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Letters to the Editor

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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

It was an interesting coincidence that I received the *Journal of Military History*, vol. 66, no. 3, and the *RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) Journal*, vol. 147, no. 3, on the same day. The *RUSI* article by Dr. John Peaty, "The Desertion Crisis in Italy, 1944," is pertinent to the discussion of the review of Murray's and Millett's study of WWII. It sheds extra light on what has been often written about, namely the lack of thrust of the British infantry in the Northwest European campaign.

After the lightning drive towards the Rhine, the British (including Montgomery) were convinced that the Germans were so badly mauled that the troops would be home for Christmas. It's a known psychological fact that nobody wants to be the last soldier killed of any war. On top of that, as Peaty writes, "between September 1944 and January 1945, 5,387 men deserted" in Italy. The majority (80%) were infantry.

This was a major problem and one can surmise that the experience of the British 8th Army in Italy was known to the officers of the British 2nd Army and subdued their martial endeavors, particularly since desertions also increased after the British reached the big and friendly city of Brussels.

Michael Alfred Peszke

Wakefield, Rhode Island

To the Editor:

In his review of my book, *Riflemen: On the Cutting Edge of World War II* (July 2002, p. 906), Albert Garland accuses me of offering "a damning indictment of the U.S. infantrymen," of whom I was one in Italy and France.

Not so. I used three battalion-level battle studies based (in part) on archival research to show what riflemen actually did in combined-arms warfare, and to defend the riflemen against criticisms based on unrealistic expectations.

Earl A. Reitan

Normal, Illinois

LTC Garland replies:

I find it strange Earl Reitan questions my criticism when I did nothing more than use his own words to support this particular statement. Thus, on

page 15, Reitan writes, "Riflemen were not selected as men who were suitable for the purpose. Most riflemen were leftovers. . . . When all the picking and choosing was finished, those who were left became riflemen." Then, on page 19, he states, "The Southerners were all young. . . . They were poorly educated, and in the infantry ignorance can be an asset. . . . They made good infantry soldiers, as my later experience demonstrated."

Am I to accept "in the infantry ignorance can be an asset" as praise to the Infantry soldier in Europe during World War II? I believe these statements constitute "a damning indictment."

They also smack of the kind of praise Russell Weigley "lavished" on the infantrymen in his *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*: "It did not help that the American Army of World War II habitually filled the ranks of its combat infantry with its least promising recruits, the uneducated, the unskilled, the unenthusiastic. Those left over after the Army Air Forces, the Marines, the Navy, the paratroops and the technical branches had skimmed off the best of the nation's military manpower, were then expected to bear the main burden of sustained battle."

Again, on page 13, Reitan writes, "The result [too few divisions] was that American divisions were kept almost constantly in combat with consequent decline in fighting power." Then, on page 65, he notes that "Russell Weigley has noted the phenomenon of 'the worn out division.' . . . By injecting replacements, the U.S. Army could keep its infantry divisions in combat for long periods of time, but at the expense of the front-line troops, who had to keep going until they dropped." Using this line of reasoning, the 3d Infantry Division's "front-line" must have been in pretty poor condition, considering the fact the division had been fighting since November 1942, first in North Africa, then in Sicily and into Italy, and in 1944 from southern France to the Vosges.

Yes, Reitan did dispute S. L. A. Marshall's ratio of fire claims, which, by the way, have never been proved. I particularly liked the way one soldier put it on page 81. And he did say in several places, as on page 93, "as always the riflemen were on the cutting edge." Never did Reitan give any real praise to those riflemen, the kind Lee Kennett did in his *GI: The American Soldier in World War II* (Warner Books Edition, paperback, 1989, pp. 170–71) and Peter R. Mansour in his *The GI Offensive in Europe* (pp. 159, 264–67). Pretty good for a bunch of ignorant infantrymen!

Albert N. Garland

Columbus, Georgia

To the Editor:

Readers of this journal would be well advised to seek another opinion before rejecting David M. Glantz's *Barbarossa: Hitler's Invasion of Russia, 1941*. The critique by Russell H. S. Stolfi in *JMH* 66 (July 2002) rests solely upon a weak alternative thesis regarding the possible outcome of the campaign.

Let me say at the outset that my goal here is not to offer a competing review of Glantz's work. I have not yet read it, and although I suspect that it lives up to the high quality of his other operational histories, I cannot speak directly to either its strengths or its weaknesses. My purpose is simply to insist that the work deserves a more informed, careful review. To state that "the reader cannot take from [Glantz's book] an accurate appreciation of the course of the campaign," when that judgment derives from a highly debatable counterfactual theory, is to do an injustice to both the book's author and this journal's readers.

The review's central contention is that "the German Army held a combination of combat power and freedom of maneuver to advance in any direction desired from 22 June to 14 November 1941," that "only a German mistake of the highest magnitude could thwart victory," and thus that Glantz is wrong in emphasizing Soviet resistance as an explanation for the failure of the campaign. Stolfi's broader thesis, which he offers in more detail in his 1991 book, *Hitler's Panzers East*, is that if Hitler had only listened to his generals and driven on to Moscow in August 1941, instead of diverting forces into the Ukraine, Germany would have won the campaign and the war.

Stolfi's analysis, like that of the Germans at the time, gives short shrift to the strategic and operational realities of 1941. The Soviet Union possessed both political resilience and reserves of men and resources that made a German victory in a single campaign highly unlikely from the start. The key question, "What if the Soviets don't give up?", is one that the Wehrmacht's leaders never answered, or even addressed. They based their expectation of victory on the idea that the Soviet regime would collapse after one good blow—a truly curious attitude on the part of men who themselves served a powerful totalitarian regime. That collapse never happened, despite Stalin's military blunders, and the Germans lacked the strength to overcome the USSR without it.

In his book Stolfi claims that the Germans could have taken Moscow and driven 200 miles further to Gorki that summer, and that they ultimately would have cleared most Russian territory west of the Volga before winter. From there, he maintains, Germany would have been able to hold the remnants of the Soviet forces at bay indefinitely; essentially, Germany would have won. He bases those conclusions upon unrealistically generous estimates of German strengths and capabilities, especially in logistical terms; upon estimates of Soviet capabilities that he draws from a one-sided reading of contemporary German sources; and upon sweeping assumptions concerning Soviet military actions and long-term economic and political power. The complex interaction of the Germans' barbaric occupation policies with Soviet resistance receives no attention at all. In sum, although many of the developments Stolfi posits appear logical in isolation, they form an implausible whole. But even if one were to accept the entire edifice, the fact remains that, helped along by German barbarism and hubris, Stalin's regime would have maintained its grip on power and kept fighting, and the Germans would have been stuck in the east just as firmly as actually happened.

The problems with Stolfi's thesis aside, one wishes that he had spent less time in his review promoting his own counterfactual challenge to the "conventional wisdom" and instead critiqued Glantz's work on its merits. For example, if Glantz really claims that Soviet resistance at Smolensk caused Hitler to direct his forces into the Ukraine, that contention deserves careful analysis. Stolfi provides neither an examination of Glantz's sources nor any comparison with the most important secondary works on the campaign, such as those by John Erickson or the Military History Research Institute in Potsdam. The end result is a review which presents neither an accurate alternative version of events nor a sound critique of Glantz's analysis.

Geoffrey P. Megargee

Arlington, Virginia

Professor Stolfi responds:

Mr. Megargee's letter on the subject of Barbarossa presents the opportunity to begin to set the clock of historical interpretation right on the subject of the course of World War II in Europe and the single most important event in it—Hitler's attack on Soviet Russia. He generalizes that the German military leaders based their expectation of victory on a quick collapse of Soviet Russia after one good blow. His generalization implies a divorce from reality on the part of the Army General Staff and commanders who underestimated the enemy and the theater of war. Quite to the contrary my research shows the German Army gauging both enemy and theater realistically. The Army plan was to drive Army Group Center directly at Moscow and force the main concentration of the Red Army to defend an area that in 1941 (unlike 1813) was the political, psychological, industrial, road, rail, and telephone hub of Soviet Russia. If the Soviet leadership chose to defend Moscow, which factually it did, the German Army would be presented with the opportunity to defeat Soviet Russia through destruction of the main concentration of the Red Army positioned thus to defend the mobilization center of the state. Long forgotten or never discerned by postwar reader and historian alike, the single most important question in Barbarossa contemporaneously was one over which the German Army had no control even though it held the initiative and possessed freedom of maneuver as the campaign opened. The question: would the Russians run or fight? This question is in turn the most important for the course of World War II in Europe because if the Soviet leadership had a conscious strategy to withdraw from the border, the German Army would have had virtually no chance to force the main concentration of the Red Army into an immediate, campaign-ending battle of decision. The German Army, in effect, would have lost the campaign and the war the day it crossed the border. The unsmiling Chief of the Army General Staff, Colonel General Franz Halder, brings this whole business into focus in his diary entry of c. 25 June 41 to the effect "the great question[!] seems

now to have been answered. The Russians are standing and fighting.” The Germans were presented thus with the most favorable possible Soviet strategy for the defense of Russia and proceeded in the first 3.5 months of the campaign to take 3.1 million prisoners from a Red Army that obligingly presented itself for destruction. An irony in this factual picture is that the Soviet military leadership both naively and grossly underestimated the striking power of the German Army rather than the reverse.

How does Glantz’s thesis that the Red Army possessed the strength and organization to defeat the Germans based on its own inherent capabilities fit in with the conventional wisdom’s thesis about the course of the campaign? The two theses are fundamentally similar because they both posit that once Hitler attacked Soviet Russia he had no chance of winning campaign or war. In Glantz’s view the reason is because the Red Army was too strong. As for the conventional wisdom, it argues that once Hitler attacked Soviet Russia he foredoomed Germany to defeat. That wisdom presents little or no support for its grand interpretation apparently regarding it as self evident that since Germany lost, it follows axiomatically that it never could have won. And, the most important German decision of the war—to invade Soviet Russia—most decisively preordained German defeat. From such an interpretive eminence, historians have searched out reasons for the failure of Barbarossa and have found them often whether they were there or not. Why examine Barbarossa except to reinforce the preconception that the invasion could only fail because of German underestimation of the rigors of the campaign. The interpretive preconceptions obscure the inconvenient facts that the German Army inflicted casualties, damage, and territorial losses in the first four weeks of the campaign from which the Red Army required four years to recover and then only with indispensable assistance from the United States and the British Empire.

In contradistinction, Stolfi postulates that the German Army had the unqualified combat capability to defeat Soviet Russia in an approximate ten-week campaign. By 16 July 1941, for example, with the arrival of German panzer divisions east of Smolensk severing the main communications to Moscow, the pace of the German advance had been within a framework of operational agility that the Soviet command was incapable of matching. The Soviets had neither the time, space, weather nor the military capability to survive on that date. Adolf Hitler, however, vacillated in mid-July 1941, with victory at his fingertips and then made the most important military decision of World War II—to deflect the southern wing of Army Group Center into the Ukraine. Hitler’s procrastination was based on his unique personal view that victory in the war in the east could be equated with the quick seizure of Leningrad, the Ukraine, and the Crimea literally to the exclusion of Moscow. This extraordinary view was incompatible with the Army plan to drive Army Group Center directly at Moscow and led to an unresolved difference in objectives that exploded in the campaign. On 22 July 1941, as noted in the personal diary of the commander of Army Group Center: “Brauchitsch [C. in C., German Army] called and said that the Fuehrer had ordered that a fur-

ther advance to the east by the panzers was out of the question!" This decision to halt the Army Group prior to the stiffening of resistance suggested by Glantz and for the reasons noted above necessarily obliterates his thesis.

The following details suggest that the year-long unresolved debate between Hitler and the Army over the direction of the next advance rather than claimed insoluble Russian resistance east of Smolensk halted Army Group Center. The German Army was in command of events at this juncture to the degree that Guderian proposed on 27 July 1941 that his panzer force (reinforced) seize the communications center of Roslavl southeast of Smolensk to give it mastery over the road system necessary for the expected advance on Moscow. At a time when Glantz claims that Red Army resistance had halted the Army Group around Smolensk, Guderian would conceptualize and launch an 11-division attack with the express purpose to clear communications for an advance on Moscow. The result: The Roslavl Battle, 1–8 August 1941, 38,000 Russian prisoners, 200 tanks, 200 guns destroyed or captured.

Against such background, one is supposed to believe under the Glantz thesis that Army Group Center, unable to advance against furious Russian resistance, is ordered to launch its southern wing into a 350 km drive south that would result in the destruction of four Soviet field armies (660,000 prisoners). Soviet resistance must have been furious indeed if it halted an Army Group Center that was so strong that its southern wing annihilated four Soviet armies and seized the Central Ukraine in September 1941. On 23 September, the southern wing began to regroup north for an advance finally toward Moscow. When the advance began on 2 October 1941, Army Group Center had stood immobilized, for example, in the case of the positions reached by the 7. and 20. Panzer Divisions on 16 July 1941, 90 km east of Smolensk along the main route to Moscow for an astounding 79 days. As it began to attack, it would be opposed by Soviet field armies that Glantz claims had stopped it late in July now heavily reinforced by two additional months of mobilization. If one accepts Glantz's thesis, Army Group Center must have been halted. The facts show to the contrary that along the main axis of the drive the Germans closed lines of encirclement in four days (106 hours) at Vyasma forming a pocket trapping Soviet field armies that would yield 460,000 prisoners. Farther south near Bryansk, the Germans would establish two smaller pockets yielding 200,000 additional prisoners. This factual German victory brings into focus the possibilities of Barbarossa. Except for the halt of Army Group Center by Adolf Hitler two months earlier on 22 July 1941, and the subsequent debate and diversion into the Ukraine, this same battle would have been fought in summer campaigning weather against weaker forces and a Soviet command outpaced by the course of events.

The alleged German underestimation of Soviet Russia is particularly disturbing because it is presented so undebatably by the conventional wisdom and Glantz as if it were part of an undeniable, natural course of events. The facts surrounding German preparations for the campaign and its opening stage make me uncomfortable with both Glantz and the conventional view.

I have found few German words or details of preparation that show underestimation of a campaign in the east. Yes, the usual quote from Hitler to the effect “all one has to do is kick in the front door and the whole ramshackle structure will collapse” is commonly held up for scrutiny. Never, however, is it counterbalanced by his more emphatic injunction to the Army high command that “we must not underestimate this enemy; every gun shall be made available to the attacking armies.” Glantz comments somewhat overbearingly that the Germans lost a campaign in a country that they never really understood. How quick one is to forget that the Germans had just fought Russia for 3.5 years in World War I and incidentally defeated it. I cannot find a word in the diary of the chief planner for Barbarossa, Franz Halder, that shows underestimation of the approaching campaign. The most important German field commander, Fedor von Bock, passed on the following stricture to the commanders of his 51-division army group: “I want it hammered into every man in Army Group Center: swiftly and ruthlessly forward.” The words apparently even got down the line, as witness the attack order for his XXXXVIIth Panzer Corps: “It is of decisive importance for the breakthrough to push forward as far as possible without regard to the danger from the flanks, with maximum use of the mobility afforded by our tank engines, without rest or rest days, with movement at night, and mobility limited only by the distance which fuel supplies will allow.” One can find little underestimation of the rigors of a Russian campaign here.

And, finally, the usual preconceptional generalizations about Barbarossa continue to abound. Glantz, for example, in making argument intended to show German inadequacies in the great opening offensive comments on “the fragile German logistics system.” An observer looking forward through the German preparations for Barbarossa and its thunderous opening must see adequate logistic forethought, organization, and results. By 7 August 1941, for example, German transportation troops were handling 24 trains with approximately 12,000 tons of supplies daily at railheads around Smolensk. Army Group Center, on 12 August 1941, literally at the pivot point in the European war, stood with a rail, railhead, and truck logistics system that was capable of projecting it in full strength to Moscow. This awe inspiring but apparently invisible historical achievement was based on the German reconstruction, i.e., not simply repair, of 14,000 miles of the Russian rail system under its control to conform to western rail gauge and repair of 10,000 additional miles during Barbarossa. Almost incredibly, this reconstruction and repair proceeded fast enough to keep up with the panzer advance. The achievement demanded armed rail construction battalions that were commonly in battle with dangerous Russian combat forces shattered but not quite subdued by the rapidly advancing panzers and advanced detachments of the trailing foot infantry divisions. The picture is not one of an inadequate logistics effort by the Germans in Barbarossa.

Russel H. S. Stolfi

Waldport, Oregon

To the Editor:

I would refer to Mr. Lawrence Briskin's letter in the *JMH* of July 2002. I note that Colonel d'Este has declined to reply, probably because a proper answer would either take a whole book or be a total waste of time. However, as a British military historian, perhaps I could take Mr. Briskin up on just a couple of points, General Montgomery and the matter of tea.

The British drink tea. So too do the Americans; today iced or hot, historically like the British—has Mr. Briskin never heard of the Boston Tea Party?

To really enjoy a cup of British Army tea, Mr. Briskin might like to try the following. Load up with sixty to eighty pounds of kit, plus a personal weapon, a couple of grenades, some mortar bombs and two hundred rounds of rifle ammunition. Then march twenty miles over rough country, preferably at night. It should be raining, but snow or a tropical downpour will do. Someone ought to be shooting at him—I could do that—but at least there should be sporadic shelling. Then, when all this has been going on for far too long, some hero hands Mr. Briskin a pint of tea, piping hot, sweet and full of condensed milk. I venture to suggest that Mr. Briskin would find that mixture, at that time, close to nectar and ambrosia.

I have before me an account from a Guards officer who found a young American lady dispensing hot coffee to U.S. troops close to the Volterno river in Italy in 1944. In a previous book I heard of U.S. troops getting coffee and doughnuts, served by “a real American girl,” close to the front in North West Europe in 1945.

When I tell that to British veterans their reaction is “Good luck to them” or “We wouldn't have minded a bit of that ourselves.” Unlike Mr. Briskin, they do not see their American comrades enjoying a hot drink as an excuse for cheap sneers.

And so to General Montgomery. Could someone please explain the reasons for this on-going hostility among U.S. historians to Monty? Montgomery only commanded U.S. troops for ninety days in a six-year war—well, three and a half for the U.S.A.—during the Battle of Normandy and then at one remove, General Bradley being the First Army commander. And yet we have had nearly sixty years of continuous denigration of this senior Allied Commander, almost exclusively from the U.S.A. What exactly is the problem here?

During the Second World War Montgomery commanded Australian, British, Canadian, French, Greek, Indian, New Zealand, Polish—even Italian soldiers. For my current work, a history of Eighth Army, I have contacted soldiers from all these nations. They are united in their praise of this commander but from the U.S.A. we get nothing but this on-going whine, all too often based on a careful selection of the facts.

For example, why is it that when Bradley's First Army took a month to cover the last five miles to St. Lô this is attributed (correctly) to the bocage and the enemy but when the British Second Army took as long to cover the six miles into Caen that is attributed to Monty's “timidity,” “caution,” and “slowness”? The presence of seven German panzer divisions in front of Caen is usually left out of this equation.

It is said that Monty was vain; so he was, but that accusation might be balanced in the U.S.A. by thinking of those three blushing, retiring, American violets, Generals Patton, Clark, and MacArthur, men not noted for modesty though all three had much to be modest about. The implication that only Monty had a super-ego is at variance with the facts.

It is alleged that Monty tried to hog the credit for the defeat of the Germans in the Bulge, an allegation based on his speech to the press on 7 January 1945. The evidence here is scanty and partial. The full text of that speech gives ample praise to the “fighting qualities of the American soldier,” and to “the captain of our team, General Eisenhower” but this speech was picked up by the Germans, edited, and rebroadcast to the Allies. This edited, propaganda version has been used ever since to smear Monty; when it comes to denigrating Monty—and the British—even Dr. Goebbels comes in useful.

It would be possible to go on but surely the point is made? No one is obliged to like the British—there are times when I am not too keen on them myself—and no army is above criticism but the rampaging Anglophobia that permeates Mr. Briskin’s letter should be seen for what it is. Nor is he alone in this, as anyone reading U.S. accounts of Allied affairs in the Second World War soon becomes aware; Anglophobia is rife. I can confidently assert that Mr. Briskin and his ilk will loathe my current book on the Battle of Normandy which disputes many popular allegations and examines closely the actions of all the Allied Armies in Normandy, not just the British. Incidentally, there already is a complete history of the British Army in the Second World War, David Fraser’s *And We Shall Shock Them*, published by Hodder & Stoughton 1983 and Cassell Paperbacks in 1999.

There is a serious, current point here. Our countries may be about to enter another war. If Mr. Briskin removes his head from the dark place it currently occupies and looks around, he may notice that the U.S.A. is not all that popular in the world at large and the British are the only reliable ally the Americans have.

Mr. Briskin’s rant, childish and ill-informed though it is, does no service either to scholarship or the mutual respect that Allies should have for one another when their fathers and brothers have shared the burden of one hard war and the current generation might be about to fight another. If all we can expect afterwards is cheap sneers from the likes of Mr. Briskin, perhaps the British should stay out of it this time? People on this side of the Pond are running out of cheeks to turn over this constant carping.

Finally, I have had the pleasure of corresponding with many hundreds of American veterans over the last thirty years. Not one of them has ever had a hard word to say about their British comrades; front-line soldiers are too wise and too decent to indulge in smear tactics and some American historians have much to learn from their example. And now, having got that off my chest, I think I will go and have a cup of tea.

Robin Neillands

Marlborough, Wiltshire, England

To the Editor,

In his letter to the editor (July 2002) describing the “one war” approach to the conflict in Vietnam that he attributes to General Abrams in 1968, Lewis Sorley omitted the groundbreaking contributions of Ambassadors Ellsworth Bunker and Robert Komer. Bunker used the phrase “one war” to describe his view of the war at his first Mission Council meeting in May 1967 shortly after arriving in Saigon to take on his duties as U.S. ambassador. His use of the term was significant and intentional. Arriving in Vietnam with him was Komer, whose job was to energize pacification, the so-called “other war,” the one fought in the villages. Bunker’s comments made clear that he viewed Komer’s task as equal in importance to military operations. Thus, he unified the two with the phrase “one war.”

Komer had singular experience in boosting the profile of pacification. President Lyndon Johnson appointed Komer as his Special Assistant for pacification from March 1966 to May 1967 and ordered Komer to deal directly with agency and department heads in Washington in coordinating and mobilizing the efforts of the military services and civilian agencies supporting the pacification program. Komer concluded on the basis of the PROVN Study (Program for the Pacification and Long Term Development of Vietnam), which Sorley cites, and other reports that the military needed to be directly involved in the war in the villages if pacification was to make headway against the insurgents. As presidential assistant, Komer advocated and won Johnson’s approval for a major reorganization that placed the U.S. military in charge of pacification support in Vietnam. Appointed by LBJ to manage American support, Komer set up and ran a unique civil-military organization, known as CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support), within the U.S. military headquarters (MACV) that employed civilians from AID and the CIA alongside military officers. Komer served as Westmoreland’s deputy for pacification. To promote Bunker’s notion of “one war,” Komer increased the number and caliber of advisers (civilian and military) and obtained additional funds to expand the territorial forces and rural development programs. With General Westmoreland’s approval Komer instituted the Phoenix program, which Sorley mentions, to attack the infrastructure.

When Abrams took command of MACV in mid 1968, CORDS was a fully functioning organization that for over a year had involved the U.S. military in pacification. Abrams could build on the organizational and programmatic foundation that Westmoreland and Komer had put in place. Abrams inherited a fully operational pacification program in November 1968 not because the PROVN study influenced him, but because it influenced Komer. As the president’s special assistant, Komer was in a position to draw on the concepts of PROVN and set up the kind of organization that could actually put those concepts to work. Acknowledging the requisite contributions of Bunker, Westmoreland, and Komer in no way should diminish the later efforts of Abrams.

(The interested reader can find additional information on these points in my book, *Pacification*, or in Thomas Scoville's *Reorganizing for Pacification Support*.)

Richard A. Hunt

Alexandria, Virginia

To the Editor:

John S. Reed's review of *Love Company: Infantry Combat Against the Japanese: World War II, Leyte and Okinawa*, by Donald O. Dencker (*JMH* 66 [October 2002]: 1239–40), describes company-level combat. It provides an opportunity to question the strategy of both the Philippine and Okinawa campaigns.

With regard to the Philippines, was it necessary to conquer all the islands, or was this an ego trip for General MacArthur ("I shall return"). Might not military needs require only the capture of sufficient areas to provide airfields, a naval base, and staging areas for further island hopping? As it developed, it resulted in the destruction of Manila and many casualties, both Philippine and American, which might otherwise be avoided?

A similar question might be asked of Okinawa. Once Naha, the capital, the center of the island, and the northern part were captured, was it necessary to capture the southern part. In the hilly south the Japanese caused the bulk of the American casualties in fierce fighting. Could we have simply shared the island with the remaining Japanese and then starved them out. Was capture of the entire island a military necessity or strategy gone awry?

I have not seen these issues addressed elsewhere. This is an invitation for anyone who cares, to comment on these matters.

Lawrence Briskin

Dayton, Ohio

To the Editor:

I had just purchased Robert Tanner's *Retreat to Victory: Confederate Strategy Reconsidered* when I received my April *Journal of Military History* with William Robertson's very positive review, calling it "an important book." Many historians have written valuable and thoughtful treatises examining the South's strategy. *Retreat to Victory* is not one of these. Although in places Tanner presents a very detailed and cogently argued case, his sloppy scholarship, misrepresentation, and overstatement detract from the book's quality. Tanner summarizes Southern strategy critics' three points: the South should have employed maneuver and guerrilla tactics; adopted a "Fabian" strategy; and avoided battle.

Although Robertson might say I'm "quibbling," when Tanner distorts other historians' arguments, this is no trivial matter. First, it reduces by inference the rest of the book's arguments. Second, it creates a straw man so that *Retreat to Victory* on the face of it looks like a seminal work. Space does not permit a full accounting but two examples should suffice.

On battle avoidance, he quotes Alan Nolan, "the South's true grand strategy of the defensive could have kept its armies in the field long enough to wear down the North's willingness to carry on the war" (page xvi). Tanner omits Nolan's concession that limited offensives were necessary for political or morale purposes, like driving McClellan away from Richmond during the Seven Days.

Similarly, Tanner quotes Reid Mitchell as doubting the U.S. "could have won the war if the Confederacy had elected to wage it as a guerrilla war" (page xii). The larger context of the quote is:

It is idle to speculate, but I doubt that the Union could have won the war if the Confederacy had decided to wage it as a guerrilla war. The Union certainly did not succeed in putting down what might be called the postwar guerrilla activity that took place during Reconstruction. But in 1861 the Confederacy did not choose to fight a guerrilla war—because, in large part, it did not seem possible to fight a guerrilla war and keep slavery intact.

Mitchell was not advocating guerrilla war, but was in fact explaining why the South could not adopt it.

Misrepresenting sources is not the only problem. *Retreat to Victory* confuses battle avoidance, Fabian, and guerrilla strategy. Further, anyone who critiques Davis or Lee incurs Tanner's wrath. Most historians argue that a conservative posture (but one that allowed limited offensives) was probably the best strategy and it nearly worked. The Seven Days, Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville succeeded in protecting Richmond, while First and Second Manassas drove the Federals back on Washington. However, Tanner is mute on Antietam, Perryville, Gettysburg and Hood's 1864 campaigns—offensives that resulted in defeats and the loss of approximately 70,000 men, and did nothing to bring the goal of an independent slavocracy closer. Antietam cost the hope of foreign intervention and Gettysburg destroyed the cream of Lee's army. Davis's replacement of Johnston with Hood (with Lee's consent) arguably lost the war.

All of this is unfortunate because, at the core, Tanner actually presents a strong argument for the South's forward defense. Namely, by the end of 1862, the South's back was against the wall. Richmond had to be held because it was the industrial and symbolic heart of the South. The South's best agricultural lands were well forward (i.e., the Shenandoah Valley). And finally and most importantly, as Federal armies approached, slaves deserted en masse. Another country could adopt a Fabian or battle avoidance strategy and expect to regain lost territory and property

when and if it won the war. If the Confederacy had won using such a strategy, much of its “property” would have walked north.

There is an argument to be made for why the South chose the strategy it did. Tanner made a good start but his strident apologetics and tendency to overstate his case coupled with his straw man argument seriously hurt the book’s credibility. This is not an important book on Confederate strategy. Alas, the definitive book on Confederate strategy remains to be written.

Jim Gates

Woodbridge, Virginia



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