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LESSONS FROM THE CIVIL WAR

by
Dr. Walter B. LaBerge*

It is a pleasant leisurely twenty minute walk from the mall entrance of the Pentagon to Arlington National Cemetery. As one strolls up the gentle incline of the cemetery the intensity of the Pentagon is left behind. The competitive pressures of how to get things accomplished give way to more reflective thoughts of what the Pentagon should do and why. In the peace and serenity of that National Cemetery and of our many battlefield parks one can draw insights into today's problems from those who lived their lives in the service of their country. It is about the help to be drawn from those who have preceded us that I wish to write.

Until last month I served as Under Secretary of the Army. At the request of Dr. Harold Brown, the Secretary of Defense, I have now become Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering. In each of these positions, as a senior civilian official, I have directed major programs to maintain and equip the military forces of the United States. Like most people in important jobs I sometimes wonder how well I am equipped for this very great responsibility.

Most of us come to Washington for these brief appointments with administrative skills honed in industry or the law or in other competitive sectors of the American free enterprise system. We come with skills developed to get things done. But in government we find that others stand ready to act once we decide what they should do. And so we transients grapple with the much more difficult issues of what should be done and why.

For the Department of Defense these problems of what and why are particularly difficult. There is no market place to decide who is right and who is wrong. Only the unfolding of the war that we are striving so hard to avoid would permit an evaluation of the correctness of our decisions. To make the issue more complicated, the military of the United States is but one instrument of a national policy striving to preserve for all Americans freedom, peace and prosperity in an increasingly uncertain world. The role of our military forces in this complicated peace-keeping endeavour is ever changing, shaped by shifting political, moral, and military exigencies.

So all who come new to the Department of Defense must attempt, each in his own way, to gain understanding of how best to help the military forces of the United States prepare to deter war if possible, but to fight and win if deterrence fails.

For many of us who work at the Pentagon today, the preserved history of those who long ago struggled with these same questions offers both insight and inspiration. The Arlington National Cemetery and the eastern battlefields of the Civil War, so near at hand, offer the chance to study the actions of others and the consequence of those actions.

I wish to share with you some of these insights. I do so for a two-fold purpose—first, to sharpen my own thoughts by committing them to paper, and second, to crystallize them further by interacting with you who read this article and might choose to comment.

As one walks toward the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, up the hill and a bit to the West there is a small knoll where for many years lay in quiet solitude a distinguished World War I soldier, General Leonard Wood. He has been joined on that knoll by the remains of John Foster Dulles, Earl Warren, and the new graves of two exceptional human beings of our generation, General Creighton Abrams, U.S.

when one member is presented the Bates Memorial Award for outstanding service to the cause. Others present at the organizational meeting were: LeRoy Wahle, Al Nolan, Tom Huston, Joseph Daugherty, and Karl and LeRoy Hoffman. From this small beginning the Roundtable began to grow and reached its peak of 120 members during the celebration of the Civil War Centennial in the early 1960s.

The Roundtable which meets monthly from September to May, offers the Civil War buff as well as scholar a variety of programs on the many aspects of the war, issues the *Hardtack*, a monthly newsletter, and an occasional field trip to some distant Civil War battlefield and a related historical site such as the Lincoln home in Springfield, Illinois. For a number of years the Indianapolis group met at the Indiana War Memorial, but in recent years the new auditorium at the Indiana State Library and Historical Building has been the location for the monthly meetings.

A list of the speakers who have presented a program before the Roundtable include several well-known Civil War scholars, namely: E. B. "Pete" Long, James I. "Bud" Robertson, Glenn Tucker, Bell Wiley, K. P. Williams, Ed Bearss, and Roundtable member and author of the *Iron Brigade*, Al Nolan. In 1960 the Indianapolis group was honored to find that one of its charter members, Carl Zenor, had been elected Executive Director, Indiana Civil War Centennial Commission.

On several occasions in the past the Indianapolis Civil War Roundtable members have held joint meetings with the Military History Section of the Indiana Historical Society, and it is the hope of many that this cooperative venture will continue in the years to come.

Membership in the Roundtable is free to any one, and all interested in this fascinating period of our history are invited to consider membership in the Roundtable. Those who would seek more information should write to: R. Vernon Earle, 8425 Broadway, Indianapolis, Indiana 46246.

- March 11 "Custer's Last Stand," by Tom Bookwalter
- April 14 "Hoover Gap," by Lloyd Walton
- May 12 "William T. Sherman," by Dr. John Jesseph
- June 9 "Orphan Brigade," by Frank Rankin (Dinner meeting. For reservations, please call Wayne Sanford, 844-7888.)

Northwest Territory Alliance

May 24-25 Rendezvous at Vincennes, Indiana. Meeting depicting the history of the city sponsored by the University of Vincennes and the park department.

September 6-7 Historic Fort Wayne. The British will garrison the fort one day, the Americans the next.

July 13-14 No. 1760 Rendezvous in Eagle Creek Park, Indianapolis. Sponsored by the Militia of Vincennes, Brigade of St. Francis Xavier.

The Indianapolis home of Civil War general (and 23d President of the United States), Benjamin Harrison, at 1230 North Delaware Street, is open for tours on weekdays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm and on Sundays from 12:30 pm to 4:00 pm.

Army Chief of Staff from 1972 to his death in 1974, and General George S. Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1974 to 1978.

I did not know General Abrams personally, but I do know and respect the Army of the United States as it is today. And that Army dedicates itself to Creighton Abrams and his vision. I cannot walk past his grave without asking how I can help carry on the work he started.

George Brown was a good friend. Those who did not know him professionally or personally may only remember some highly publicized remarks thought to have been made by him in private and immediately regretted. Those of us who did know him personally or professionally knew quite a different man. We knew him to be an immensely sensible sound military leader, in every way honest, considerate, kind, and to the core an American of great talent and impact. To have known George was to wish to be like him. To see his grave is to rekindle that desire.

Attesting to the valor of the American soldier lay today in Arlington National Cemetery many Civil War Congressional Medal of Honor winners. Many are unknown to us today, but the names of many still are known to those who read of the Civil War. Among these are Colonel Nelson A. Miles, a valiant, stubborn and controversial soldier, who some forty years after the Civil War was to rise to the top of the Army he loved.

Also buried in Arlington is Medal of Honor winner, 1st Lt. Arthur McArthur, father of Douglas. There also is Captain Frank D. Baldwin of the 19th Michigan, who was awarded a second Medal of Honor for fighting a superior force of Indians at McClellans Creek, Texas, in 1874.

Arlington, as with any one of our national battlefield cemeteries, contains in the most literal sense, place cards as a reminder of the contributions of America's greatest soldiers, sailors and airmen. The study of their lives cannot help but illuminate our responsibilities and give insight into what the American spirit can accomplish.

To any who have shared contact in life with these men, the experience of walking past their graves wakes a deep spirit of commitment and of purposefulness. As one's lips move in an unvoiced prayer, inevitably a realization grows that we each are afforded only a short and perishable opportunity to assist in the preservation of the rich legacy of this country.

For the majority of Americans who have not known personally any whose remains are interred at our national cemeteries, the impact of that legacy is much the same. It is just not possible to walk past the rows of graves without wondering about these men. In one corner of Arlington, for example, are interred hundreds of Union soldiers killed in the first major battle of the Civil War in the East—Bull Run. Many are buried without name or history. Many who walk by may share my feeling that each headstone passed in the quiet of a Sunday stroll can be felt to be gently asking, "why me not you?" or, "I tried my best, have you?"—Who can be so unfeeling as to return from Arlington without a rededication to a purposeful life.

This same sense of rededication comes from a walk on the Bloody Lane or a visit to the Dunker Church or a crossing of Burnside Bridge at Antietam. In the stillness of that beautiful countryside just North of Sharpsburg, Maryland, one can almost sense the feelings of the soldiers in Blue and Butternut that day in September of 1862. Perhaps less known but equally moving is the picturesque little battlefield of Balls Bluff on the Potomac just outside of Leesville, Virginia, forty miles from the Pentagon. Each field of battle has its own personal story to tell, each its lesson to teach.

The history of the Civil War, whether it be at Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg

or at the Bloody Angle at Spotsylvania, is available to the Washington bureaucrat who is interested in knowing how his fellow man behaved in periods of crisis. A bit more subtle but also equally available are insights into the quality of the American soldier, his leadership, and the strengths and weaknesses of the American military organization under stress.

Among the most important of the lessons which our preserved battlefields offer to today's civilian masters of the military machine is the stark realization of how hard war is to stop once started. The long ordeal of the U.S. Civil War is typical of most conflicts of modern history. It was typical of the recent war in Vietnam, and it may well be typical of future wars. The emotions which cause war deepen as conflict proceeds and thus keep war going until the military power is fully depleted. It is only on the chess board that conflict is terminated early when minor advantage is gained by one over the other.

A rational person in the peace time of our day, will have difficulty understanding how the battles in the East, one after another, could have slaughtered Americans for a nebulous "cause" for almost four years. It is a litany of horror, now sometimes misunderstood, starting with First Manassas, Seven Days, Second Manassas, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, to the final Confederate exhaustion at Appomattox. To these major battles of attrition must be added the countless minor engagements and skirmishes in which life was lost. After visiting the battlefields of the East, the lovely music of "All's Quiet Along the Potomac" takes on an added significance as one appreciates as well the song's poignant lyrics.

It is, in no way, my intention to diminish an appreciation for the valor of the American soldier. On the contrary, I will later dwell on the wonder of that valor and of our responsibility to a nation which from its fabric can draw forth such sacrifice. But the point I wish to make over and over again is that wars are hard to legislate in size or duration. This understanding becomes all the more important because we are beginning to draw our civilian and military leaders from generations which have not themselves known the experience of total war. The Civil War is but one example of total war—one which stops only when one side can go no further.

If we take to heart this key lesson from the 1860s, our reactions manifest themselves in two goals. The first is to avoid the outbreak of war in the future and the second, paradoxically, is to be prepared to win quickly and decisively, should it occur.

The task of avoiding war while maintaining for us and our allies freedom and opportunity is a perplexing one for our government. Our experience and that of all others in history is that a major military imbalance invites political adventurism. Among those who read history, few, if any, advocate weakness as a means to avoid war. And therefore we are drawn to the apparent paradox that adequate strength—not weakness—is the best way to avoid war.

Another important lesson of the Civil War is that the seeds of war are sown before hand. War does not spring forth full-blown. Controversies were banned in the 1840s and 50s without a realization of the suffering which would be reaped in the war of '61-'65. It seems hard to believe that by 1860 conflict could have been avoided. Look at the prologue to the war—20 years of failures in the Missouri Compromise, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Wilmot Proviso and other congressional and White House approaches to the underlying problems of North and South. There is the cause of the Civil War, not the firing on Ft. Sumter. An analogous pattern can be discerned in Europe in the 1930s. By 1939, there was little hope for peace. And so, the problems of the late twentieth century need to be resolved before they grow

to an irreversible intensity.

There is a strong psychological element which **comes** into play in total war. Edward Pollard, editor of the Richmond *Examiner*, who wrote his celebrated *Lost Cause* in 1866, spent the first 133 pages of his text rationalizing (or relating, depending on your geographic bias) why the war was justifiable if not inevitable, and concluded his introduction with this statement:

In an intelligent view of the precedents of history it might safely be predicted that the South, fighting on its own soil, and for it, and occupying a territory of more than 728,000 square miles in extent, and in which the natural features of the country, in mountain, river, and swamp, were equivalent to successive lines of fortification, would be victor in the contest, however unequally matched in men and the material of war, *unless the management of her affairs should become insane, or her people lose the virtue of endurance.*

Clearly, even after experiencing the siege of Richmond and seeing the South driven to exhaustion by superior force, the author could not accept the inequality of the contest at its inception. To read the *Lost Cause* is to understand that objectivity under stress is rare indeed.

This realization from the war between the States of the all-engulfing nature of war leads to a willingness to expend any amount of personal labor needed to defuse situations which might lead to crises. From my view, the fundamental requirement is to avoid the creation of a military imbalance which could promote war. To this end, I am willing to pursue the small, sometimes imperceptible steps like our ongoing negotiations for mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR), a comprehensive nuclear test ban, restrictions on chemical weapons, and the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks. Attempting to find a formula to reduce long-term military imbalance through arms limitations seems to me to be a reasonable approach to limiting the chance of the world's blundering into war again. At the same time that we are negotiating, we must also make it well known that, while we seek peace, we will fight if we must. Whether the negotiations I have cited will progress in a way acceptable to us, I do not know, but I believe that now is the time to try.

As we seek ways to dampen the tensions of the 1980s we must also be able to fight. We must appear to be *and we must in fact be able to fight* to defend with our allies our lands and our homes. It is a paradox.

The Civil War battlefields seem as the years go by to retain relevance to the military situation of today. The vicarious study of the Civil War campaigns and battlefields of the East can provoke useful discussion of what has military importance in 1980 and to what ends our resources should be directed.

One fact is as true in 1980 as it was in 1860. Having good intelligence about the plans of one's adversary and denying that adversary intelligence about one's plans can compensate for material differences between combatants. The ruses of "Prince" John MacGruder at Williamsburg, the secretiveness of Jackson in the Valley campaign, the concealment of Jackson's Corps on Sudley Ridge during Second Manassas, the discovery of General Order 109 wrapped around three cigars at Frederick before the battle of Antietam, inadequate intelligence support to Lee at Gettysburg, the crossing in '64 of the James by Grant—all these show the tremendous value of good intelligence and, conversely, the awful consequences of bad.

Intelligence has played a key role in the experience of the United States in wars since 1865. Pearl Harbor and Midway vividly connote this importance. It was manifested from the Sicily and Normandy landings in Europe to Guadalcanal in the

Pacific. The modern equivalent of getting there "firstest with the mostest" will only be possible if we invest heavily in intelligence systems.

As we build this intelligence system, there is yet one more lesson of the Civil War to be remembered; intelligence systems must have independent cross checks. The Union Army under McClellan was in great part wasted by a belief in the faulty information of Alan Pinkerton. The error, in my view, was more McClellan's than Pinkerton's. To be so wrong in the facts as was Pinkerton was deplorable. To believe them without checking as did McClellan was inexcusable. I hope we remember that lesson for yet 115 more years.

Antietam or Fredericksburg or Spotsylvania show American ingenuity and virtuosity in what we now call a "mobile defense." *The West Point Atlas of American Wars* vividly points out to our young military students the power of the mobile defensive force of the Civil War. It is a lesson no less appropriate to the high intensity combat we could expect today.

Cold Harbor made clear to Grant what had been known to troops of both sides soon after the battles of the Summer of '62. The war soon proved that strong defense positions were able to withstand force imbalance ratios of as much as 3 to 1. The same is true today at Fulda or the Hohenfels Gap. There, as at Antietam, if we can be mobile enough to get our forces in place we can defeat an enemy with initiative and superiority in numbers.

I do not test your credulity by claiming that the XM-1, the Army's new high speed tank, or AAH, its new fast moving helicopter loaded with highly lethal missiles, are the direct results of an appreciation of Jackson and Early at Antietam or Anderson at Spotsylvania. But the recognition of the importance of mobility and firepower date far back. It is a true military heritage and you cannot walk the battlefields of the East without each time appreciating the overpowering virtue of mobility of firepower and the audacity to use it.

The open tactics of the Civil War in both the East and West gave way to the unbroken trench warfare of 1914-18. The construction of fixed fortified lines reasserted itself in Italy in World War II, but mobility began to return with the invasion of France and now is the doctrine of both United States and the Soviets in 1980. The need for study of the masters of mobility—Sherman and Grant in the West and Lee and Jackson in the East—has again reasserted itself to the military man of today.

Beyond those Civil War applications to the contemporary Pentagon, which I have already cited, many more abound. Some of the most interesting of these applications are contained in *Numbers, Predictions and War* by Colonel Trevor DePuy, USA (Ret.). In this work just released from the printer, the author compares modern combat with historical battles and finds an empirical relationship which he believes allows the chance for prediction of the outcome of future combat. According to DePuy, the results of Antietam, Gettysburg, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Chattanooga, and Cold Harbor as well as historical battles of other wars, all fit into a Quantitative Judgment Method of Analysis which should allow the future battle commander, helped by his computer, to accurately estimate his chances in any engagement.

It will be perhaps a generation before such a technique is available and perhaps several more before it will be accepted by the military, but it is probably correct that a computer-assisted handicapping of the outcome of battle could be as accurate as that now available from Las Vegas on Sunday's pro football games.

One can imagine the odds makers showing Wellington 3 to 5 if it rains in the night preceding the battle of Waterloo, or Lee/McClellan even, pick 'em at Antietam,

or the Allies 4 to 5 over the Russians at the Fulda Gap in 1981. Surprising as it may seem, there is now no Department of Defense plan to give the Supreme Allied Commander of Europe a hand calculator programmed to predict the outcome of World War III.

To conclude this discussion of one man's views of the importance of understanding our military heritage, let me cover just three more lessons, perhaps the most important of all.

The first encompasses a recognition of the quality of the citizen soldier of the United States and our obligation to match the talents of that superb young man with the tools he needs. The American soldier has always, from Brandywine to Pleiku, endured hardship beyond expectation and fought as well if not better than he has been led.

One has but to walk the Cornfield or the West Wood or Devil's Den or the Peach Orchard, or the Hornets Nest, or any of the thousand other battlefields of 1861-65, to know the valor of the Civil War soldier. But Bellau Wood or Chateau Thierry or Omaha Beach, St. Lo, Bastogne, Okinawa, Pleiku or Khe San are reminders that the citizen soldier of modern America can fight as well.

We owe to the young men wearing Army green today the tools of war, the training and the leadership to survive and win if war comes. More importantly, we need to give our soldiers the tools of war so that our potential adversaries believe the lessons of history. If our enemies see an equipped, trained and ready American soldier we all may, Lord willing, be blessed with the peace we long for so much.

Equipment and training cost money, money sought for other needs of our society. But we have a fundamental obligation to support today's soldier. At the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, America can see the fine young men of the 3rd Infantry—the Old Guard—keep silent vigil. Here one young man of the United States Army stands erect in his duty amid the tens of thousands who rest having completed theirs. It is a reminder that we have an obligation not only to our dead, but, more pressing, to our living. It is hard to walk among the trees and headstones and fail to believe that we owe today's soldier the tools that let him do his job.

The next lesson of our Civil War heritage is that valor and competence are not in and of themselves enough. One cannot help but admire the generalship of Robert E. Lee and the valor of the Confederate soldier. But this admiration and desire for emulation should not obscure the fact that Grant, not Lee, won.

Grant won because of resources, not tactics. We as a nation must ensure that as we train and equip ourselves for the "mobile defense" we do not allow our level of resources to fall so low that our fate is that of Lee. This lesson in its clearest form is that the "better man can lose."

And one last lesson important above all others that flows from our Civil War heritage is an appreciation of how very good we can be if we only try. We in America must appreciate what we can do as individuals in a gigantic, impersonal system. We need to be reminded of the many times that one ordinary man made a difference. The Civil War is replete with such men who, while considerate of others, believed in themselves.

If I could keep but a single book on the Civil War, it would be *Reminiscences of the Civil War* by Lieutenant General John B. Gordon, CSA.

John B. Gordon, born in Georgia in 1832, graduated from the University of Georgia. He was a lawyer and then superintended a coal mine in Alabama. As captain of the Raccoon Roughs, a volunteer company of mountaineers, he was sent to Virginia. Named Colonel of the 6th Alabama, he fought in the Peninsular campaign—and succeeded Rodes in the command of the brigade at Seven Pines. He was

wounded leading his regiment at Antietam and was appointed Brigadier General, CSA. He commanded his Georgia brigade at Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness and Spotsylvania before being named major general, 14 May 1864. During the siege of Petersburg and in Early's Valley campaign he led his division and returned to Petersburg near the end of 1864. He planned and led the assault on Fort Stedman at Petersburg. After the war, Gordon became U.S. Senator, Governor, and again U.S. Senator. Modest, fair and willing to do anything that he asked others to do, he was indeed an American to be admired and copied.

Although the Civil War is something to be remembered first for its horror and suffering, we should also draw strength from that demonstration of how Americans can respond when tested in crises. The nearness of the Pentagon to the Arlington National Cemetery and to the battlefields of the East, permit us bureaucrats—military and civilian—to study the lives of Creighton Abrams, James Forrestal, George Brown, and John B. Gordon, and Nelson Miles. And with luck, having some appreciation for what man can do when he tries, we will throw back our shoulders, draw in our stomachs, and get on with seeing to it that the U.S. Army of today is so good that no one will, in our lifetime, wish to test it on Civil War-like fields of battle.

*Dr. LaBerge is the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering with the United States Government. He reports directly to the Secretary of Defense and was one of the developers of the Sidewinder missile and recently helped formulate the United States defense budget for 1981. He delivered this address to the Military History Section at the annual meeting of the Indiana Historical Society on November 3, 1979, in Indianapolis.