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BOOK REVIEW

Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War

by Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, C.B.

*Longmans, Green and Co.: London; 2nd Edition, 6th reprint, 1911 (1st Edition, 1898);
in two volumes – volume 1, 447 pp.; volume 2, 528 pp.*

The Institute's Ursula Davidson Library contains a treasure-trove of military literature dating from the late 18th century, and this biography¹ of Lieutenant-General Thomas J. ("Stonewall") Jackson of American Civil War fame, by one of Victorian England's leading military historians, is among the best of them.

At last year's Institute Dinner, a currently-serving soldier indicated to me he had studied Jackson's Valley campaigns while at Duntrone. Indeed, our library holds several copies of this book, because it was required reading for Army officer training for many years.

With a forward by Field Marshal Wolseley, the book objectively analyses the background to the American Civil War and the activities of Jackson in it, including his campaigns in the Shenandoah Valley. The author demonstrates the "necessity of maintenance at all times a well-organised standing army in the highest state of efficiency and not to hand over to civilians the administration and organisation of the army in peace and war". He describes Jackson's grasp of military strategy and use of manoeuvre and terrain in the Shenandoah Valley to threaten Washington, D.C., the Union capitol, thereby forcing President Lincoln to withhold or recall troops from McClellan's Peninsula campaign directed at Richmond, the Confederate capitol.

In researching the book, Henderson meticulously studied the official records, visited the battlefields, and interviewed and corresponded with numerous participants from both sides and eyewitnesses to the battles, including Jackson's mapmaker, Jed Hotchkiss; then analysed the campaigns drawing on classic works on strategy by Napoleon and Wellington.

Henderson initially develops a detailed picture of Jackson's background and character. Like many in western Virginia, Jackson's family was Scottish. His parents died when he was young. Raised by an uncle, young Jackson, chopped wood, rode and raced horses, transported timber and at 18 was county constable. At 19, he was nominated² for a vacancy at West Point Military Academy, despite his sub-standard education. Studying very hard, Jackson rose from 51st in a class of 72 to near the top by graduation when, with proven ability in mathematics, he was appointed to the artillery.

During the Mexican War, Jackson demonstrated his leadership and tactical skill. Given command of a captured Mexican field battery, he and his men eventually overpowered the Mexican artillery and stormed a breastwork. Within 18 months, Jackson was a brevet major

and had served with Lee, Grant and others who later fought on both sides in the Civil War.

With peace, Jackson taught mathematics, optics, mechanics and astronomy at Virginia Military Institute and ran the cadet corps. He also studied Napoleon as part of his self-development.

Henderson examines the background to the American Civil War, comparing and contrasting the life and resources of the North and the South, the causes of secession, and the dilemmas of the State of Virginia, refreshingly referring where appropriate to 'the War Between the States', the term with which I grew up, rather than the commonly-used term, 'American Civil War', preferred by the Northerners. He depicts the fundamentals of military leadership in describing how Jackson trained what became known as the 'Stonewall Brigade', chose his staff officers and allocated them their roles. He conveys Jackson's strategic priorities and his preference for individuals who displayed leadership, attention to detail and strategic vision.

In Volume 1, the raid on Harper's Ferry and the battles at 1st Manassas (Bull Run), Romny, Kernstown, McDowell, Winchester, Cross Keys and Port Republic, are detailed through maps, tactics, and analysis of the terrain, roads, transport, leadership and performance of the artillery, cavalry, quartermaster corps and medical corps. The reader follows the development of Jackson's strategy; his redeployment of officers having tested their skills in battle; and the difficulties he faced in managing the usually highly-praised Confederate cavalry. Volume 2 covers battles such as The Seven Days, 2nd Manassas (2nd Bull Run), Harper's Ferry, and Sharpsburg, ending with Chancellorsville, often seen as the premier battle of Lee and Jackson, where Jackson was fatally wounded while on reconnaissance at night.

Henderson paints a realistic picture of Jackson and the military situations in which he found himself. He draws out two lessons for military leadership – the need for clear strategic vision; backed up by detailed planning across all corps to achieve the strategy. He argues that Jackson had much in common with Grant. He ranks Jackson above both Lee and Grant, but below Wellington, who had much wider responsibilities. There are numerous battle maps, including a two-page topographic map of the Shenandoah Valley which enables the reader to perceive the implications of troop movements as well as the overall strategic plan.

This book would appeal to people with an interest in strategy, man-management, history or the American Civil War. It emphasises the intellectual capacity and vision required in high command and compares the American commanders with Napoleon, Wellington and other European contemporaries. The author's ability to analyse strategy while captivating the reader, makes the book a timeless, effective study.

Priscilla Leece

¹Cal Numbers: volume 1, 564.1/14187; volume 2, 564.1/14193.

²Each United States senator and congressman may nominate candidates for West Point. This ensures that the army is broadly representative of the national population.