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Edward G. Longacre, *The Early Morning of War: Bull Run, 1861*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2014. Pp. xviii, 662. ISBN 978-0-8061-4498-6.

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In *The Early Morning of War*, Edward Longacre (formerly Historian of the US Department of Defense) offers a corrective examination of the First Battle of Bull Run (21 July 1861), with acute character evaluations of the commanders involved in the fighting. Long albeit engaging narrative sections are punctuated by moments of keen analysis. The author skillfully shifts perspectives as the battle unfolds, telling the story of the battle from both sides. Most importantly, he expressly indicates points on which he is challenging or concurring with the arguments of other historians.

Discussing Union Gen. Irwin McDowell's checkered disciplinary history at West Point, Longacre writes that "the fact that in his first-class year he ranked 190 out of a class of 218 cadets on the conduct roll hints at a propensity to take risks that has gone undetected or overlooked by scholars" (9). This propensity may have caused McDowell to order a forward movement of artillery at Henry Hill without sufficient infantry support. This fateful order proved catastrophic for the Union, since the consequent capture of its artillery, argues Longacre, "changed the course of the battle and made its denouement inevitable" (395).

Though Longacre acknowledges such mistakes, he is not universally critical of the Union commander. Speaking of Gen. Winfield Scott's decision to place McDowell at the head of the Army of Northeastern Virginia (later, the Army of the Potomac) in 1861 and the "nervous energy" that caused McDowell "to flush," Longacre writes:

These were behavioral issues, however, not flaws of character. Other qualities seemed more important: McDowell had a solid background in military affairs, was intensely loyal, and appeared to have the strong support of General Scott. The integrity and earnestness he habitually displayed could not fail to impress his civilian superiors, many of whom came to see him as a soldier of vitality and intellect with a vision for dealing with those who would destroy the Republic. In Washington in April 1861, such men were in short supply. (21)

Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston receives similarly perceptive treatment: "Johnston's persona was multifaceted; most of his associates glimpsed a single side of it" (54). Some subordinates commented on his intellectual prowess and sense of humor, "others perceived a darker side," manifest in "his inherent moodiness and hair-trigger temper" (55). Johnston's perfectionism led to friction with Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard, who had taken command of the Confederate defenses at Bull Run after his capture of Fort Sumter. Having evacuated the Shenandoah Valley and assumed overall command of Beauregard's line, Johnston never seemed satisfied with his subordinate's preparations.

While his inordinate concern for his own prestige may not have set Johnston apart from other Civil War generals, Longacre highlights this facet of his character by describing his refusal to fire during a hunting excursion for fear of compromising his reputation as a marksman. He uses such anecdotes both to enliven his narrative and to set up later analysis. Johnston had vacillated over whether to evacuate Harpers Ferry, a position he considered untenable, and wanted explicit authorization from either Gen. Robert E. Lee or Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

[Johnston] realized his decision to withdraw might have serious consequences for his career in the Confederate service, and he wanted to protect his reputation. Here was the Johnston of old—the crack shot and hesitant hunter, reluctant to pull the trigger, to exercise judgment and take action, for fear it might harm him professionally if something went awry or looked blameworthy. Only if higher authority accepted the responsibility would he act. (119)

Longacre criticizes Confederate Adjutant General Samuel Cooper for failing to recognize this shortcoming in Johnston. Cooper had ordered him to leave the Valley and support Beauregard “if practicable.” “To any man chronically reluctant to pull the trigger,” comments Longacre, “to commit himself to a course fraught with uncertainty and dire repercussions, Cooper’s words offered an excuse for avoiding precipitate action” (231). Ultimately, though, Cooper cannot be convicted of any irredeemable mistakes; when pressed, Johnston did decamp for Manassas Junction.

Well captured here is the unique character of Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, whose host of idiosyncrasies led some to call him “crazy as a March hare” (66). He insisted, for example, on taking his meals standing up in order to aid digestion. He constantly sucked on lemons and abjured pepper, afraid it would cause his leg to ache. He wrapped himself in wet blankets before falling asleep in order to fight dyspepsia. But in evoking such quirks of character, Longacre never loses sight of the Virginian’s qualities as a field commander:

Habitually clad in the sun-bleached blue coat and yellowish cap he had worn at VMI, outwardly Jackson was anything but a model soldier. To some he was awkwardness personified. His future staff officer Henry Kyd Douglas claimed that “from riding a horse to handling a pen, [he was] the most ungraceful man in the army.” Only in battle would he rise above physical and emotional peculiarities to achieve greatness through a dazzling display of valor, tenacity, tactical ability, and an unwavering commitment to victory. Seemingly composed of equal parts stolidity and excitability, he was described by Richmond editor John W. Daniel as “Bessemer steel and electricity combined.” (66)

The narrative goes beyond a bird’s-eye view of the battle to clarify its significance within the larger context of the war. Of the Confederate volunteers who formed most of Beauregard’s command at Bull Run, the author writes that “Three verities sustained them: the coming struggle would be brief, the battle to be fought along Bull Run would be decisive, and the cause of Southern nationhood would prevail” (84). The most controversial assertion in the book comes in Longacre’s assessment of the Southern will to fight. After a perfunctory mention of states’ rights and the institution of slavery, he declares that “For most Southerners in arms, ... the main incentive to fight, one easily understood and keenly felt, was the desire to protect their homes, their families, and their communities against invasion” (85).¹ Whether this characterization of the Confederate rank-and-file is accurate is beyond the ken of this book.

If Southerners were motivated primarily by a desire to protect hearth and home, the soldiers in McDowell’s Army of Northeastern Virginia enlisted mostly out of boredom. Longacre’s contrast between the foot soldiers of the two armies is not altogether favorable for the Union:

Unlike Southerners, who had overriding personal reasons for taking up arms, McDowell’s recruits had a variety of reasons for joining up. Not all enlisted with the goal of whipping the scoundrels down south. Elnathan Tyler of the 3rd Connecticut was typical of those who regarded war as an adventure, a release from the humdrum of life in a small town. “I never fully made up my mind,” he later confessed, “whether I enlisted out of simple pure patriotism or not.... Many of my mates were going, business was dull, I was young and ready to go in for anything new or exciting.” Thrilling stories of warfare, digested in boyhood, had induced thousands of youngsters to join McDowell’s ranks. “We were all young then,” a member of the 2nd Michigan wrote after the war, “and the imagination was more active, the ambitions were greater.... Every man carried a baton in his knapsack and Hope, the enchantress, was clad in the most roseate hues.” (97–98)

Longacre stresses that First Bull Run dispelled such facile assumptions in the North and convinced the Lincoln administration that the Civil War would be a prolonged conflict demanding social, economic, and political revival.

1. Cf. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1988) 311: “A Confederate soldier captured early in the war put it ... simply. His tattered homespun uniform and even more homespun speech made it clear that he was not a member of the planter class. His captors asked why he, a nonslaveowner, was fighting to uphold slavery. He replied: ‘I’m fighting because you’re down here.’”

After McDowell's removal from command, Gen. George B. McClellan was called in from western Virginia, where he had won several skirmishes.

Willing and able to learn from his predecessor's mistakes, McClellan would not take the field at the head of the newly christened Army of the Potomac until many months of training turned raw recruits into soldiers who viewed war as a dirty job that had to be done rather than a glorified militia muster or an exercise in the manly arts.... The outcome of the war's first campaign would give the president and his political and military subordinates a mandate to wed the people of the North to an effort capable of changing the political, cultural, economic, and moral fabric of the country. (498, 501)

The North soon realized it would have to use to the full its vast reserves of manpower and stark advantage in manufacturing to bring the secessionists back into the Union.

Longacre assigns most of the blame for the Union defeat at Bull Run to Gen. Robert Patterson, the Pennsylvanian tasked with keeping Johnston in the Shenandoah Valley while McDowell confronted Beauregard at Bull Run. "Patterson's failure to hold the Army of the Shenandoah to its Valley home created a dramatic reversal of fortune for the forces vying for supremacy along Bull Run" (431). Conventional wisdom holds that McDowell's battle plan was "well thought out and eminently workable" (151), but that, misled by the assurances of General Scott, he was too confident of Patterson's willingness to engage the Confederate forces in the Valley. Before entraining along the Manassas Gap Railroad, Johnston's army had bivouacked at Winchester, anticipating an assault by Patterson, who instead marched his army to nearby Charles Town, avoiding an engagement altogether. "Scott paid little or no attention to this matter, casually assuming that his Mexican War subordinate would accomplish a complex and difficult mission without sufficient oversight and unambiguous orders from Washington" (151-52). "If Patterson could not be enticed to offer battle when ... he outnumbered the Valley Confederates three-to-one," writes Longacre, "he must lack the nerve and determination needed in a field commander" (168). Failure to keep Johnston in the Shenandoah Valley had grim repercussions for the Union forces who tried to capture Henry Hill on 21 July.

The author does cut Patterson some slack: "One of the excuses [Patterson] offered provides legitimate motive for shying away from contact.... This was his inability to rely on the will of his soldiers to serve beyond the imminent termination of their enlistment periods" (184). But this does little to exonerate Patterson. His role was to harry, not overwhelm, Johnston's men. Longacre more persuasively defends him by faulting Scott for his ambiguous orders. Initially, believing Patterson had removed to Charles Town in preparation for a pursuit of Johnston, Scott telegraphed his approval of the movement without explicitly stating his expectations. He did little to spur his timid subordinate to action. "This was a manifest injustice, for while General Scott could not have been attuned to every limitation and flaw in Patterson's constitution, he should have been skeptical that the man could be trusted to execute given orders promptly and properly" (248).

Longacre's most original contribution to the scholarship on First Bull Run is his criticism of historians who have lauded Johnston's decision to remove his men via the Manassas Gap line from Piedmont Station in the Shenandoah to Beauregard at Manassas Junction, which raised the force Johnston commanded at Bull Run to over thirty thousand effectives. Longacre insists that an overland march would have been even more beneficial to the Confederates.

Generations of scholars have cited the Manassas Gap Railroad's ability to get enough of Johnston's men to Manassas in time for action as critical to the outcome of the first large land battle of the conflict. It would seem, however, that too much importance has been placed on the value of the troop transfer by rail. It is true that Johnston's men moved glacially after leaving Winchester (it took Johnston's men eighteen hours to cover the twenty-three miles to Piedmont Station), but had they maintained that pace the rest of the way, they would have reached Beauregard in time to join the fight. In fact, had Johnston's army marched the thirty-four miles to Beauregard's headquarters in a little over twenty-four hours—which would have been entirely possible even with periodic rest halts—[Edmund Kirby] Smith's brigade could have reached Manassas by sundown on the twentieth or shortly afterward. The latest arrivals still would have enjoyed some hours to rest and regain their

stamina before being committed to battle. And if fatigued when the shooting started, the accompanying adrenalin rush would have quickly restored their physical and emotional strength. (266–67)

Whether or not Longacre's estimates are correct (the entire book is, to some extent, a consideration of past counterfactuals), his skepticism of the removal via the Manassas Gap line distinguishes him from previous historians.

Longacre also rectifies a misconception, less prominent among recent historians, concerning the civilian spectators at the Battle of Bull Run. "A majority ... appear to have come not to indulge a fascination with war or an obsession with death and destruction, but to witness history in the making." Some had personal ties to the combatants. "Parents and spouses of soldiers in the fight included the anxious wife of Colonel [Israel B.] Richardson and the elderly father of two members of General [Daniel] Tyler's 1st Ohio Infantry.... Even so, the image of a bacchanal just off the battlefield would outrage public opinion North and South" (309). Nor did the civilian spectators exacerbate the skedaddle that followed McDowell's withdrawal. Quoting John Hennessy,² Longacre writes that "the panic was a military, not a civilian event.... The civilians in fact affected (or were affected by) events that day very little indeed....' The majority of spectators left the battlefield in orderly fashion before the real terror set in" (469).

Such novel perspectives, together with an engaging if somewhat involved narrative of the tactical dynamics of the First Battle of Bull Run, will please and instruct any reader with an interest in the diplomatic and military history of the Civil War.

2. "War-Watchers at Bull Run," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 40 (Aug 2001) 69, 72.