



The American Military: A Concise History by Joseph T. Glatthaar.

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Review by Jared Dockery, Harding University (jndockery@harding.edu).

After his previous studies centered on the US Civil War and the American Revolution,¹ noted historian Joseph Glatthaar² (Univ. of North Carolina) has now written a succinct and accessible survey of American military history from colonial times to 2018. The book comprises four chronologically arranged chapters, each with a major thesis.

Chapter 1 examines the period from America's colonial experience to the end of the War of 1812. The militia system of colonial days had its advantages. It could summon plenty of troops, many with combat experience. It was inexpensive and offered an "excellent defensive system with true offensive capabilities" (2). But it also had drawbacks. Colonial governors could summon their militias for only two or three months a year, nor could they force them to fight outside the colony's borders. Cooperation between militias of neighboring colonies was uncommon. As the American frontier shifted westward, the quality of the militias in the eastern regions declined.

During the American Revolution, the professional Continental Army became "the backbone of the military struggle," but the militias still played a "central role" by controlling areas of the countryside not occupied by the British, interdicting enemy patrols, and lending manpower to military campaigns (8). Besides the Continental Army and the militia, the Americans also relied upon their French allies. Indeed, Glatthaar asserts that the colonies would likely have lost the war without all three of these forces. After the war, George Washington proposed a regular army of 2,631 officers and men, a military academy, and mandatory militia service.³ Instead, Congress voted for a regular army of just eighty officers and men, plus seven hundred militia volunteers (15). Militias continued to play a vital role in American defense during the War of 1812, when eight of every nine Americans who fought were militiamen (23).

Chapter 2 explores the period 1812 through the Spanish-American War; it concentrates on the improvement of US military professionalism by men like John C. Calhoun, Sylvanus Thayer, Jefferson Davis, Stephen Luce, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and Elihu Root. Their efforts notwithstanding, the American armed forces were chronically unprepared for mobilization when it was required. This chapter includes Glatthaar's discussion of the Civil War, featuring a brisk account of the ten-month interval between Antietam and Gettysburg:

[George] McClellan's hesitancy to advance prompted Lincoln to replace him with Major Generals Ambrose P. Burnside and then Joseph Hooker, but little changed. At Fredericksburg in December

1. Viz., *Soldiering in the Army of Northern Virginia: A Statistical Portrait of the Troops Who Served Under Robert E. Lee* (Chapel Hill: UNC Pr, 2011); *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse* (NY: Free Pr, 2008); and, with James Kirby Martin, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians in the American Revolution* (NY: Hill and Wang 2006).

2. Winner of the 2015 Society for Military History's Samuel Eliot Morison Prize for lifetime achievement.

3. Glatthaar incorrectly states that Washington asked for a regular army of 2,263 officers, but he actually asked for 2,631 officers and men. See "Washington's Sentiments on a Peace Establishment, 1 May 1783," National Archives Founders Online.

1862 and at Chancellorsville in April and May 1863, Lee executed Davis's strategy and defeated Union advances. Lee's greatest loss was Jackson, who was mortally wounded by friendly fire. Nonetheless, Lee then seized the initiative, taking 75,000 troops into Pennsylvania. Over three days in July, Lee's army fought an unanticipated battle at Gettysburg against a larger Union army led by Maj. Gen. George G. Meade. Although Meade's soldiers repelled repeated assaults and inflicted some 28,000 casualties, they failed to destroy Lee's injured army (41).

Chapter 3 concerns the period 1914–45, with special attention to technology and mechanization. After the United States entered World War I in 1917, its Navy quickly turned the Atlantic War around by introducing Adm. William S. Sims's convoy system, without which the British would have been knocked out of the war by November 1917 (56). In terms of ground combat, the Americans vainly sought to implement Gen. John J. Pershing's open fighting tactics, then transitioned to combined arms (62). Indeed, the war demonstrated the considerable potential of the airplane and tank, but their development in the interwar years was hindered by small defense budgets, unimaginative officers, and the postwar peace movement (67). Debates raged over strategic bombing and the usefulness of the aircraft carrier. Meanwhile, the Marines developed new amphibious landing doctrine and acquired the tracked and untracked landing craft that would make it possible (70).

Mobilization and technology played obvious roles in Allied victory in World War II. Glatthaar admits that Germany "had better tanks and weapons," but argues "the Allies had superior artillery and aircraft, and their tanks and vehicles were simple in design, durable, quick to build, easy to repair, and gave them speed and mobility" (79). Other reasons for the Allied victory in the European theater included the "modified P-51 fighter plane" (presumably a reference to the drop tank which extended its range), the availability of ULTRA intelligence, and the contribution of the Red Army, which killed two million German troops by June 1944 (79). In the Pacific War, Glatthaar credits American torpedo-bombers, fighters, dive-bombers, submarines, and *Essex*-class carriers in securing US victory (83).

Chapter 4 analyzes the post-1945 time period, highlighting the limits of US military power seen in Korea and Vietnam. The author's assessment of Lyndon Johnson as lacking "the knowledge, temperament, military structure, or agenda" (103) needed for dealing with the Vietnam crisis, is especially biting. The 1991 Gulf War seemed to have "vanquished the ghosts of Vietnam" and confirmed that technology had so completely revolutionized warfare that earlier military history had little left to teach. This idea, known as the Revolution in Military Affairs, "proved to be a severely misguided notion," the author argues (114–15). Nevertheless, the technological edge enjoyed by the United States showed its limitations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Joseph Glatthaar has succeeded in writing a concise, lucid, and highly engaging introduction to American military history. Its mere 127 pages of text are enhanced by a few black-and-white photographs and illustrations, footnotes for direct quotations only, and a five-page bibliography that will assist general readers seeking to further explore topics that pique their interest. Professors teaching undergraduate survey courses in American military history will do well to assign *The American Military* as a basic textbook, to be supplemented as needed by readings from scholarly journals or monographs.