just under 11,000 men at most, to the capture of the political objective of the enemy's seat of government, the City of Mexico. On the way, through skillful maneuver and for the most part the avoidance of large-scale battles, he was able to win the still larger political objective of favorable peace terms to end the Mexican War.

While they were not ultimately successful, several of the Confederate commanders of the Civil War also offer lessons in the effective use of relatively small forces by means of agility and maneuver, most notably Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, but also General Robert E. Lee himself (albeit Lee's contradictory thirst for climactic, Napoleonic battle helped undermine him, especially by playing into U. S. Grant's hands).

Finally, though the Indian wars were fought for total objectives, the means of pursuing the objectives usually had to be small-scale forces, and probably the most able of the Indian-fighting leaders of the United States Army was a soldier who favored unconventional, guerrilla-style, low-intensity war: Major General George Crook. And at the very beginning of United States military history there stood alongside Washington a master of guerrilla warfare whose Southern Campaign has rarely been equalled for the achievements of a small conventional army interweaving its operations with those of guerrilla bands, Major General Nathanael Greene.

Thus, the American way of war as it came to be conceived of between 1864 and 1945 was by no means the only historic American approach to war. If American military history is studied and understood in all the diversity that has been its reality, then Americans should find therein rich guidance toward the solution of any military problems whatever, including the still not clearly defined difficulties ahead of us that will demand a deftness of maneuver and a subtlety in using military force as an instrument for securing political ends not demanded of our soldiers since before 1861.

The issue of blurred, difficult-to-define political objectives in war is another matter. All our post-1945 wars except the Persian Gulf conflict have posed that problem, and likely scenarios calling for American military intervention in the future will most probably offer it with at least as many puzzles to plague us as Vietnam. Policy, not military strategy, has to be the instrument for dealing with this issue. At least, however, if we disabuse ourselves of the notion that there has to be only one acceptable American way of war, if we devise military forces and tactics, operational methods, and strategies suited to conflicts of less than total means and objectives, if we learn to fight with measured applications of military strength and with adroit maneuver skills, then policies of intervention in complex circumstances need not be foredoomed by a military commitment to the unrelenting quest for unconditional surrender as our only way of war.

## Exploring the Social History of the Military

RICHARD H. KOHN

Over the course of American history, few experiences have been more widely shared than military service. From the seventeenth century to the present, Americans by the millions have served in armed forces of one kind or another, in war and in peace, on frontiers and overseas, as career professionals and temporary militia conscripts. Universal military obligation is one of our oldest and most enduring traditions. Every generation has experienced military conflict of some kind, and through the twentieth century the military has increased dramatically in size and its impact on national affairs. Between 1940 and 1973 the government through selective service touched the lives of nearly every American family directly, even if a male family member did not serve. In 1980 an estimated 37 percent of the male population over age seventeen were veterans, as many as 70 percent for those in the age bracket forty-five to sixty-four; and, in gross numbers, including women, some thirty million Americans were veterans in 1980. Nor are these figures likely to change significantly. Projections for manning the all volunteer army stress the need for fully one quarter of our eighteen-year-old males to enlist to maintain the armed forces at a strength of two million. And current projections estimate that 28 percent of the male population over seventeen, perhaps twenty-eight million men, will be veterans in the year 2000, even without conscription.

With rare exception, American historians, particularly social historians, have neglected this experience. In the last two decades scholars of the military have begun to abandon the old preoccupation with strategy and battle, but few practitioners of the "new" military history have chosen subjects that are frankly social. Of course, there has existed for generations a vast literature on American soldiers in the form of histories, memoirs, diaries, biographies, literary studies, popular hagiographies, government compilations of statistics, and sociological studies. But little of this material has been concerned with understanding soldiers per se, the

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