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# So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico 1846-1848

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alternative. Sherman in particular, according to Hagerman, fulfilled the predictions of Clausewitz by making war against his enemy's will and resources. But he did so through maneuver rather than direct attrition, by going around Confederate armies to strike their more vulnerable rear areas and ultimately their heartland—a case of compensating for the absence of shorter roads to victory.

Hagerman's view of the Civil War is strongly ethnocentric, stressing indigenous responses to indigenous problems at the expense of any European influences. Comparison with the experiences of Prussia, France, even Austria, suggests that Americans were not alone in their search for intellectual and institutional structures for a developing industrial society. Any limitations of scope in this work are, however, more than balanced by Hagerman's demonstration of the importance of tactical factors in shaping the responses of military systems to changes in the circumstances of warfare. War's sharp end, so long neglected by practitioners of the "new military history," is coming into its own as a subject of analysis as well as description.

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Eisenhower, John S.D. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico*

1846-1848. New York: Random House, 1989. 436pp. \$24.95

The Mexican War abounds with colorful incidents appropriate to narration by a military historian of the literary skill and forcefulness of John S.D. Eisenhower. Beyond that, however, this reviewer confesses that he opened *So Far from God* with skepticism over whether we need another one-volume survey of the war, when an excellent and relatively recent similar work is at hand in Karl Jack Bauer's *The Mexican War 1846-1848*, a volume in *The Wars of the United States*, Louis Morton, general editor. Yet reading Eisenhower's latest book offered at least some measure of reassurance that the effort was worthwhile.

Particularly, the time is probably right to survey the war with Mexico from a perspective different from Bauer's. His 1974 book was written under the shadow of the Vietnam War, so that the Mexican conflict emerges from it largely as a forerunner of subsequent military confrontations of the United States with underdeveloped countries. John Eisenhower by no means neglects that aspect, and he is much troubled by the moral dimensions of the war. Significantly different, however, Eisenhower suggests a strategic parallel between the course of the Mexican War and the course of World War II, remarking near the outset that the campaign in northern Mexico might be considered the equivalent of the North African campaign of 1942-1943, while Major-General Winfield Scott's

march to the City of Mexico matched the grand offensive from Normandy toward Berlin. We have here, then, an embodiment of the shift of American military thought away from the emphasis on unconventional war engendered by the Vietnam experience, toward a renewed interest in conventional war. This shift obviously might go too far, but it springs in part from a healthy wariness about involvement in guerrilla and low-intensity conflicts.

The return of the focus to the elements of classical warfare in the Mexican War permits Eisenhower to better focus on the military figure he sees as towering above all others in 1846-1848, General Scott, "who may well have been the most capable soldier this country has ever produced . . . [but who] has never received the credit that was his due." Both of Eisenhower's assessments of Scott are on target. At the very least, he was the most capable American military commander between General George Washington and General Ulysses S. Grant. But he failed to receive acknowledgement, largely for reasons that lend a touch of irony to the praise he receives from the son of General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower. Scott's personality offended virtually everybody who came in contact with him.

John Eisenhower praises Scott not only as a strategist and tactician but also as a logistician. In general, Eisenhower is mindful of the logistical achievements of the United States in conducting a war so far

from the national center of gravity in the 1840s. The emphasis on logistics also helps Eisenhower give proper attention to the navy's role in the war, although the book is primarily an army historian's study of what was mainly the army's war.

When it ventures beyond military history to the moral issues of the Mexican War, the book does not condemn the war out of hand as a simple act of aggression, as some conscience-stricken Americans have done. The author acknowledges Mexico's responsibility for bringing on the conflict: weak governments that failed to grasp the opportunities for a negotiated settlement of differences that President James K. Polk offered. Still, such opportunities did not amount to much, because there was never much over which Polk, his government, and the American public were willing to compromise in their territorial ambitions in the Southwest. "To the student of today the fate of Mexico is sad," Eisenhower writes, because Mexico represented a power vacuum that someone else was sure to fill. Eisenhower's sense of sadness over the grim realities of international power struggles, as exemplified by the United States against Mexico, underlies this book—rousing good military narrative though it is.

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