



# The Dispatch and Book Reviews of the Company of Military Historians *Fall 2011*

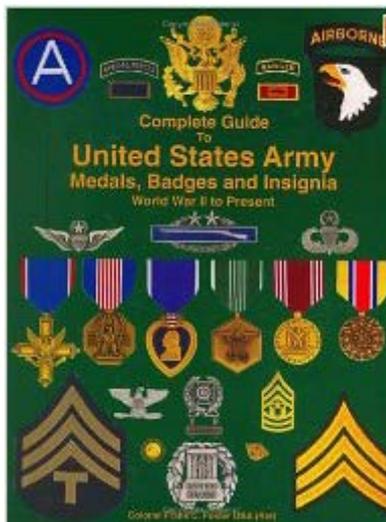
In this issue of the occasionally produced CMH “Dispatch” we have the fine book reviews contributed by our members.

As the “Holiday Season” is almost upon us, here are the reviews of a number of books. Unlike many World Wide Web reviews that one can consult, ours have the depth and maturity that one can only find in the Company’s learned membership.

Good Reading!

René Chartrand  
Interim editor

United States Army Medals, Badges, and Insignia. Frank Foster, Medals of America Press, 114 South Chase Blvd, Fountain Inn, SC 29644. 181 pp., no footnotes. ISBN: 1-884452-66-3 (hard cover) \$29.95 and ISBN: 1-884452-66-1 (soft cover) \$19.95.



I have always had the rule that if I could not say some good words about a book in a review, I should pass the volume on to someone else who might. There is, however, an exception to every rule and United States Army Medals, Badges, and Insignia is this rule breaker. While nicely illustrated for the most part, it is chocked full of errors and misstatements while it omits some important data, yet contains duplication. With such a start, this reviewer is forced to point out a few of the many problems and errors.

After a short history of medals, badges, and insignia from Roman times to the twenty-first century there is a brief but inadequate discussion of “Hat badges, buttons and lapel pins” that indicates the author is not aware of the difference between hats and caps and the ornamentation that went on them. When discussing the WAAC cap insignia there is the

statement on page 17 that the “walking eagle was also used as a lapel insignia for the WAAC branch.” This same error is repeated in another WAAC discussion of page 45.

The author is apparently totally unaware that between the world wars the army had warrant officer band leaders who generally wore officer uniforms with the eagle-in-the-wreath lapel insignia, but without any rank device. That was their uniform and without any rank insignia it showed they were warrant officers.

The history of chevrons is replete with misstatement such as Military Academy cadets introduced chevrons in 1802 and implications that during the Civil War chevrons were worn by, among other, battalion saddler sergeants and battalion veterinary sergeants. He shows that technical chevrons were used from 1941 through 1957 (in actuality they were from 1942 through 1948) and incorrectly titles the 1948 combat chevrons while misplacing some position in the pay structure. The author attempts to show ranks and enlisted pay structure by only using today’s pay grades of “E-1” through “E-9” rather than including the 1920-1958 “7th Grade” through “1st Grade” titles, which could have been done rather simply.

Branch insignia also suffer. The looped horn that was the infantry insignia of the Civil War is not shown, but without caption the earlier style of curved but not looped horn is displayed alongside an early twentieth century infantry insignia. Although only 2 or 3 officers at a time served in the Bureau of Insular affairs, the early twentieth century drooped wing insignia used from 1902 through 1936 is omitted while the 1936-1939 version created by WD Drawing 4-4-30 (June 15, 1936) is shown.

Badges likewise suffer. Between November 1962 and January 1966 regulations authorized aircraft crew chiefs to wear the driver and mechanic badge with a CREW CHIEF bar and also with a bar in the shape of a propeller—perhaps the most interesting addition the army ever made to the set of badges that suspended qualification bars—but sadly, these are not mentioned although the pre 1921 silver rifle expert, sharpshooter and marksman badges are shown twice (pages 46 and 57) but their gold National Guard counterparts are not discussed at all, nor are pre 1921 pistol badges. Since the end of World War I the army has had a set of marksmanship awards now called Excellence in Competition badges. Over the years the army had changed the colors and design details in a manner confusing to the casual historian. This book only adds to this uncertainty by showing a current version and labeling it as obsolete (p 57) when both all silver colored and all bronze colored badges are currently authorized, while page 109 shows two versions that the army never made (all silver with enameled ring and all gold with enameled ring).

Even shoulder patches suffer. The Special Forces tab established by the army in 1983 is listed at the World War II First Special Service Forces patch (p 66), the 187th RCT patch is not for the shoulder, and the supposedly 5th Regimental Combat Team's "patch" from the Korean War is the distinctive unit insignia. This last is not surprising given the entire area of distinctive unit insignia is grossly mishandled throughout.

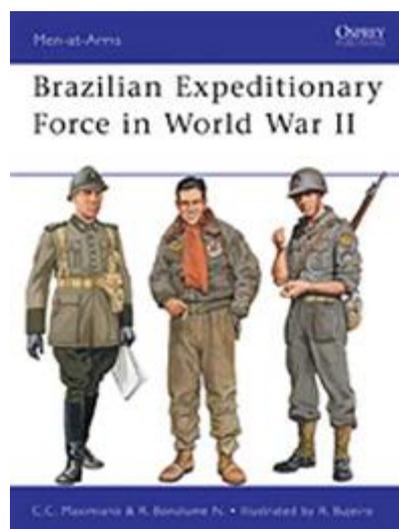
Uniforms do not have appropriate labeling. An Eisenhower jacket worn after the Korean War is captioned as being from World War II, but both the cut of the jacket and the placement of overseas bars show its proper mid 1950s period.

Finally, medals also take a beating. For example the World War II campaign medals are correctly shown on page 103 with their three center blue, white, and red stripes, but on the next page the plastic covered ribbons are mounted upside down, which makes the center strips wrong. Even the basic rules for medal hierarchy are not handled well. Page 103 shows the Purple Heart ranks immediately after the Bronze Star, but on the next page that displays ribbons being worn, the Purple Heart is wrongly placed after the Meritorious Service Medal. Other lack of attention to detail is prevalent. The Meritorious Unit Award originally was a gold colored wreath worn on the lower sleeve but that is not mentioned and the reader is left with the impression the current gold edged red ribbon originated in 1944. The original ornate Distinguished Service Cross, of which only 100 were awarded, is covered twice: pages 10 and 124, yet more available and historic medals and associated changes are not mentioned such as the original ribbons for the Civil War and Indian Wars campaign medals.

A ten second flip through the book gives the impression of a substantial and interesting work. A ten minute scan shows otherwise. Many issues not mentioned above exist. Even the bibliography does not have publishers' data and contains misspellings.

William K. Emerson

Brazilian Expeditionary Force in World War II by C.C. Maximiano and R. Bonalume Neto, Oxford: Osprey MAA 465, 2011, 48 pp., ill., 8 color plates, ISBN 978-1-84908-483-3. US \$17.95.



This attractive little book offers a fine concise account of the 26,000 Brazilians that were sent to Italy in 1944. The land forces served within the US Fifth Army and were deployed in the Apennines with the US 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. There they distinguished themselves in battle while also coping with a totally alien environment for Brazilians: a cold winter. The expeditionary force also included air squadrons, notably the 1<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron flying US P-47 Thunderbolt fighters that was involved in many actions.

Besides the concise account of how Brazil came into the war and its involvement alongside the US forces in Italy, this book offers excellent information on the uniforms and equipment used by the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, much of which appears to be the first time it appears in the English language. Because of the US helmet worn by the force and,

from a distance or B&W photos, what appear to be American uniforms and equipment, it has always been assumed that the Brazilian troops in Italy simply had US issues with their own badges. As the two authors, who certainly know their military material culture, demonstrate in this book, much of these items were in fact designed and made in Brazil especially for the Brazilian Expeditionary Force. The general look was the same, but there were all sorts of details that were different as well as the hue of the khaki, which was often more grayish. These are shown in detail thanks to the many photos as well as the good color plates by R. Bujeiro. All in all, a remarkably well crafted MAA that provides excellent information on the Brazilian Expeditionary Force in general and its uniforms and equipment in particular.

René Chartrand

The Encyclopedia of Trade Goods: Volume 1, Firearms of the Fur Trade, by James A. Hanson, with Dick Harmon (Chadron, NE: Museum of the Fur Trade, The Fur Press, 2011). Hardcover, 583 pages; color illustrations throughout; notes; appendices; bibliography; index. Limited/numbered edition. \$135 plus shipping (\$12 [US]; \$20 [Canada]; \$45 [Europe]). Due to its cost this is a volume that will not likely have many gratis review copies. However, it is of sufficient importance that Company members need to be quickly aware of its existence. Indeed, twenty per cent of the 1,000 numbered copies were subscribed before publication, based on the reputations of the author and the museum sponsoring the series. There is no doubt this volume will sell out quickly and for many years become difficult to acquire on the secondary market; the museum says it will not reprint the volumes. Five additional volumes are planned for the series, with the second, Clothing and Textiles of the Fur Trade, anticipated in print in 2012. Subscribers will have the right to acquire subsequent volumes with the same registration number, further reducing the availability of individual volumes in the future.

In its nearly 600 pages the Firearms of the Fur Trade is encyclopedic in its coverage of the three hundred years of the evolution of firearms intended for the Indian trade by various governments and trading companies. It is as much a catalog of the museum's extensive collection of trade guns as it is a comprehensive treatment of the subject. This is a real benefit to those of us who have had the privilege of seeing the collection but were unable to take home a book about it. So far we have had only the satisfaction of the many article in the

museum's quarterly publication, many authored by the current author and his father, Charles Hanson.

Well over a thousand photos of extraordinary examples of trade guns are presented. There probably is not a collection in the world that was not combed for examples that could contribute to the story. One of the more extraordinary collections was located in the Armémuseum, Sweden. In 1736-8 Sweden contemplated making guns for the trade and a number of examples were collected throughout Europe for study. These arms are still in new, unfired condition and a number are presented in the chapter, "Trade Guns for a World Market."

Complementing the photographic illustrations is a beautifully detailed text. Again, over many years numerous collections were examined and all of this reference material was skillfully woven into a readable story. The cover and frontispiece, a colored vignette of a gun being presented by French Louisiana Governor Louis de Kerlérec to Cherokee Chief Stalking Turkey, were particularly well chosen. The text focuses on the technological (and to a lesser degree artistic) changes of these guns, and is minimally a cultural study of the traders and organizations which got these guns to the Indians and how the latter used them. That is not a weakness of the volume as the title tells the reader the emphasis will be on the guns themselves. Other venues are more important for ethnological studies.

For the enthusiast of early arms this is a significant book. For those particularly interested in the fur trade it is indispensable—as doubtless will be the subsequent volumes in this series. You will not regret the investment.

Frederick C. Gaede

Confederate Coal Torpedo, Thomas Courtney's Infernal Sabotage Weapon. Joseph M. Thatcher and Thomas H. Thatcher. (Fredericksburg, VA: Kenerly, 2011). Softcover; 124 pp., illus., biblio., app. No price. ISBN: 978-0-9837230-0-4.

During the Civil War the Confederacy was desperate to achieve independence and to defeat the United States and so conjured up unconventional weapons to compensate for its military weakness. The use of the submarine is well known but not so the coal torpedo. During the nineteenth century the term torpedo defined a variety of explosive devices including sea mines and land mines. The coal torpedo was an explosive device, made of cast iron, fused and loaded with powder, designed to be introduced into the coal supply of steam powered ships and industrial operations that depended on steam power. Disguised to resemble a lump of coal and to be inadvertently shoveled into a boiler, the resultant explosion would cripple or destroy its target. The fountainhead of this concept was Thomas Courtney.

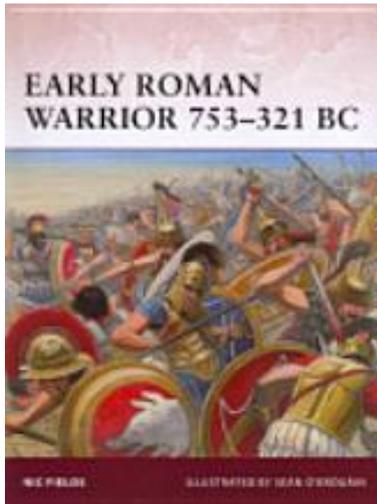
Confederate Coal Torpedo details Courtney's life and his role in promoting and manufacturing the device. He also organized a corps of agents to plant the devices. Courtney was an invertebrate promoter whose charisma ensnared even Jefferson Davis. But, reading of Courtney's life, the reader may wonder if this was an elaborate scheme to keep Courtney off the battlefield, provide him with veneer of service, all the while lining his pockets. And considering the effort expended to manufacture and size the devices (and camouflage the cast iron body to resemble a boiler ready lump of coal) the reader may question its efficacy as a weapon of war. Never resolved was the problem of getting the device into a boiler. Was it to be placed in a bunker or on a barge to be randomly shoveled to its destination or placed aboard its target by an agent, risking discovery? Ultimately, the device destroyed little and though resurrected in the 1940s was not especially effective then.

Joseph M. Thatcher is a Fellow and past President of the Company of Military Historians and a life long museum curator. His son, Thomas M. Thatcher, is an assistant research professor of medicine.

Confederate Coal Torpedo is a tale of desperate men in desperate times and recommended for those interested in Civil War unconventional warfare.

James B. Ronan II

Early Roman Warrior, 753-321 B.C. Nic Field. (Oxford: Osprey, 2011). Softcover; 64 pp., illus., biblio., index. \$18.95. ISBN: 978-1-84908-499-4.

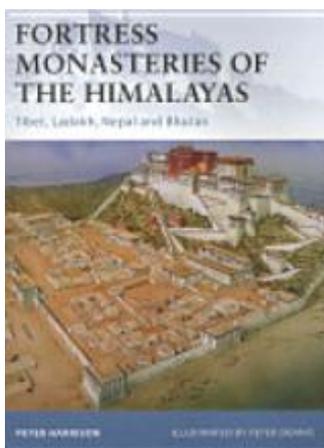


Much like the U.S. Army, the Roman Army had its origins as a part time citizen force. Over a course of years the Roman Army became the world's first professional army playing a vital role in the establishment and maintenance of Roman hegemony. However, when we think of Rome we seldom think of it as a collection of Iron Age villages on the yet to be storied Seven Hills. Rome's struggles with its neighbors and its sack by the Gauls in 390 B.C. are more well known but, in Early Roman Warrior, author Nic Fields uses both archeology and ancient sources to show how the citizens of Rome developed their powerful army over the centuries. Covered are early warfare, manpower procurement, arms and armor and the religious background of Roman military life. The other peoples and civilizations that influenced the infancy of the Hegemon

are also introduced to the reader in this interesting Osprey number. Nic Fields is a former Royal Marine and university lecturer. He is currently a free lance author. Although the want of a map will be apparent, this volume is highly recommended for those interested in the Early Republic or to supplement other histories.

James B. Ronan II

Fortress Monasteries of the Himalayas: Tibet, Ladakh, and Bhutan. Peter Harrison. Oxford: Osprey, 2011. Soft Cover. 64 pages. Illus., maps, biblio., glossary. \$18.95 ISBN: 978-1-84908-396-6.



Strange geography (Sakya, Mustang), unfamiliar names (dzongs, dochen) and exotic religions (tantric) all combine in this Osprey entry that does much to fill in the history of those countries that make up "the roof of the world." Particularly interesting is the turbulent history of the region, long associated with pacifism. From 644 A.D., with the introduction of Bhuddism, through struggles with Muslim and Mongol neighbors to recent conflicts with the Red Chinese the region has been very turbulent. A British expedition to annex Tibet in the early 20th century did much to document the buildings photographically and despite war damage and earthquake damage the Chinese have restored some buildings to attract tourists.

Covered are the native forces who fought with one another or defended the region against foreign invasion, their weapons, the evolution of regional defensive architecture and the conflicts (both internecine and foreign) as well as the buildings themselves, including protected temples and defended geographic features. They all share

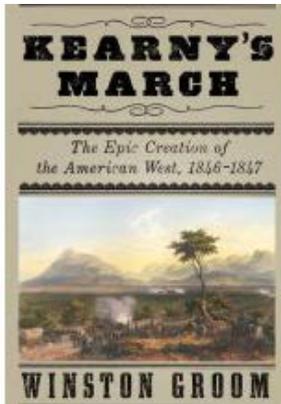
certain characteristics that relate to defence as well as to the prevention of earthquake and weather damage.

The author, Peter Harrison, is a medical practitioner who has a life long interest in military architecture and has also written *Castles of God, Fortified Religious Buildings of the World* (2004) and has also published in *Fort, Casemate and Postern*. The illustrator, Peter Dennis, has contributed to many *Osprey* numbers.

The region, always in the headlines because of continuing conflict with China is virtually unknown to the Western reading public. Despite the exotic names and places, this work is an excellent precis for those interested in the history of south central Asia or non-European fortification systems.

James B. Ronan II

Winston Groom, *Kearny's March: The Epic Creation of the American West, 1846-1847* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff Publishers, November 2011,) 320 pages; 16 of illustrations. Price \$27.95



I am always happy at the prospect of reading works on one of my favorite subjects, the First Dragoons. It was in this spirit that I learned that Winston Groom, the author of *Forest Gump*, had written a book on the subject of Steven W. Kearny in his role as the vanguard of Manifest Destiny. While I find the author's style refreshingly readable and entertaining, dismay set in at finding the book badly researched and, as such, to embody much misinformation.

The book continually denotes the Dragoons as the 1st Cavalry, designating the dragoons as being part of the cavalry—as if they were a flank company or such specialized formation. First, the 1st Dragoons did not become the 1st Cavalry until 1855, nine years after Kearny's March. 1st Dragoons became the 1st Cavalry with the army reorganization of 1861. The first (initial) 1st Cavalry then was denominated as the 4th Cavalry. The book states that the 1st Cavalry was created in 1833 and was the Nation's first mounted regiment. They were not the first (created) regiment of federal cavalry, as many mounted regiments came and went during the Nation's first decades. Rather, Colonel Kearny's bunch was the first permanent regiment of dragoons. The book informs the reader that an artillery company accompanied Kearny to California. Its author is obviously unaware that each dragoon company had a 12-pound mountain howitzer assigned to it and the two California-bound companies (C &K) brought with them their cannons. There was also a battery of artillery that rumbled into Santa Fe with Kearny, but this battery was composed of Missouri volunteers and did not proceed to California.

Turning to Groom's poorly researched account of Col. Sterling Price's siege of the Pueblo of Taos during the 1847 insurrection, the book employs artistic license. Though generally correct, the account of the battle is generally correctly pointing out that Price's two hours of shelling of the rebels' position in a thick-walled church produced little effect, so the colonel decided to take the building by means of a direct assault. So far so good. Alas, on p. 162, Groom tells us:

At the signal, nearly four hundred U.S. soldiers moved out in perfect marching formation, flags waving, drum and fifes marking the tempo, with officers leading the way, drawn swords gesturing overhead.

No reference is given for this quote. No matter, it never happened this way.

In January, Price's foot weary troops, some four-hundred men, marched and fought their way through the rugged and frozen Sangre de Cristo Mountains to corner the insurrectionists at

Pueblo de Taos. These exhausted men were primarily volunteers from Missouri and not in any condition to perform a Napoleonic style grand review prior to the assault. Except for, perhaps, 1st Dragoon Company G's swallowtail, red and white guidon, there were neither flags on the field, nor were there any fifes or drums. With the Dragoons in the lead, made a mad dash for a low wall on the west side of the church and after suffering heavy losses including of its commander, Capt. James Burgwin, the troops, with the aid intense cannon fire, captured the building.

Turning to the confused Battle of San Pasqual on 6 December 1846, Groom is on seriously thin ice in heavily relying on three observers: Capt. Archibald Gillespie, General Kearny, and Kit Carson.

Marine Capt. Archibald Gillespie was not always a reliable source. A notorious liar who used the truth sparingly--such that he conserved telling the truth whenever possible. In 1854, this gentleman was forced to resign from the Marines when caught stealing from ship's company fund. Groom makes the mistake of using Gillespie as one of his primary sources for details of the Battle of San Pasqual. Here are a few, and there are many more: Placing a locofoco (cigar match) to the torch hole of a gun would, due to blow back, cause serious damage to one's hand. It is unlikely that the three officers who were attending the gun would allow a badly wounded man (about to pass out) to fire the piece.

Kit Carson's account is mostly a tall tale (he was MIA during the initial battle), as is the official report from Kearny, who was doing his level best to save himself from being the subject of a court of inquiry. Kearny's loss of a howitzer was enough to have resulted in a court of inquiry and one would have resulted had the poor man not fallen ill and died in 1848. Too many historians, even a few of the participants in the battle, and Groom as well, blamed the Hall carbines and wet ammunition for the defeat. Weapons are all too frequently wrongfully blamed for military disasters (e.g., the Custer debacle.) Yet this weapon was effectively used to rally and save the command from being overwhelmed. The cartridges were safely protected from the rain, being kept in leather cartridge boxes carried by each soldier. It is also important to bear in mind that the command stopped two miles from San Pasqual to allow sergeants to inspect tack, weapons, and ammunition. Groom writes of Andres Pico's vaqueros as being resplendently dressed. They were not--these warriors were working cowboys, wearing working clothes--not fancy army lancers. And there were but 75 Californios--not the 150 as reported by Groom. There was no skirmish wherein the gunners valiantly fighting to save their gun were overwhelmed and killed. A perusal of company muster rolls report the gunners as uninjured after the battle--three of them deserted a month after the battle.

In 1943, Bernard DeVoto published his work, *The Year of Decision 1846*. This well-written book won for DeVoto a Pulitzer Prize. Like the attempt in 1966 to remake the classic movie *Stagecoach*, the forgettable performance of Alex Cord was never going to replace John Wayne's performance as the Ringo Kid. Likewise, *Year of Decision* remains head and shoulders above Groom's slapdash effort to retell the story of that watershed year in the Nation's history.

Will Gorenfeld

Martin Windrow, *Our Friends Beneath the Sands: The Foreign Legion in France's Colonial Conquests 1870-1935*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010, 696 pp., notes, appendices, index, maps, ill. ISBN 978-0-297-85213-1. [www.orionbooks.co.uk](http://www.orionbooks.co.uk). Hard cover £25. Paperback £14.99.

Martin Windrow is well known for his outstanding expertise in all that concerns the French Foreign Legion and he has already authored several books, big and small, on the Legion's history or its material culture. He is also one of the best known and most respected persons in London's military publishing community and, insofar as this reviewer is concerned along with many thousands of readers, a gifted writer. I would even compare him with the great Balzac, a pillar of French literature, for the ease with which he takes the reader through minute descriptions or complicated political concepts. Every time I pick up this mighty tome, I end up being lured from one page to the next.

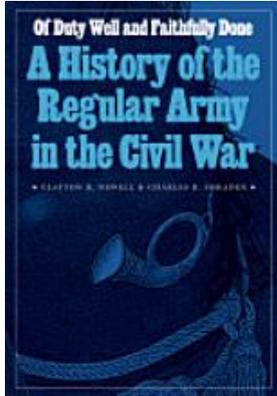
In this offering, the author starts with the Legion's Paris street battles against the "Communards" (basically French Communists) towards the end of the Franco-Prussian War while also presenting the reader with one of the best summaries of that war that this reviewer has ever seen outside of the French language. There is little complaisance in this account, which is refreshing. It was, after all, the third time in the century that German armies had marched under Napoleon's "Arc de Triomphe" (previously in 1814 and 1815) shortly before this civil strife that evolved into the often politically chaotic, yet relatively stable 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic. Again, throughout this account of the Legion, many of whose members were German incidentally, the author provides the necessary government policy background that went from a nearly total indifference toward colonial territories in 1871 to a grand "greater France overseas" vision as expressed by the politically powerful Marshal Lyautey in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Algeria had been occupied in 1830 to finally eliminate its mighty nest of pirates that had plagued western powers since the Middle Ages. This resulted in French colonization schemes that were, one reads, not exactly equitable to its Arab inhabitants. The Algerian coastal areas eventually became a French metropolitan department rather than a colony. However, as can be seen in this book, the vast Sahara desert inhabited by nomadic groups really never was subdued and it would form the main battleground of the Legion well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The genesis of such frontier campaigning by legionnaires was learned in the 1880s conquest of Viet-Nam, which would also eventually include Laos and Cambodia in the territory of French Indochina. Fighting redoubtable "Black Flag" troops as well as Chinese regulars proved, as this book shows, far from an easy "show the flag" and a "white man's fighting superiority" exercise, but a grinding, costly and often desperate fight for all the French troops involved. Later on, in Morocco, the Legion encountered the extraordinary Abd el Krim brothers, genial natural tacticians, that defeated the Spanish while keeping the French on their toes. And on their feet, literally, because, at that time, much campaigning was done by marching, to which the Legionnaires added a twist by using mules, not to fight on, but as mounted infantry. This proved a great tactical success in an age when there were no flying drones nor land mines and the mounted companies became part of the establishment of this infantry formation. The text gives an excellent account of how this concept came to be, how it was organized and how well it worked.

Indeed, this study is replete with accounts bearing on all sorts of such developments. Other strengths of this study are the fine personal descriptions of the many men involved in the Legion, officers (who were mostly French) and enlisted legionnaires, that gives an understanding of an esprit-de-corps that was quite unique. One should add, before concluding, that the book has no less than 23 maps and 83 B&W photos that show the many sites and personalities discussed in the text. The author has traveled to some of these sites while preparing this study and his photos with his comments are quite revealing. Needless to add that this major study is not likely to be buried in the sand. It is a fine reading experience as well as a most valuable reference on the activities of the "soldier's soldiers" that these amazing legionnaires really were. Highly recommended.

René Chartrand

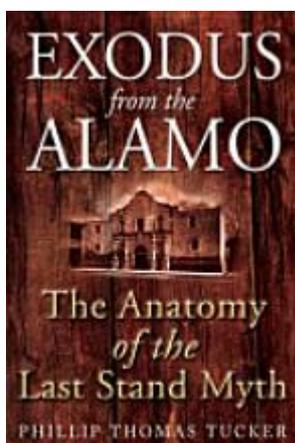
Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done, A History of the Regular Army in the Civil War. Clayton R. Newell and Charles R. Schrader. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2011) Hardcover; 381 pp., illus., biblio., index. \$75.00. ISBN; 978-0-8032-1910-6.



The U.S. Regular Army was at once the Civil War mainstay of Union forces, their trainers and exemplars. On half a dozen battlefields, they saved the Union Army and in the process were literally shot off the battlefield. The role of the Regulars is not well known but since 1990 books and articles (including MC&H) have treated the subject, dwelling on the combat arms. Newell and Schrader, in this most comprehensive survey, cover both the war fighters and those who administered the massive U.S. Army of the 1860s. Regulars also performed the more prosaic duties of feeding, organizing, and paying the troops. Medical care and transportation, signaling, and ordnance functions were all administered by Regulars and these combat service support functions contributed as much to victory as battlefield sacrifice. The staff of the army is typically viewed as superannuated time servers but these old smoothbores had created the framework that younger men used to administer the huge Civil War army (the U.S. Army grew from 17,000 to about 1,000,000 during the war). And this they did without greatly expanding their respective manpower. The authors both served in the U.S. Army Center of Military History and are now independent scholars and authors. Clayton R. Newell is the author of *Lee vs. McClellan, The First Campaigns*. Charles R. Schrader is the author of *The War to End All Wars, the American Military Experience in World War I*. *Of Duty Well and Faithfully Done* is the most complete picture, to date, of the entire war effort by the Regulars. This work is highly recommended for students of the Civil War, the U.S. Army at war in the nineteenth century or the Regular Army.

James B. Ronan II

*Exodus from the Alamo: The Anatomy of the Last Stand Myth*, Phillip Thomas Tucker, Casemate Publishers, 2010. 398pp., notes, biblio., index. \$32.95. ISBN: 1932033939.



Reading this book, I felt like Oprah must have before deciding to leave The Reverend Jeremiah Wright's church—overloaded with the intensity and predictability of the preaching, notwithstanding any benefits. Too bad, too, since, amidst all the repetitive fulmination, Mr. Tucker's book makes an important contribution to our understanding of what actually happened in the early hours of March 6, 1836 in San Antonio de Bexar.

Tucker, an established popular military historian, demonstrates a mastery of the Mexican sources on the Alamo siege. He is able to draw valuable evidentiary distinctions among Mexican soldiers' accounts, in particular based on an understanding of the authors' biases with respect to the Alamo's conqueror and central character in Mexican politics of the era, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Tucker

also does a good job of placing the decision to defend the Alamo within the turbulent context of Texan politics and society, as contending groups of native Tejanos, relatively long-established Texas colonists, and fortune-seeking newcomers from the United States grappled with issues from declaring for independence or demanding devolutionary self-government within Mexico, to a policy regarding slavery (it had been officially abolished in Mexico in 1829, though the situation in Texas was anomalous) to establishing a government and, of course, how best to organize, support and deploy their forces. Drawing on his command of the Mexican sources, Tucker presents a richer portrait than heretofore encountered in English of the victors at the Alamo. His Mexican army is a well-organized and motivated force, ably led by Santa Anna and an experienced officer corps, sporting Napoleonic doctrine as well as fashion, though armed largely with British cast-offs. Santa Anna was able to move two converging columns in winter with Napoleonic alacrity, descending with surprise on San Antonio and Goliad in his own version of the Emperor's Ulm campaign. His Alamo battle plan was both brutally effective and comparatively sparing of his men's lives. In fact, and notwithstanding his high opinion of the Mexican infantry, Tucker endorses other observers' speculation that more Mexican casualties were caused by friendly fire than by the defenders' rifles or artillery.

The centerpiece of Tucker's account, and the "exodus" of the book's title, is the case he makes that the Alamo's defenders, after being caught entirely by surprise in a pre-dawn assault and the consequent collapse of any organized defense, made several, more or less organized large-scale attempts to break out of the deathtrap. Tucker argues convincingly that more than half the Alamo garrison tried to break out, most only to be cut down by Mexican dragoons and lancers on the open ground outside the mission. While speculation about breakout attempts appears elsewhere, most recently in William C. Davis's excellent *Three Roads to the Alamo* (New York, 1998, pp. 562,563), Tucker provides the most detailed and best documented account yet for three discreet breakouts. This is a notable achievement and a significant contribution to the Alamo literature.

Unfortunately, Tucker attempts to make more-- much more--of the significance of these breakout attempts than they merit. Tucker insists that the tactical truths he has unearthed entail nothing less than a wholesale upending of a pernicious "Last Stand" racial myth "manufactured" to serve as pillars of a noxious structure of "Anglo-Celtic" exploitation and repression. Tucker the military historian becomes a man on an ethno-cultural mission. The result is that too much of *Exodus from the Alamo* is a tiresomely tendentious diatribe against all the sins of Manifest Destiny, and within the space of under 400 pages, an annoyingly repetitive one at that:

"...No part of America's story has been more romanticized than its expansion to the west. At the heart of this myth was that white Americans fought against inferior people of color, Indian, Mexican, and Mestizo, in the name of progress, civilization, and the highest Christian virtues. Almost seamlessly in yet another chapter of western expansion, the myth of the heroic Alamo last stand fulfilled these same vital cultural, historical, and racial requirements for both Texas and the American nation: in a willing self-sacrifice for a greater good, a band of heroic white men bravely stood up for righteousness and liberty against barbarous hordes from an alien and inferior culture." (p. 341)

But hyperventilation aside, *Exodus from the Alamo* is still, at bottom, a battle history, and can be analyzed as such.

Tucker views the stand at the Alamo as a strategic mistake and the defense as incompetently conducted. Except for his obsession with "Anglo Celtic" illusions of racial superiority as the bases of these failures, he is by no means alone in these judgments among Alamo historians. Gonzales made much more sense as a place to make a stand against Santa Anna's incursion. It was closer to the pro-independence settlements in East Texas, while San

Antonio was relatively isolated, and also was predominantly Tejano, and therefore much more equivocal politically. Just as clearly the men who finally decided to hold the Alamo certainly could not claim particularly distinguished military experience, nor did they display any remarkable martial talent. The January departure of the greater part of the Texan forces in San Antonio back home to east Texas, or for the ill-conceived Matamoras Expedition, effectively doomed the Alamo. An expanse of that size (about four acres) could not have been held by comparative numbers of Wellington's defenders of Hougoumont or by Napoleon's Old Guard. But was the decision to hold the place really motivated by "Anglo-Celtic" racial hubris? One certainly can imagine other rationales. Circumstances sometimes require that stands be made on less than optimal ground, and in the Alamo's case, to have abandoned the mission would have meant surrendering to Santa Anna what Tucker rightly notes was "the largest concentration of artillery between New Orleans and Mexico City." The Alamo was no Gibraltar, but it had just been taken from a Mexican garrison in December 1835 and was accordingly the source of some pride. The Mexicans had made some marginal engineering improvements to the place during their occupation. Most significantly, it was crammed with twenty-one pieces of artillery, more and heavier artillery than Santa Anna could hope to bring up from Mexico in any realistic time frame, and more than the Texans could possibly have managed to move with the resources available, as well as significant numbers of small arms and Mexican cartridges. It is just as reasonable to suggest that it was big guns, rather than big-talking ethno-cultural hubris that caused the defenders to dawdle in San Antonio until Santa Anna unexpectedly appeared and made the decision for them.

In Tucker's account the largely inexperienced, indifferently led, ill, tired, numerically inadequate garrison, whose supply of very poor quality Mexican ammunition was running low, is completely surprised by a vigorous pre-dawn assault on the mission's weak north wall. With all hope gone, some took refuge in the quarters and hospital lining the plaza and died miserably, while most tried to break out, with two sallies to the south and a smaller one to the west. A few, most notably the gunners in the chapel, heroically tried to cover their comrades' escape along a brush-lined irrigation ditch that led to the comparative safety of a double row of cottonwood trees known as the Alameda, from which the desperate men hoped to gain the road to Gonzalez and safety. With lethal efficiency, the Mexican cavalry cut down most of the escaping defenders just outside the walls, though Tucker notes that a few more men managed to escape the Alamo than has commonly been believed.

Tucker's account would have been made much more useful, particularly to readers new to the story, by more and better maps and plans. There is no map of the immediate San Antonio area, and only one plan of the Alamo, which attempts to do the double duty of providing the layout of the mission and the sequence of the Mexican attacks and the breakout attempts. What is worse, this plan appears towards the end of the book, and is hidden in the sense that it is not noted in the table of contents, so the confused reader comes upon it too late. This is a particularly telling defect for a tactical history of this sort. When one compares the graphic inadequacy of *Exodus from the Alamo* to the excellent supporting maps and plans of comparable works like Lt. Col. Mike Snook's *How Can Man Die Better*, London 2005, or his *Like Wolves on the Fold*, London 2006, on the British defeat at Isandlwana and the subsequent defense of the mission station at Rorke's Drift, Natal in 1879, one cannot help but suspect a little less preaching and a little more attention to better supporting the narrative would have been advisable for Tucker. Snook's Zulu War books also deserve note for another reason here. He manages to show us soldiers--Zulus, British, Colonial volunteers, and native levies, doing what they could with the tactical situation, conditions, weapons, equipment, doctrine, training and leadership dealt them. All are treated with empathy and respect without anachronistic special pleading. Would that Tucker had tried the same.

Finally, there are a few off-key notes in Tucker's analysis that call for some comment. First is the author's annoying insistence on reminding the reader that, in effect, the Alamo's defenders were not Leonidas' Spartans who stood their ground to the end-- a genuine Last Stand. But in defense of the ill-fated "Anglo-Celts," they may not have known a *doru* from a *xiphos*, but they did stay put for thirteen days in an adobe death trap until, Tucker admits, what poor powder they had was nearly gone. Certainly, a mass escape would have been more likely to succeed earlier in the siege, but that is not what happened, according to Tucker. In fact late in the siege several dozen Texans from Gonzales actually joined the garrison. Only when it was obvious that the Mexicans had overcome the pitiful defenses with a successful coup de main did they try to fight their way out. Probably the Alamo was but a last stand *manqué*, but the distinction hardly seems worth Tucker's obsession with the point, unless, of course, one believes that the utility of history resides principally in its ability to help sustain a contemporary political stance.

In another dubious excursion, Tucker is so determined to defend the soldierly qualities of the Mexican army that he is led into making some absurd assertions. For example, he feels compelled to find a way to excuse the fact that many Mexican casualties were the result of friendly fire. This kind of historical gymnastic becomes necessary in any endeavor like that of Exodus from the Alamo, which must be populated with perfect heroes and brutish villains rather than mere men. A relatively high proportion of Mexican friendly fire casualties should not be surprising. This was, for all practical purposes a night attack. The plan called for the attacking columns to concentrate predominantly on the north end of the Alamo perimeter. There may have been some further drifting together of the columns in the darkness and smoke. Once the firing started the Mexicans were close to, if not already, scrambling, and no doubt stumbling, in the dark over the crumbling, irregular, timber and earth reinforced north wall at several points. On entering the plaza the soldados began a hunt through an unfamiliar, dark complex rooting out hidden defenders, some firing on them. It is difficult to imagine how there cannot have been significant friendly fire casualties under the circumstances, but that is not good enough for Tucker. He insists on weaving a justificatory tale to the effect that the Mexican troops—the same troops he tells us were so well trained and led—had a penchant for, literally, firing from the hip, because the recoil of their Brown Bess muskets was so heavy; this bad habit, he suggests, accounts for the large amount of friendly fire casualties (p. 315). This notion has to raise eyebrows. Tucker tells us that the Mexican powder tended to be of poor quality, that is, delivering relatively low compression on discharge. Combining weak powder with a big, heavy musket like the Brown Bess, should not add up to a particularly punishing recoil, and shooting from the hip is just as likely to cause the balls to go high—over friends' as well as foes' heads. In any event, the idea that an experienced commander like General Vicente Filisola, a veteran of the Peninsular Campaign against Napoleon, or any of his colleagues, would have tolerated hip-shooting from troops, most of whom they had been commanding for some time, is silly on its face. There were friendly fire casualties because the conditions were such that they were likely; that should be sufficient.

There is also the matter of the remains of the Alamo defenders. Tucker uses their disposition after the battle to support his argument for a breakout, but he misses other inferences that might be drawn from their fate.

Two of the three breakout attempts Tucker places on the southern side of the Alamo perimeter, while a third, much smaller one, headed west. One very good piece of evidence for these breakouts having been attempted is that fact that after the battle Santa Anna ordered the defenders' bodies stacked and burned on the open ground south of the mission. Why go to the trouble of dragging them out of the compound, Tucker rightly asks, if the majority did not fall outside? The disposition of the bodies, when considered in conjunction with the large numbers of Mexican accounts describing the breakouts, makes a convincing case.

However the two principal funeral pyres, which Tucker shows as sited symmetrically on either side of the Alameda, speak to more than breakouts.

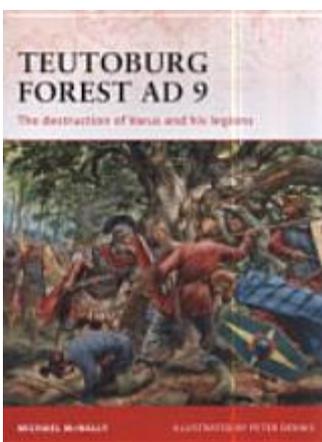
The Alameda was a comparatively pleasant sylvan oasis on the rather scrubby flatland around San Antonio de Bexar. Consisting of rows of cottonwood trees flanking the relatively high ground on the road to Gonzales, it would have been a popular local spot. What better place for a political strongman with an understanding of the importance of symbolism like Santa Anna to order the grimmest of monuments and most compelling reminder of the fate of rebels? While the mission itself would become a place of evil omen, likely to be avoided by residents, the park-like Alameda, on a main road, would not be avoided. While the significant numbers of reliable Mexican accounts testify to the breakout, it is not unreasonable to speculate that wherever the rebels actually fell, the Alameda was the most politically effective spot to burn their bodies.

Finally, Tucker tells us that after Santa Anna moved his main body out of San Antonio, and for more than a year later, long after San Jacinto, the ashes of the Alamo defenders remained neglected where they stood. He then goes on to recount, with predictable disapproval, a raucous ball held in April 1837 in Liberty, Texas to commemorate the anniversary of Sam Houston's victory over Santa Anna, describing it as unseemly and a harbinger of dark days to come for Mexico, (p.339.) It seems they partied in Liberty, but left the ashes of Travis, Crockett, Bowie and the rest by the side of the Gonzales Road. This neglect of the Alamo remains is a jarring contradiction to Tucker's central thesis that the Alamo, from the moment of its fall, became the chief relic of a cult of sacrifice and racial superiority for Texans.

A good piece of advice from one of my teachers was that, when approaching a review, "always grant the book its impulse." As best I can discern, the impulse of *Exodus From the Alamo* is what might be called Exclusionary Multiculturalism. As distinguished from the other variety, Non-Judgmental Multiculturalism, ("Suttee had its good points, too..."), Exclusionary Multiculturalism limits its empathic coverage severely, and "Anglo-Celts" of the Jacksonian period and their descendants certainly fall into the excluded category. By wrapping what might have been a valuable contribution to the study of an iconic American battle in Exclusionary Multiculturalism's coat of many colors but one, Tucker has shortchanged his research and his readers.

James V. Capua

Teutoborg Forest, A. D. 9. Michael McNally. (Osprey, Oxford, 2011). Softcover. 96 pages. Illus., Maps, Bibliography. \$19.95. ISBN: 978-1-84603-581-4.



The battle between the XVII, XVIII and XIX Roman Legions and the German tribes of the *Cherusaii*, *Angrivarii* and *Bructeri* fought in the Teutoburger in A. D. 9 were the Roman equivalent of The Little Big Horn or Isandhlwana. Professional soldiers were defeated by primitive native tribes. Of the five legions that officially disappeared from the Roman Army List over the ages, three vanished in this battle in northwestern Germany. And, who can forget Augustus crying "Quintillius Varus! Give me back my eagles!" in the BBC production of *I, Claudius*?

Rome was engaged in active operations east of the Rhine River in an area bounded on further to the east by the Elbe River known as *Germania Magna*, Greater Germany. Their aim may have been to add this territory to the Empire. In this their commander, Publius Quintillius Varus

was thwarted by the Roman trained German leader, Hermann (or in Latin, Arminius). Recent archeology had led to a re-interpretation of this battle. Rather than a forest massacre, Major Terry Chunn (British Army, Retired) has reconstructed a running battle lasting from 8 to 11 September during which Arminius was able to divide and exhaust the Roman force before closing in for the kill. Varus committed suicide and Rome set its European boundaries on the Rhine and Danube.

The author, Michael McNally is passionate student of military history and lives in Germany with his family.

Clothing, equipment and terrain are excellently illustrated in Osprey style and there are many photos of the monument commemorating the battle, *Weg Der Romer*, near Karlkriese, Germany. This work is highly recommended for the general reader of ancient history or to supplement reading of classical works.

*James B. Ronan II*