

Naval War College Review

Volume 47
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 30

1994

The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans

Steve C. Hawley

Charles Royster

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Hawley, Steve C. and Royster, Charles (1994) "The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 47 : No. 4 , Article 30.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol47/iss4/30>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

narrative concerning the employment of the ships of the class in their short, semiactive postwar lives. These are, however, minor criticisms. Tarrant's work is, as Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Leach notes in his foreword, "a balanced work of absorbing interest, technical accuracy and which is highly readable." *King George V Class Battleships* says little that will be wholly new to the deep specialist, but it is a lively and sensible account that will satisfy many tastes.

JAMES GOLDRICK
Commander, Royal Australian Navy
OIC Warfare
RAN Surface Warfare School

Royster, Charles. *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans*. New York: Knopf, 1991. 523pp. \$30

This well written book is a dual biography as well as a history of the Civil War and its effect on American society. With a biography of Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson and William T. Sherman, Royster shows that the military origins of the destructive nature of the Civil War lay with both armies. This argument stands in contrast to that of historians who contend that while the North sought victory through a destructive and brutal strategy of exhaustion, the South strove to validate its independence through maneuver and elegant, decisive battles. It is by adding an assessment of the third party, the American people, that Royster's work makes its most unique contribution.

The author argues for the existence of a relationship between generals like Jackson and Sherman and the people, whereby public opinion directly contributed to the escalating level of violence.

Royster uses the relationship between Jackson and the civilian populace of both sides to prove that the seeds of a destructive war were present from the very beginning. The author then contends that the public's desire to share vicariously the experience of war combined with Sherman's growing realization that the South's will had to be destroyed through attacks on its resources and population. The net effect was to bring "soldiers and civilians together in joint determination to make a successful society by force—[this] became the destructive war."

One of the book's greatest strengths is Royster's ability to portray the burning of Columbia, South Carolina, and the near-hopeless Federal assault up Kennesaw Mountain. The author asserts that the American people sought to live the war through their soldiers' experiences in order to understand what the war meant for their country. It appears that Royster intends for us to live the war vicariously too, through startlingly clear images. In making his case, Royster offers us proofs of historical relationships between American society and its armed forces that are of use to both Civil War historians and the national security community.

Perhaps the author's most provocative argument begins with the assertion that the public's desire to share the war with its soldiers did not extend to the war's confusion, horror, pain, and

146 Naval War College Review

futility. The press of the era, in order to build readership, portrayed the conflict in the decisive, romantic, and well defined manner the public expected. Public opinion, as shaped by the press in this case, demanded more of the war; that meant more press coverage; and that fueled the designs of General Sherman. The synergistic effect culminated in the famous march to the sea and up through the Carolinas.

Certainly one need look only as far back as the Gulf War and CNN's high ratings to see the continued existence of at least part of this relationship. In a similar vein, some observers question whether United States involvement in Somalia was driven more by policy or the media's attention to an issue of its own choosing. An additional caution this sub-thesis raises is that if the military carelessly shapes the image the press presents to the people, or hides factors inherent in warfare such as confusion and horror, the people may soon demand more of a war that does not really exist and that the military may not want.

Royster's forays into intellectual history are not as easy to read as the rest of the book, but they do help to place this work within the literature. With its cultural, intellectual, biographical, and military facets, this book is of the "drum and bugles" school; it easily qualifies as part of the new military history exemplified by such authors as Gerald Linderman and John Keegan. Having written extensively on earlier aspects of the American military tradition and edited the most recent edition of Sherman's *Memoirs*, Royster is well prepared for this venture into the mid-

nineteenth-century American military experience. The author's interesting system of notation makes the book "reader-friendly" while retaining its utility, albeit with minor difficulty, for the scholar.

STEVE C. HAWLEY
U.S. Military Academy
West Point, New York

Tucker, Spencer C. *The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1993. 265pp. \$24.95

Few episodes in U.S. naval history have been more criticized than the decision during the administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to substitute a force of coast-defense gunboats, manned primarily by militia, for a regular fleet of blue-water warships. Alfred Thayer Mahan summed up the gunboat experiment as showing that these vessels were "not only excessively costly in expenditure, and lamentably inefficient in results, as compared with seagoing cruisers, but were also deleterious to the professional character of officers and seamen." Historian Fletcher Pratt called them "wretched" and "useless."

Spencer C. Tucker, chair of the History Department at Texas Christian University, takes a more balanced (and charitable) view of the gunboats, concluding that they "do not represent the triumph of a weapons system, nor were they a total failure." Thus he distances himself from Pratt while at the same time substantiating all of Mahan's charges.