

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Military Legacy of the American Civil War in Europe

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The American Civil War (1861-1865) occurred during an eventful and violent period in European history. Between 1853 and 1871, a series of conflicts completed the demolition of the Congress diplomatic system that had been erected in Vienna at the end of the Napoleonic Wars: the Crimean War (1853-1856), the Italian War (1859), the Danish War (1864), the Austro-Prussian War (1866), and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). The campaigns and battles associated with these conflicts provided European soldiers with a great deal of food for thought. Indeed, the experience, study, and consequences of these wars produced considerations that fundamentally influenced European military thinking for the rest of the century. Under these circumstances, it was often difficult for the American Civil War to exert a palpable impact on European armies.

One of the biggest factors that limited the relevance of the Civil War military experience was the widespread recognition that American political and social conditions were far different from those in Europe. Whether they admired or loathed the United States, Europeans associated America with a unique brand of democracy. Indeed, the character of American middle-class democracy seemed to go a long way toward explaining the peculiar nature of the Civil War. Large, enthusiastic, amply supplied (at least on the Federal side), well equipped, unskilled volunteer armies eventually learned their trade on the job, but not before a great deal of blood and treasure had been expended in indecisive battles. The conflict was widely understood in Europe as a people's war in which large numbers of citizen-soldiers did the fighting, an extraordinary proportion of the population was materially involved in supporting the war effort, and huge electorates exerted the primary influence in shaping the aims of their governments. Such a situation was far different from what obtained in most of Europe after the Revolutions of 1848. Because they failed, these revolutions left the political, social, and national aspirations of many Europeans unfulfilled. States uneasily sought simultaneously to accommodate and suppress these aspirations. For that reason, they walked a fine line as they attempted to enhance their military effectiveness in the middle of the nineteenth century. They hoped to reach a tolerable settlement with what often seemed like the inevitable onrush of political and social democracy. They sought to harness the latent power of emerging

modern industrial society while mitigating its worst social consequences. And they negotiated with national feelings that had the potential to unify or divide their peoples.

At the same time, the theaters of operations in America were far different from what Europeans were accustomed to at home. Both the Federal government and the Confederacy maintained a number of medium-sized armies strewn across a vast span of territory. By European standards, the force to space ratio in America was low. Concentrating troops would have been difficult when much of the country, relative to Europe, was rugged, sparsely settled, and not thoroughly cultivated. Under these conditions, railroads became indispensable for the movement of armies and supplies across unprecedented distances, while the telegraph helped with strategic communication. The availability of large, navigable rivers also facilitated logistical support. By contrast, European operations during this period were conducted in much smaller spaces by larger armies. For example, in 1859, over 350,000 French, Sardinian, and Austrian troops battled it out within the confines of Lombardy—a province roughly the same size as New Hampshire. In 1866, contemporaries considered Field Marshal Helmut Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke's dispersal of Prussian forces along the frontier with Bohemia a dangerous expedient; the Prussian chief of staff's three armies were scattered along an arc no greater than the distance between Memphis and Nashville. Obviously, the challenges of managing an army were far different in America than they were in Europe.

Because of the foregoing reasons, the American military experience did not always provide answers to the kinds of questions that Europeans asked. Europeans had unique concerns that were produced by their own experiences. Were social and political changes necessary to produce efficient armed forces, and if so, what were they? What was the most cost-effective way of maintaining a large, politically reliable army that could be called upon to fight at short notice? How should political and military authorities share the burden of producing strategy, doctrine, and plans? What were the best ways of using railroads and telegraphs for the purposes of mobilization, concentration, and supply? How could armies assume the tactical offensive which was the only way of winning battles (and therefore wars) when breech-loading, rifled artillery and firearms provided the tactical defensive with an extended killing zone as well as a high rate of fire? The American experience appeared to provide suitable answers to only some of these questions.

For good reason, then, the great powers tended to turn to their European stock of experiences as they sought to improve their armed forces. After all, it made more sense for Moltke to pay close attention to the Italian War in which two of Prussia's potential enemies fought (he did indeed commission a study of that conflict) than to subject the far-off Civil War to a thorough examination. Once he defeated Austria and France in relatively short order, it should come as no surprise that the other great powers, including Prussia's erstwhile foes, started taking pages out of Moltke's book. Yet, even when states tended to copy the practices of their neighbors, this mimicry was often filtered through existing national traditions. As the foregoing indicates, military reforms very much depended on the immediate context. As we shall see, substantial changes generally

occurred in response to a particular crisis that highlighted specific deficiencies—either military defeat or the immediate and proximate threat of a hostile neighbor.

Any study of what Europeans learned from the American conflict must commence with Jay Luvaas' *The Military Legacy of the Civil War: The European Inheritance* (first published in 1959 and reissued with a new introduction in 1988). In his own classic work, *The Face of Battle*, John Keegan claimed that Luvaas' book was a "glittering example" of a book that did not succumb to "that weakness endemic to the study of ideas" which was "the failure to demonstrate connection between thought and action."¹ Perhaps Keegan may have been more correct in arguing that Luvaas' excellence lay precisely in his recognition of the gap between thought and action. *The Military Legacy of the Civil War* argues that although Europeans observed the American conflict closely and wrote a number of penetrating works about it, "there never was a time when the Civil War exerted a direct influence upon military doctrine in Europe."² The product of a sound judgment, Luvaas' book is fluently written and cogently argued. And yet, as is so often the case, this first word on European lessons derived from the Civil War ought not to serve as the last. First, while studying the findings of European observers, Luvaas often judges them by the degree to which they correctly understood the lessons of the Civil War (namely, that rifled weaponry would exert a huge impact on tactics and fortifications), as if such lessons were matters of objective fact. In other words, he seems to assume that lessons are discovered rather than constructed. Second, Luvaas does not always fully explain the "background of ideas and doctrines" that influenced Europeans who constructed these lessons.³ His emphasis tends to be on the supply rather than the demand for information in Europe about the Civil War. For sure, Luvaas makes general references to the thoughts, concerns, and experiences of European militaries, but these do not always thoroughly illustrate the variety of forces acting on those soldiers who sought to assess the significance of the American conflict. He is ultimately correct in claiming that European writers often saw what they wanted to and that they were more inclined to look at what they believed were more relevant lessons generated closer to home. Yet since European perspectives are often sketched with insufficient clarity, it becomes difficult sometimes to understand or empathize with their attitudes toward the Civil War.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the European great powers were the only ones in the world that possessed the political organization, the administrative competence, the industrial strength, the technological know-how, and social cohesion necessary to fight a conflict that resembled the American Civil War. Yet as the foregoing indicates, there were many reasons that the great powers of Europe did not use the American example as a model to reconstruct their forces wholesale. In an essay that stresses the degree to which the American Civil War's military legacy in Europe was restricted, it makes sense to discuss the attitudes of all the great powers, even the ones where the influence of the conflict was minimal. For the same reason, it also makes sense

¹ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 29.

² Jay Luvaas, *The Military Legacy of the Civil War: The European Inheritance*, 1988 ed, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 226.

³ *Ibid.*, ix.

to give a full accounting of major military developments in each state. These approaches help highlight why Europeans garnered surprisingly few lessons from the American war.

The American Civil War's legacy was perhaps weakest in Austria; links between the two countries were tenuous, and the Austrian army showed a decided reluctance to reform throughout this period. Emperor Franz Josef was not inclined to shake up an army that was responsible for internal security and whose loyalty had allowed him to retain the throne during the revolutionary troubles of 1848 and 1849. Indeed, the most important change experienced by the army after the Revolutions of 1848 was that it fell under the Emperor Franz Joseph I's personal command—a development that was of a piece with Franz Josef's policy of neo-absolutism. Throughout the 1850s, army reform was piecemeal, gradual, and often nominal. For most of the decade, though, the army seemed capable of overawing its domestic and foreign enemies. At home, Hungary as well as Lombardy-Venetia remained quiet. In 1850, a show of force at Olmutz compelled Prussia to accept the resurrection of an Austrian-led German Confederation, and in 1854, an Austrian demonstration convinced the Russians to evacuate the Danubian Principalities. In 1859, however, the execrably led Austrians were defeated by the French in northern Italy after slugfests at Magenta and Solferino (Franz Josef commanded his forces personally at the latter battle). After Solferino, the Austrian emperor observed in classic *ancien regime* style, "I have lost a battle. I pay with a province."⁴ Despite the seeming insouciance of Franz Josef's words, there was a widespread sense that the army could not perform so poorly and expect to maintain domestic tranquility while upholding Austrian claims to great power status. There remained, however, a great reluctance to reform an institution that seemed like the only barrier between the throne and revolution.

The Civil War occurred during the period between the defeat in Italy (1859) and the even greater disaster suffered at Prussian hands in Bohemia (1866). By this point, the Austrians were already familiar with many of what Luvaas would describe as the lessons of the American conflict. Although scholars often present the Prussians as pioneers when it comes to the integration of railroads and warfare, the Austrians won the showdown at Olmutz partly because they used rail lines efficiently to concentrate a force of 75,000 men in Bohemia. The Austrians also began rearming their infantry with muzzle-loading Lorenz rifles in 1855. In 1863, after extensive tests, they decided to distribute bronze, muzzle-loading, rifled cannons (modeled on the French pattern) to the artillery—a branch that performed particularly well in 1866. For sure, the *Stosstaktik* developed to deal with the increased firepower of enemy infantry harkened back to old traditions of bayonet attacks launched in close order, but it did represent an attempt to learn from what the French had done in 1859.⁵

⁴ Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 73.

⁵ *Stosstaktik* amounted to quick bayonet charges mounted by columns of infantry that sought to reach the enemy before he could inflict sufficient casualties to halt the advance. Geoffrey Wawro argues that the new Austrian tactics were also a product of the fact that Austrian line regiments were undertrained and underfunded. See Geoffrey Wawro, "An 'Army of Pigs': The Technical, Social, and Political Bases of Austrian Shock Tactics, 1859-1866" in *The Journal of Military History* 59 (July 1995), 407-33.

Although it had appeared, more or less, to keep up with contemporary military developments and felt disinclined to reform, elements of the Austrian army did show some interest in the American war raging overseas. Civil War buffs who have read Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels* are familiar with Fitzgerald Ross, the English-born, Austrian hussar captain who smuggled himself into the Confederacy in May 1863 and spent just under a year there.⁶ Ross eventually wrote a series of articles about his experiences in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and John Blackwood later published Ross' *Cities and Camps of the Confederate States* in 1865. There is no reason to think that Ross' book had much influence on the Austrian army. For one thing, his anecdotal (and very pro-Southern) work, which was published in Britain, aimed more at satisfying British curiosity about the Confederacy than revealing military information to Austria. For another, after going on furlough in 1862, Ross spent almost no time in Austria; he only returned in 1868 to resign his commission.

A potentially more useful report, but one about which we know little, reached the Austrian high command in 1864. In September of that year, a Captain Boleslawsky, formerly an Austrian officer associated with the "Royal Imperial Military Geographical Institute" but now serving Emperor Maximilian I in Mexico, supplied the Quartermaster-General with a "detailed report" on the American war that covered signals, field telegraphs, railroads, mines, artillery, balloons, photography, clothing, and soldiers' packs. Based on a "lengthy presence in the theater of war," the report included books, samples, and an album of 46 photographs.⁷ What the army made of this report is unclear. It did serve partly as the basis for an article by Captain Wendelin Boeheim (a pioneer officer who had just completed a teaching stint at the Theresian Military Academy and who later became a prominent historian of weaponry) in the *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*. The article detailed the bridge-building exploits of Federal engineering officers and the U.S. Military Railroad. Among other things, it described Brigadier General Irvin McDowell's bridging of the Rappahannock in April 1862 as among the "most impressive engineering achievements in military history."⁸ One should not, however, make too much of this essay. For one thing, stitched together as it was from Boleslawsky's report and several obscure German secondary sources, this article did not always express an easy familiarity with the war. For another, although the journal was officially sponsored by the army, a disappointingly small number of officers actually subscribed to *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*.⁹

⁶ In 1859, just over half of the Austrian army's officer corps was born outside the empire. Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1976), 42. This work is probably the best English-language history of the Austrian army between 1815 and 1918.

⁷ In 1861, French forces invaded Mexico after the government there suspended interest payments to its creditors. Eventually, in 1864, Emperor Napoleon III of France installed Maximilian I (the younger brother of the Austrian Emperor, Franz Josef I) as the emperor of Mexico. A substantial number of Austrian officers came to Mexico with Maximilian to serve his armed forces and help staff his administration.

⁸ Wendelin Boeheim, "Das Eisenbahnbau-Corps der Armee der vereinigten Staaten; seine Errichtung, Versuche und seine Leistungen im letzten Kriege" *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* VII (1866), 8-10. See also Luvaas, *Military Legacy*, 8, 123.

⁹ Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, 62.

Whatever the case, Austria's situation changed dramatically in 1866 when it was defeated in Bohemia by the Prussians. After this disaster, far-reaching reform could no longer be put off, and the *Ausgleich*¹⁰ soon followed in 1867. The status of the army became the subject of much acrimonious discussion during the negotiations that culminated in this agreement. As it adapted to constitutionalism and the somewhat complicated arrangements of the new Dual Monarchy, the army also attempted to modernize. Understandably, in doing so, it did not look so much to the United States as it did to Prussia. Over the years, Austria eventually adopted Prussian organization and tactics, Prussian-inspired universal military service (theoretically at least, in 1868), and a Prussian-style general staff (which more or less occurred when Friedrich Beck became chief of staff in 1881).

The effect of the American Civil War on Russia also appears to have been negligible. While the American conflict raged, the Russian Empire turned inward as it embarked on an ambitious modernization program in the wake of its defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856).¹¹ It is in this context that the famous visit of Tsar Alexander II's naval vessels to New York and San Francisco during the Civil War (1863-1864) should be viewed. This visit was not a confident assertion of Russian power in support of a friendly American state; rather, it was an attempt to save the Baltic and Pacific squadrons from blockade or destruction should Britain and France come to blows with Russia over the Polish uprising (1863).

The real reason behind the sending of these squadrons to America should remind us of the degree to which the Crimean War had shocked Russian leadership, left it feeling vulnerable, and inspired it to lie low as it rebuilt Russian power. In 1813 and 1814, Russia had constituted the backbone of the coalition that had defeated Emperor Napoleon I, and Tsar Alexander I had projected his military power all the way into western Europe. A mere forty years later, the Russians had been badly beaten on their own doorstep by a combined French, British, Ottoman, and Piedmontese force. The Russian army had suffered from poor leadership, inferior weapons, dreadful logistical difficulties, and the lack of a trained reserve. Yet, the army's defeat was widely understood as a symptom of Russia's overall backwardness; disaster in the Crimea "had exposed the shortcomings of every institution in Russia."¹² A number of contemporary Russian observers traced many of these deficiencies back to serfdom. As Tsar Alexander II reluctantly admitted, only the abolition of this institution could promote social stability, modernize the economy, and serve as the foundation for an effective army. The Tsar promulgated an Edict of Emancipation in February 1861, the first in a series of Great Reforms that were implemented well into the mid-1870s. These changes, along with the appointment of

¹⁰ This compromise created the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Hungary was allowed to run its own internal affairs with its own parliament and laws. Under the new system, Austria and Hungary shared not only the same emperor but the same financial, foreign, and military policy.

¹¹ This policy was referred to as "recueillement" after a famous phrase in a note that Aleksandr Gorchakov, the Foreign Minister, sent to his ambassadors: "la Russie ne boude pas; elle se recueille"—"Russia is not sulking; she is composing herself."

¹² Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 443.

Field Marshall Count Dmitry Miliutin as Minister of War in November 1861, set the stage for the transformation of the Russian army.

A tireless reformer, Miliutin retained the ministry for twenty years. Miliutin's reforms were many, but mainly they attempted to improve army administration, create a general staff, change peacetime deployments to enhance the speed of mobilization, remodel the peacetime structure of the army to accord with its wartime organization, overhaul the army's tactics, rearm the rank and file with modern firearms, and revamp the education of officers as well as generals. Miliutin's crowning achievement, which came in 1874, consisted of making all Russian men liable for military service for six years with the army and nine with the reserves—thus creating a large, well-trained force that could be expanded dramatically upon mobilization.¹³

Miliutin was a Russian patriot who paid homage to his country's traditions, but he also looked abroad for inspiration. To use one example, Russian interest in building railways for strategic purposes rose dramatically in the wake of Prussia's victory over Austria, and the introduction of universal military service mimicked the Prussian system (in practice, though, only about half of each class was conscripted in peacetime). To use another, the Russian general staff was placed under the war ministry just as it was in France (if truth be told, though, this outcome had as much or more to do with army politics as it did with emulation of France). Finally, the first modern, breech-loading, bolt-action rifle the Russians armed themselves with was the Berdan II, or Berdanka, which was designed by an American, Colonel Hiram Berdan, the famed organizer of the 1st and 2nd U.S. Sharpshooters during the Civil War. This tendency to take the best the world had to offer did not necessarily extend to lessons from the Civil War. It was only when the Russians discussed the role of cavalry that the American war appeared to exert any influence. Although a number of officers persisted in thinking about cavalry as a shock arm, various mid-nineteenth-century conflicts, including the Civil War, suggested to some Russian thinkers that horsemen should fulfill a different function. In the early 1870s, the views of N. N. Sukhotin, a young staff officer who had studied the activities of cavalry during the American Civil War, assumed some prominence. Based on the American experience, Sukhotin asserted that cavalry still could play an important part in warfare by undertaking large raids. Such raids, he claimed, could provide intelligence, undermine the opposition's logistics, inflict substantial material damage on the enemy's economy, and even exert an important political influence. Such arguments led to expectations that Russian cavalry ought to develop a capacity for deep raids, but confusion about this arm's primary mission persisted.¹⁴

¹³ For an excellent summary of Miliutin's reforms, see Bruce W. Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 11-50. For a good English-language account of the pre-reform Russian army, see John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Army under Nicholas I 1825-1855* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1965).

¹⁴ Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets*, 45-46; David Schimmelpennick van der Oye and Bruce W. Menning, eds., *Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press and Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162-3.

Like Russia, Prussia also underwent a number of important military reforms during this period. These contributed to a great deal of political turbulence, but they also led to military success. Although Prussia (which eventually served as the foundation of a new German Empire in 1871) became a model for military reformers across Europe due to its remarkable victories over Austria and France, that did not stop Prussian officers from taking heed of the American conflict.

Prussian reforms were inspired by a desire to create a more politically reliable armed force and remedy the country's military weakness (which had become noticeable first with the climb-down at Olmutz and later with the awkward mobilization of 1859 during the Italian war). In 1860, Lieutenant General Albrecht Graf von Roon, the War Minister, introduced a bill in the *Landtag* that sought to increase the annual intake of recruits, reduce the significance of the *Landwehr* (the militia that helped bulk up the line regiments in wartime and which was valued by radicals as ensuring a measure of popular participation in the armed forces), and produce an army that could be significantly expanded by well-trained reservists upon mobilization. The *Landtag* eventually refused to approve any budget that included funding for these reforms, but Emperor Wilhelm I's government, led by Otto von Bismarck, who became Minister President in 1862, went ahead anyway and collected the taxes necessary to follow through on Roon's proposals. Meanwhile, the army, particularly the General Staff under Helmut von Moltke, sought to enhance Prussia's military preparedness by making a thorough study of the country's own experiences as well as those of neighboring powers. The General Staff reconceived Prussian strategy as it perfected the machinery of a railway-supported mobilization and gave serious thought to overcoming the tactical problems associated with new breech-loading rifled arms. All of this preparation paid off with a spectacularly rapid defeat of Austria in 1866. Prussia not only established itself as the pre-eminent German power, but Bismarck also obtained an opportunity to disarm his political opponents with a Bill of Indemnity in the *Landtag* that gave the government retroactive approval for having operated without a legally approved budget for four years. Victory over France in 1871 turned a Prussian-based Germany into Europe's most powerful state and a model for militaries everywhere.

Given its domestic turmoil and military success, the Prussian/German army might have been forgiven for overlooking America events. Moltke has frequently been quoted as dismissing the American Civil War as consisting of "two armed mobs chasing each other around the country, from which nothing could be learned."¹⁵ Such a statement seems out of character, and Major General William T. Sherman, who met Moltke after the war, refused to believe the Prussian had used such words, because, "I did not presume that he was such an ass as to say that."¹⁶ Moltke was widely read, well-traveled, and extremely thoughtful. Moreover, the Prussian army was successful precisely because

¹⁵ Luvaas, *Military Legacy*, 126.

¹⁶ Jay Luvaas, "The Influence of the German Wars of Unification on the United States" in Stig Forster and Jorg Nagler, eds., *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871* (New York: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1997), 605.

certain elements of the officer corps were curious about developments in the wider world. The dispatch of Captain Justus Scheibert on an official mission to the United States in 1863 was evidence of just such an attitude. The General Staff wanted information about the effect of rifled artillery on different types of fortifications in America, and with the blessing of Roon, Scheibert (who was considered an expert on modern fortifications) was sent across the Atlantic. As the title of his popular travelogue indicates (*Sieben Monate in den rebellenden Staaten*, written in 1868), Scheibert spent seven months in North America, almost all of them in the Confederacy. Scheibert saw a great deal of the Army of Northern Virginia, where, among other things, he served on Major General J.E.B. Stuart's staff.

He also studied the Confederate works at Charleston and Wilmington extensively before returning home. Scheibert was one of the few continental soldiers who believed the Americans outdid Europe in a number of ways and that the American conflict pointed toward the future of warfare. Although he filed a report with the General Staff upon his return and delivered a series of lectures to officers about his experiences, his most interesting and comprehensive works were *Der Bürgerkrieg in den nordamerikanischen Staaten* (1874) and *Das Zusammenwirken der Armee und Marine* (1887).¹⁷ Contrary to the claims of many scholars, these books indicate that Scheibert was just as interested in strategy as he was in tactics. Although he expressed much respect for figures such as Stuart, Jackson, Grant, and especially Sherman, Scheibert worshipped Lee, seeing him as a master of the strategic defensive who knew how to use interior lines to perfection. At the same time, Scheibert recognized the degree to which Federal success, particularly in the West, depended on inter-service cooperation; neither the army nor the navy could have won the war without the cooperation of the other. Scheibert also devoted a great deal of attention to tactics. His account of the way infantry tactics developed over the course of the war is somewhat over-schematic, but it is also insightful in its understanding of the way soldiers behaved in combat and how this behavior influenced formations. In the middle period of the war, he argued, successive lines of infantry, preceded by a dense cloud of skirmishers, would often clump up in attack and become exceedingly difficult to maneuver. In the last year, however, Lee had too few men to engage in anything but the tactical defensive, and tactics came to "resemble a siege, a war of shovel and axe." Scheibert's description of the Overland Campaign very much sounds like the type of fighting that characterized World War I.¹⁸ While Scheibert understood why the war devolved to this level and praised Lee's conduct (giving due respect to Grant), he clearly preferred, all things being equal, decision won on the open field. In discussing the tactics of American cavalry and artillery, Scheibert clearly recognized the challenges presented by American topography; broken up, forested ground limited the concentration and thus the decisiveness of the former while restricting the range of the latter. So far as fortifications were concerned, Scheibert believed that earthworks had demonstrated their great superiority to masonry.

¹⁷ Both works have been translated into English. See Justus Scheibert, Frederic Trautmann, trans., *A Prussian Observes the American Civil War: The Military Studies of Justus Scheibert* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

Scheibert was well suited to articulate and broadcast his impressions of the American war. He possessed a fluent pen. Highly regarded by his superiors, he was also very well connected. Finally, he was an experienced soldier who saw action against the Danes, the Austrians, and the French. He certainly exerted a greater influence than, say, his friend, Heros von Borcke, the Prussian dragoon lieutenant who stayed in America for almost three years and served for an extended period of time on Stuart's staff.¹⁹ Scheibert's account dominated German images of the Civil War. However, a paradox that ran through his work undermined the influence of his findings. On the one hand, his book stressed the degree to which the war was fought under circumstances that differed greatly from those in Europe. On the other, he constantly pointed out that the Americans, at their best, fought very much like the Prussians. It is no surprise, then, that the German military believed it had more to learn from studying the Bohemian campaign of 1866 and the battle of Sedan (1870) than, say, the Peninsula campaign and the battle of the Wilderness. As the years passed, the General Staff would pay close attention to subsequent wars, especially those involving European belligerents, and the American conflict would diminish even further in significance.

The French, however, submitted the American Civil War to somewhat closer inspection. This interest seems to have stemmed from the fact that France was a "military nation" where the Second Empire promoted the cult of Napoleon I as well as military values. At the same time, the support of the army was indispensable to sustaining the Second Empire's position at home as well as its claims to pre-eminence in Europe. Military affairs, then, were of great interest to France. Undoubtedly, another reason French commentators expressed interest in the American war was because many recognized that all was not well with the French army in the late 1860s.²⁰ Concerns about the army's inadequacies began to turn to panic after Prussia's rapid victory over Austria in 1866. Reports sent by Colonel Baron Stoffel from Bohemia (he was then the military

¹⁹ Published by William Blackwood and Sons, *Memoirs of the Confederate War of Independence* appeared in Britain under Borcke's name in 1866. The genesis of this work is interesting. Fitzgerald Ross, who had already published *Cities and Camps of the Confederate States* with William Blackwood and Sons, asked John Blackwood if he was interested in an account written by Borcke, who had kept a diary while serving in America. Ross understood full well that Blackwood was a Confederate sympathizer who had published a number of accounts—both books and articles in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*—by European visitors that presented the South in a good light. Blackwood jumped at the chance, but Borcke's English was so poor that he needed assistance in expanding his diary (which was written in German) into a full-sized book for a British audience. Initially, John Reuben Thompson, the Southern poet and journalist, who was then in Britain, started the process of translating and ghost-writing Borcke's account in English. The two men had a falling out, however, and a "Mr. Kenny" replaced Thompson. The book, which is very favorable to the Confederacy, mainly relates Borcke's adventures in the Army of Northern Virginia and does not tackle important military developments during the war. For more details regarding Blackwood's relationship with Borcke, the publisher's pro-Confederate views, and the difficulties of producing Borcke's work, see the Blackwood Papers at the National Library of Scotland, MS 4196, MS 4197, MS 4203, MS 4207, and MS 30,360.

²⁰ A thoughtful and well researched investigation of the problems that plagued the late Second Empire's army appears in Richard Holmes, *The Road to Sedan: The French Army 1866-70* (Atlantic, NJ: Humanities Press Inc., 1984).

attaché to the French ambassador in Berlin) galvanized Emperor Napoleon III to action.²¹ The much-reported effectiveness of the Prussians' Dreyse needle gun led the French army to adapt its own bolt-action rifle, the famous Chassepot (officially known as the *Fusil modèle 1866*). Meanwhile, Napoleon III sought to create machinery that would provide the French army with a large, trained reserve that could augment the line regiments upon mobilization and confront the Prussian-led North German Confederation on equal terms. Unfortunately for the emperor, this initiative encountered much opposition in the *Corps législatif* and the resulting *Loi Niel* (1868) represented a series of compromises that did not produce the pool of trained manpower the French army required in 1870.²²

In 1861, though, as French observers began crossing the Atlantic to witness American events, the demise of the Second Empire was still well in the future. Early in the war, a number of prominent Frenchmen found their way to the United States. In July 1861, Prince Napoleon arrived in New York with an entourage of military men, including his second aide-de-camp, Lieutenant-Colonel Camille Ferri Pisani, an extremely experienced officer. Pisani wrote a series of letters detailing political, social, and military conditions in America at the time, and these were later published in book form as *Lettres sur les États-Unis d'Amérique* (1862). The next year, the Prince de Joinville, son of King Louis-Philippe (who had been deposed in 1848), also visited America with two of his nephews, the Count of Paris and the Duke of Chartres. All three served on Major General George Brinton McClellan's staff during the Peninsula campaign. The Prince de Joinville would go on to produce a very credible history of this campaign entitled "Campagne de l'Armée du Potomac, Mars-Juillet, 1862" that appeared in *Revue des Deux Mondes*. This visit to America also inspired the Count of Paris to write (but not complete) a meticulously researched eight-volume history of the war, *Histoire de la guerre civile en Amérique* (1874-1883).

These works were all good in their own way, and they served as the raw materials for later histories, but probably even more influential in France were the works of official military observers sent by the Swiss and French armies. Lieutenant-Colonel Ferdinand Lecomte, a staff officer in the Swiss army who edited the *Revue militaire suisse* and had observed the Italian War of 1859, was authorized to visit the United States in 1862 and published a widely read report the next year.²³ This study was based not only on

²¹ See Le Colonel Baron Stoffel, *Rapports Militaires; Ecrits de Berlin 1866-1870* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1871). For an important contribution to the debate concerning the French army's preparedness before 1870, see [Louis-Jules Trochu], *L'Armée Française en 1867* (Paris: Amtot, 1867).

²² The *Corps législatif* was the lower house of France's legislature under Emperor Napoleon III. The *Loi Niel*, named after Marshal Adolphe Niel, then the Minister of War, sought to revamp recruitment of France's army. Under its terms, soldiers who were drafted into the army spent four years with the colors (instead of the traditional seven) and five more years with the reserves. All those who escaped the draft were supposed to receive training as part of the Mobile Guard.

²³ The report is entitled *De la guerre actuelle des États-Unis d'Amérique: Rapport présenté au département militaire Suisse* (Lausanne: Imprimerie Pache, 1862). This work appeared in America as *The War in the United States: Report to the Swiss Military Department* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1863). Lecomte also

Lecomte's own experiences but also a wide reading that included numerous American, British, French, and German sources. Like many French observers, Lecomte was impressed with the volcanic energy of the Americans who had quickly raised and equipped large armies that "have shown military capacities equal to those of the best troops in the world."²⁴ He was also struck by the inventiveness and productivity of Americans. At the end of the last volume of *Guerre de la Sécession*, he remarked of them:

Their numerous breech-loading and repeating rifles, their revolvers, their enormous weapons factories, their heavy artillery (up to 300 pounds rifled and 1000 pounds smoothbore); their monitors and their armored fortifications; their field and stationary artillery, their Requa batteries, Gatling guns, locomotives, machined-parts, etc., etc., their rapid construction of rail lines, bridges, roads, military canals, their admirable use of telegraphs and signals; next, camping equipment, rubber ponchos, the Benham infantry shovel, the impact of ambulances among other things—these are real achievements that ought to be documented with care in a large volume.²⁵

Nonetheless, Lecomte spotted a number of problems with both armies—units had been recruited from volunteers instead of conscripts, regiments were too small, discipline was faulty, wagon trains were too big, and armies were characterized by much political divisiveness. Indeed, he argued, "In the matter of organization, discipline, mass maneuvers, military dress, [and] hierarchical spirit, the war of secession has not furnished anything new worthy of study and imitation."²⁶ At the same time, "In the realm of strategy, there's nothing much to bring up." Despite the heavy use of new technologies like the railway and telegraph as well as the repeated resort to interservice operations, Lecomte concluded that the war merely confirmed the strategic precepts laid down by the prominent military theorist General of Brigade Antoine Henri Baron Jomini many years before.²⁷

In 1864, the French Minister of War, General of Division Jacques Louis Randon, eventually got around to sending an official military mission to the United States consisting of Lieutenant-Colonel François de Chanal and Captain Pierre Guzman. The two spent over six months visiting camps, arsenals, foundries, and the Army of the Potomac. According to Luvaas, Guzman submitted a report that later became the basis for *L'Armée américaine pendant la guerre de la sécession* (1872) (which was released under de Chanal's name). It was also the foundation for an important study commissioned by the War Ministry and written by F. P. Vigo Roussillon, a professor of

wrote *Guerre de la Sécession: Esquisse des événements militaires et politiques des États-Unis de 1861 à 1865*, 3 vols. (Paris: Ch. Tanera, 1866-1867).

²⁴ Lecomte, *War in the United States*, 53-54.

²⁵ Lecomte, *Guerre de la Sécession*, 3:289.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:291.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:290.

military administration at the staff college, entitled *Puissance militaire des États-Unis d'Amérique, d'après la guerre de la sécession 1861-1865* (1866). These two significant works differ in tenor, but both expressed a great deal of respect for American military achievements. Both de Chanal and Roussillon were impressed by the Americans' spirit—a combination of enthusiasm, civic virtue, selflessness, and patriotism—that allowed them to assemble large armies and overcome all manner of obstacles. Indeed, Roussillon likened the American troops of 1861 to the French revolutionary forces of 1792. De Chanal even argued that American discipline bore comparison to that of European armies even if it did not manifest itself in the same way. Both authors looked favorably upon West Point and the officers of the old regular army. And both were also impressed by the efficiency with which Americans transported and supplied their soldiers by rail. Yet, Roussillon in particular believed that since American military administration had grown in a rapid and ad hoc fashion during the war, it was not as efficient and unified as it ought to be (and certainly not as good as the French article). While discipline was good, it did not compensate for a widespread lack of military knowledge and an insufficiency of military spirit. Neither man seemed to think much of American tactics. Indeed, as Roussillon put it, “in the American army, like ours under [the first] republic, strategy was much more important than tactics.”²⁸ The picture that emerges from de Chanal and Roussillon's works is one of a very powerful but hardly flawless force that bore the mark of America's political and social idiosyncrasies. After some consideration, Roussillon dismissed the idea that a volunteer force called out in the event of an emergency would prove as useful as a standing army. Still, Roussillon believed the war had “powerful lessons” to teach the rest of the world.²⁹ Both authors seemed to think the war pointed toward the future by showing how new technologies enhanced war making capability without invalidating traditional tactical or strategic concepts.

These French works, and others like them, were the product of much thought and research. In showing an appreciation for the political and social context within which the war took place, these French observers often betrayed more sympathy for the American predicament than, say, the British did. It is possible that these works could have established the Civil War as an important object of study in France. In 1870, however, the Franco-Prussian War broke out, the Second Empire's armies were defeated, and Napoleon III was deposed. Under the ensuing Government of National Defense, Leon Gambetta drew inspiration from the American military experience as he attempted to cobble together a nation in arms to defend France, but the experiment was an unhappy one.³⁰ In the aftermath of their terrible defeat, French soldiers understandably took Prussia/Germany as their model.³¹ Although Adolphe Thiers, president of the new Third

²⁸ F. P. Vigo Roussillon, *Puissance militaire des États-Unis d'Amérique, d'après la guerre de la sécession 1861-1865* (Paris: J. Dumaine, 1866), 387.

²⁹ Roussillon, *Puissance militaire des États-Unis d'Amérique*, 437.

³⁰ See Richard D. Challener, *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms 1866-1939* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 29. See also Charles de Freycinet, *Souvenirs 1848-1878* (Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1914), 149.

³¹ For example, see Allan Mitchell, *Victors and Vanquished: The German influence on Army and Church in France after 1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

Republic (1871-1873) resisted the prussification of the French army, his departure from the political scene allowed the army to refashion itself along Prussian lines. Later military authors like Joseph Frédéric Canonge, Professor at l'École supérieure de guerre (1876-1877), would make room for the Civil War in the textbooks they wrote, but clearly, the significance of the American war had diminished in relation to closer and more immediate events.³²

It is only in Britain where one can claim the American conflict enjoyed an enduring legacy—one that stretched well into the 20th century. Britain scrutinized the conflict much more intently than any of the other European great powers. Although the British army's deficiencies had been exposed during the Crimean War (inspiring a series of small, tentative reforms), it was not these shortcomings that prompted the Britain to scrutinize the Civil War with such avidity. Rather, British interest was stimulated by cultural affinity with the United States, great material interests in North America, and important strategic considerations. In this context, it is also important to note that Britain was the European great power which was most likely to get drawn into a war with the United States during this period (e.g. the *Trent* affair); officialdom often expressed an interest in learning as much as possible about a potential enemy.

A host of Britons visited America during the war, including many journalists (William Howard Russell being the most prominent) and soldiers (with Sir Garnet Wolseley, in the long run, proving the most significant). The British government obtained information from these sources as well as from its minister in Washington, D.C. (Lord Lyons) and the various consuls strewn across America (those in the South, however, had their exequaturs revoked by the Confederate government in 1863). Two official military missions also visited the United States during the war. In 1862, with the blessing of the Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief of the British army, Major General Sir William Fenwick Williams, commander of British forces in North America, sent three officers to visit the Army of the Potomac, fortifications around Washington, D.C., and foundries located throughout the North. This group filed a report that dealt mainly with Federal artillery and technology. A second mission (consisting of two officers), authorized by Earl de Grey, the Secretary of State for War, visited the North in 1864. This group's report revolved mainly around artillery and fortifications. In both cases, a desire to take the measure of Northern armies that might soon find themselves pitted against British forces provided the impetus for sending military missions to America.

In any event, these various sources (along with American ones) provided a great deal of material for studying the significance of the Civil War. British military thinkers immediately went to work analyzing the American experience. For example, Captain Charles Cornwallis Chesney, Professor of Military History at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, produced the well-received *Military View of Recent Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland* as early as 1863 (Chesney continued to write and lecture extensively on

³² See Joseph Frédéric Canonge, *Histoire Militaire Contemporaine (1854-1871)*, 3 vols. (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1882).

the war until his death in 1876). Only a year later, Colonel Patrick Leonard MacDougall, the first commandant of Britain's staff college from 1858 to 1861 (then also at Sandhurst), referred to American examples in his *Modern Warfare as Influenced by Modern Artillery* (1864). In 1866, Colonel Edward Bruce, then professor of military history at the staff college, also discussed American events in his extremely influential *Operations of War Explained and Illustrated*. We should not, however, exaggerate the impact of the Civil War on the British military during this period. These works betray an anti-Federal bias that colored their understandings of the conflict.³³ More important, the Civil War did not seem to change their understanding of war in any significant way. For example, Hamley's sense that the firepower of rifled small arms and artillery had increased dramatically was not derived exclusively from his understanding of the Civil War but from the advances made by armies throughout the Western world.³⁴ Moreover, it was clear that Hamley looked at the Civil War much as he regarded any other recent conflict; it was a source of examples chosen to uphold a traditional Jominian view of strategy and operations.

The Prussian victory over France in 1871, however, "caused the British army to sit up and take notice" (to use Luvaas' phrase).³⁵ For about fifteen years, British soldiers focused on the Prussian achievement—before returning to the study of the American Civil War. Two men were responsible for renewing the examination of the American conflict: Sir Garnet Wolseley and Colonel George Francis Robert Henderson. Wolseley, who had visited America in 1862 and written an article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* about his adventures, had never lost interest in the war.³⁶ By 1882, Wolseley had become Adjutant-General of the British army. This position of authority, along with Wolseley's stature as Britain's most successful field commander, made it possible for him to encourage the work of scholars like Henderson, who found the Civil War particularly intriguing. Henderson first came to Wolseley's attention as the author of *The*

³³ During the war, Hamley wrote a series of articles for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* that were ferociously hostile to the Federal government. See, for example, "Disruption of the Union" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 90 (July 1861), 121-34; "Democracy Teaching by Example" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 90 (October 1861), 395-405; "The Convulsions in America" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 91 (January 1862), 118-30; "Spence's American Union" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 91 (March 1862), 514-36; "Trollope's North America" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 92 (September 1862), 372-90; "Our Rancorous 'Cousins'" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 94 (November 1863), 636-52; "Books on the American War" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 94 (December 1863), 750-68; and "General McClellan" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 96 (November 1864), 619-44.

³⁴ Charles Cornwallis Chesney, *Military View of Recent Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland*, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1863-5); Patrick Leonard MacDougall, *Modern Warfare as Influenced by Modern Artillery* (London: John Murray, 1864); Edward Bruce Hamley, *The Operations of War Explained and Illustrated* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1866), 389-99.

³⁵ Luvaas, *Military Legacy*, 115.

³⁶ See "A Month's Visit to the Confederate Headquarters," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 93 (January 1863), 1-29. As late as 1889, Wolseley wrote a series of seven articles for the *North American Review* entitled "An English View of the Civil War." These have been collected and edited in James A. Rawley, ed., *The American Civil War: An English View: The Writings of Field Marshall Viscount Wolseley* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002).

Campaign of Fredericksburg Nov.-Dec., 1862 (1886).³⁷ On the strength of the book, Wolseley appointed Henderson an instructor at Sandhurst in 1889, and Henderson would go on to teach at the Staff College at Camberley from 1892 to 1899.

In his instruction and writing, Henderson covered many different conflicts because he believed they all had something to teach. However, he felt that scholarly investigation of the Civil War, which had been fought by volunteers, was particularly useful because the British army would probably enter any future continental conflict with a similarly constituted force. Henderson claimed repeatedly that for the men who would lead such a force, military history was an excellent substitute for combat experience—indeed, it was, perhaps, superior. The point of such histories was not to cram an officer's mind with military theories or axioms; rather they served to cultivate his judgment. To this end, when he studied past conflicts, Henderson put his students and readers in the position of those leaders who had made crucial decisions in battle. Unlike Hamley, whose approach to operations was Jominian and somewhat schematic, Henderson stressed the significance of moral forces, the difficulties of leadership, and the messiness of war (all of which were more Clausewitzian themes).³⁸ A concern with these issues is apparent in Henderson's most famous work, *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War* (1898) which he hoped would "serve as a treatise on the art of war."³⁹ Undoubtedly, Henderson's treatment of the American conflict was more sophisticated than that of previous writers, he made that war an integral part of the curriculum, and he was an influential teacher. However, there were limits to his impact. As he put it to a sympathetic party, few officers outside of Camberley read *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*, largely because "we are certainly not a literary army, and the unfortunate soldier with a turn for writing history does not get much encouragement from the service."⁴⁰ Moreover, after Henderson's premature death in 1903, the study of the Civil War was increasingly characterized by cramming and rote memorization. Still, as Nimrod Tal has argued, by the outbreak of World War I, many British soldiers had become convinced that the American conflict "held the keys to understanding and mastering the future of warfare" and crucial "to comprehending American power, which lay in American unity and American modernity."⁴¹

³⁷ George Francis Robert Henderson, *The Campaign of Fredericksburg, Nov.-Dec., 1862; A Study for Officers of Volunteers* (London: K. Paul, Trench & Co., 1886).

³⁸ Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 284.

³⁹ George F. R. Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*, 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1898); Luvaas, *Military Legacy*, 181.

⁴⁰ Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 244.

⁴¹ Nimrod Tal, *The American Civil War in British Culture: Representations and Responses, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 43.

After World War I, the study of the Civil War was taken up in Britain by what became its two leading military intellectuals of the 20th century, J. F. C. Fuller and B. H. Liddell-Hart. These thinkers' relationship to the Civil War, however, was fundamentally different from Henderson's. Neither Fuller nor Liddell-Hart built his career on the Civil War in the same way that Henderson did—their interests in military history were too diverse and comprehensive. Although both believed that the Civil War was an enormously important event in political and military history (largely because they saw it as the first modern war as well as a conflict that ensured the United States would become a world power), they did not see it as uniquely relevant to British circumstances as Henderson had. Although Fuller exerted an enormous influence on Liddell-Hart (which the latter never fully acknowledged), they saw the Civil War in different ways and used it to peddle very contrasting arguments. Simply, where Fuller admired Grant, Liddell-Hart saw Sherman as his ideal general. Fuller conceded that Grant's tactics had been costly, but the British thinker appreciated the Federal general because he had understood Lincoln's policy and developed an appropriate strategy to pursue it. At the same time, Grant seemed to embody the true American spirit which was modern, democratic, and brutal—all attributes that Fuller admired. By helping bind the huge territory of America together, men like Grant pointed to the future as well as the methods by which that future would be attained. Liddell-Hart, on the other hand, praised Sherman for recognizing the new power of the defensive (which was a major feature of modern war) and refusing to engage in frontal assaults that wasted soldiers' lives. In this telling, Sherman was a proponent of the "indirect approach" (Liddell-Hart's favorite hobby horse) which employed flexibility and mobility to seek out the enemy's vulnerabilities. If Fuller's Grant was a man of the future, Liddell-Hart's Sherman was a man of the past, a symbol of a virtuous world that had been lost.⁴²

If the British army does not study the American Civil War with quite the same diligence as it once did, the tradition continues. In this context, one thinks, for example, of Brian Holden Reid, a Civil War military historian who has one foot in academia and the other in the British defense establishment.

To summarize, Luvaas is quite right in arguing that the American Civil War never really changed the course of European military doctrine or thought. Moreover, Luvaas appears to understand why the American experience exerted such little influence on European affairs. For one thing, "events in Europe following on the heels of the Civil War induced most soldiers either to dismiss or at least minimize American innovations."⁴³ For another, most soldiers believed the Civil War "was unlike any campaign which they had seen, or were likely to see . . . in Europe." Finally, many lessons associated with the American experience seemed inapplicable to Europe.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Luvaas persists in implying that the American ordeal somehow provided an

⁴² For a summary of Fuller and Liddell-Hart's contrasting views of the Civil War, see Tal, *American Civil War*, 43-65.

⁴³ Luvaas, *Military Legacy*, 227.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

education that European wars did not. European soldiers, he charges, missed significant American lessons. In the conclusion to his work, he argues, “In every instance when the experience of the American armies conflicted with popular opinion at home [in Europe] or the lessons of more recent wars, the latter prevailed.” “Most of those who studied the Civil War after 1870,” Luvaas asserts, “were in reality seeking to confirm accepted principles rather than to discover new information that might lead to a change in doctrine.”⁴⁵ As we have seen, though, European governments were quite willing to reform their armies (and even the state) if provided with sufficient reasons to do so. Demanding that European military and political leaders ought to have made such changes in response to distant events rather than closer and more immediately relevant ones, however, seems unwarranted. It could not have been clear to these figures that the American Civil War pointed to the future in a way that European conflicts did not. To claim, as Luvaas does, that Europe did not recognize the “tactical lessons” of the Civil War is unfair—due to their own experiences, European soldiers understood well the power of rifled artillery and small arms.⁴⁶ To argue, as others have, that Europe did not digest the “modern” and “total” character of the Civil War is to ignore the problematic nature of these concepts and the complexity of the European experience.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 233.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See Jeremy Black, *The Age of Total War, 1860-1945* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 1-11, 29-42.