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Editor's Shelf

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Editor's Shelf

In the summer of 1999 while assuming the duties of Editor, I was warned by a wise and venerable sage, “do not succumb to your history bias and turn *Parameters* into another *Journal of Military History*.” How could I, the neophyte, disagree with such wise counsel? In retrospect, that compact has created numerous conundrums over the past eight years. The informed reader of *Parameters* understands that military history is one of the covenants incorporated in our charter. The challenge has always been to provide readers with quality histories having a direct bearing on today's military, while eschewing what I term, “history for history's sake.” As a result of this dilemma there are a number of books on my desk that fall somewhere between the two dimensions. In fairness to authors and readers we have included the following for your consideration.



The award winning author Nathaniel Philbrick has produced an epic tale of the Pilgrims perilous journey to North America, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*. It was all about religious freedom, a voyage on a tiny ship that ended at Plymouth Rock, and the support of friendly Indians—right? Wrong—Philbrick destroys those myths with his first few pages. His search for the “full truth” paints a story that is far more complex and morally ambiguous than the popular mythology Americans have come to embrace. Yes, there is a kernel of truth in many of the myths that historians and poets have perpetuated in the three centuries since the Mayflower landed, but Philbrick's reality quickly redefines the essence of such tales. He does celebrate the courage and resourcefulness of these early settlers, spending a good deal of ink on the relationship between Pilgrims and the Indian tribes that populated New England. The author also highlights such events as the signing of the Mayflower Compact, penned during the crossing of the Atlantic; a document that would later provide the underpinning for America's democratic system. Philbrick paints a picture of the Pilgrims as religious fundamentalists, in search of a form of Christianity unscathed by centuries of abuse. Pilgrims possessed by a religious fervor capable of suppressing any and all dissent and perpetrating unbelievable acts of violence against the Indian population. Perhaps, the most enlightening of Philbrick's revelations are his descriptions of a war most Americans know nothing about, King Philip's War. As settlements appeared ever further to the West, the Indians quickly realized the gravity of their situation. The result was the burning of Springfield in 1675, the spark that ignited this dreadful little war. Over eight percent of the males in Plymouth Colony would perish in the war. By way of comparison, less than one percent of America's male population perished in World War II. If the reader wishes to maintain those cherished images of nattily-clad Pilgrims stepping onto Plymouth Rock, of Indians and Puritans setting down to tables of bounty

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at Thanksgiving, and Indian-Pilgrim cooperation in the establishment of settlements in the New World, this book is not for you. If, on the other hand, you want your history based on fact, this story of racial disharmony, violence, and an unrelenting search for religious identity and economic opportunity, this is what you are seeking.

Charles Bracelen Flood's *Grant and Sherman: The Friendship that Won the Civil War* provides a wonderful tale of the relationship between two of the Civil War's more colorful and successful commanders. A relationship, if we are to believe the author, responsible for the Union's ultimate victory. The book examines the formative days of the protagonists, providing family background, their relationship with other military men, and most convincingly, the story of their loyalty and respect for one another. Although the author is quite successful in proving the men had a special admiration and friendship; he is not as successful in making the case that this friendship led to victory. Flood traces interaction between the two from West Point, through all the major battles and campaigns of the war, and into retirement. Unfortunately, the author appears to be so dedicated to supporting his subtitle, "The Friendship that Won the Civil War," that he is guilty of omissions, accepts oft-stated rumors as fact, and presents numerous inaccuracies. The one example most obvious to this reader is the description of Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. The author describes the charge as Lee sending his forces up Cemetery Ridge. Students of the battle readily know that the attack on Cemetery Ridge long preceded the march across the wheat fields in what was to be known as "Pickett's Charge." To the Civil War historian or for that matter any student of history notes and sources are equally as important as the story itself. Unfortunately, the accompanying notes are quite brief and in many cases supported only with secondary sources. That said, the book is engagingly written and an easy read. For those looking for new tidbits and insight into the lives of two men who, possibly, more than anyone else were responsible for the Union winning the Civil War this is the book for you.

It is not unusual for authors anxious to record history as the events unfold to get caught up in the maelstrom of the obvious. That cannot be said of the latest work by the distinguished historian John Patrick Diggins. *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* provides an educated reappraisal of Reagan's life and career. Unlike the many others who rushed to print, Diggins view of the man and his place in history benefits from the continuum of time and the opportunity for reflection. Diggins readily admits that recently released Reagan family documents and correspondence contributed significantly to this expanded picture of the former president. The author chronicles in the greatest of detail Reagan's childhood, his Hollywood years, the road to the White House, and the Reagan presidency. This is a new and refreshing view of the man known as the champion of conservative politics authored by a self-admitted liberal. But it is this critical and thoroughly precise examination of Reagan's life and career that sets this book apart from earlier works. Diggins portrays Reagan as a man of character whose ideals and values, developed during childhood, greatly influenced his decisions later in life. The major insight this reader took away from the book was Reagan's obsession with communism. An obsession colored by his experiences in the 1950s, experiences that would later cause President Reagan to view every action by the Soviet Union through that earlier prism. This is a book not only about the life, times, and legacy of Ronald Reagan, it is the story of unparalleled change in American political culture.

Our friends at Scribner Publishing and the Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense have provided readers with two rather differing presentations of what many would believe to be two very similar secretaries of defense. *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961-1965* is the first of a planned two volume work by the History Office of the SECDEF covering the McNamara era. The book is jointly authored by three of America's leading scholars: Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea. The work is a narrative history of the early years of McNamara's tenure as Secretary of Defense. The authors highlight McNamara's special and often tumultuous relationship with both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Of course, they have placed special emphasis on the role McNamara played in transforming the Pentagon. They leave little doubt that McNamara brought an unequalled energy and intelligence to the job, making him the most successful "manager" the department had experienced up to that time. His application of lessons from his previous position as a corporate executive resulted in an aggressive pursuit of programs designed to achieve greater economy and efficiency within the Department of Defense. Of all his reforms perhaps the best known and lasting is his linking of the budget process to actual programs. A methodology used to this day. Unfortunately, McNamara and his "Whiz Kids" incurred a growing resistance to their drive for change from both the military leadership and the Congress. Much of this resistance can be traced directly back to McNamara's oppressive management style. The authors do a marvelous job of relating McNamara's role in the Pentagon's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs episode, and the early days of the Vietnam War. They conclude that Robert S. McNamara's first four years in office resulted in a fundamental redefining of the roles and methods used by the department and lead to a marked transformation of the entire national security establishment.

Investigative journalist Andrew Cockburn provides a reflective view of the tenure of a more recent secretary of defense in *Rumsfeld: His Rise, Fall, and Catastrophic Legacy*. Unfortunately, from the title alone the reader has an idea of what is to follow. Cockburn makes a valid argument that Rumsfeld and his tenure cannot be truly understood until one examines his earlier career. There are a number of insights as the author walks the reader through the formative years of Donald Rumsfeld's political life. For instance, this reader did not know that a younger Rumsfeld actually had presidential ambitions. But insights aside, the author is so fixated on skewering Donald Rumsfeld and his legacy that he loses objectivity. Cockburn traces Rumsfeld's career from the time he was a young congressman through the present day. The author's style of moving from an earlier period to the present and back does little for flow and continuity. Additionally, Cockburn spends a great deal of ink attempting to prove the secretary of defense completely mismanaged the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Much of this mismanagement he ascribes to Rumsfeld's desire to be remembered as a hero and his caustic relationship with the military. Whether one agrees with that portrayal of Donald Rumsfeld or not, the author's criticisms of America's military and the allusion to its complicity in tactical and strategic failures are nothing less than hyperbole. The book lacks the in-depth research and impartiality demonstrated by the previous offering. The notes alone tell the reader this is a hurried attempt based primarily on recent books, magazines, and newspaper sources. Oh yes, let's not forget television. The author se-

lectively interviews members of the US military and then provides readers with generalities related to the conduct of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even if readers agree with what the author says about Donald Rumsfeld actions relevant to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, his domineering style of management, or his attempts at transforming the Pentagon; one must also admit that this work is not a fair and unbiased depiction of those events. If you are a Rumsfeld-hater go ahead and read it; if you are a student of government or history wait for a more balanced offering.

Our final book in this feature is a memoir by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*. As a rule *Parameters* does not review memoirs. We have found over the years that an individual's reflection on the conduct of their life often tends to lack objectivity. I am sorry to say that President Musharraf's book only serves to reinforce that conclusion. The book does provide valuable insight about one of America's most important partners in the global war against terrorism. Unfortunately, too many pages are devoted to the President's view of a modern democratic Pakistan; a Pakistan that can only be achieved through pursuit of Musharraf's vision. Many familiar with the history of Pakistan will wonder at the picture presented by the author. A picture that glosses over little facts like the military coup that brought him to power; or the fact that he is a moderate Muslim reluctant to confront Islamic fundamentalists (leading to widespread reports that the Taliban operates freely within Pakistan's eastern provinces); and the fact that many believe he exaggerates his role in counterterrorist operations within Pakistan. It is truly unfortunate that President Musharraf spends so much effort on self-promotion. A more realistic appraisal of his life and times would in and of themselves been truly appreciated by many of Pakistan's friends. Still, readers need to digest this offering while remembering that the man is critical to the war against terror and the future of Pakistan and Southwest Asia. — RHT □

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