

## The Old Army: a Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898

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Missouri's Thomas Hart Benton, and Kansas's John Steuart Curry. Hogue thought the Regionalist label was limiting and resented it, feeling that his work contained a more universal message both formally and graphically. If it is his poignant images of the depression and the Dust Bowl era that have left a lasting impression, Hogue's condemnation of human abuse of the land contrasts with the favorable and optimistic viewpoint characteristic of most other Regionalist painters. In the art of Grant Wood, for example, the plow is a tool that helps to put the Iowa landscape in order. In Hogue's paintings, on the other hand, it is a symbol of desecration. Another familiar image used by Hogue in *Mother Earth Laid Bare* (1931) is the form of a woman incorporated into the landscape.

World War II brought an end to this chapter of the artist's career. After the war Hogue's art became more and more abstract. Old values and standards had been called into question as a result of the war. This was true, also, in art. New art trends once more emigrated from Europe. Hogue looked afresh at the landscape. Nature became a vehicle for formal interpretation. While the earlier erosion paintings unquestionably will endure, his latest works, the Big Bend pictures, are considered by some to be his most important work, a culmination of his long experience. They are filled with space, light, distance, and atmosphere. There is an obvious concern for nature's forms and forces, the indestructible qualities found in the earth's topography.

Generally, this publication, with its introduction by one of the leading scholars of American art history, Matthew Baigell, and text by Lea Rosson DeLong, is an admirable effort to reestablish one of many ignored or overlooked artists to a rightful place in American art. The excellent illustrations and color plates of Hogue's work are additional testimony to his virtues as a creative artist and to his achievements.

SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF ART

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*The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898*, by Edward M. Coffman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. ix, 514 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$35.00 cloth.

The professional army of the United States was created in 1784, following the revolutionary war, primarily to protect and support the westward expansion of the nation. From the very beginning, however, despite the important services provided by the army, it continued to be the institution most neglected by the government except in times of war, when volunteers and conscripts from many families were added

to the ranks, inspiring greater public interest and support. It is this Army—the “Old Army,” the military establishment that existed from 1784 to 1898—that Edward Coffman, historian of war and professor at the University of Wisconsin, writes about in this richly documented, well-illustrated, and equally well-written work. These were the troops who were deployed in forts in the West and artillery stations along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coastlines. By the time of the Civil War they numbered sixteen thousand and were divided into 180 companies broadcast about the land.

Coffman presents a detailed portrait of the *peacetime* Army; he does not discuss the War of 1812, the Mexican War, or the Civil War. Neither does he concentrate on the Indian wars, although those conflicts of expansion receive some attention along with the numerous services of a non-traditional nature performed by the army. During the nineteenth century officers and enlisted men served as explorers, engineers, cartographers, protectors of the public in times of civil violence, and military administrators of Reconstruction. In support of these services the nation expended less than one percent of the gross national product on an annual basis.

Coffman's book is as much a socioeconomic study as it is a military history. It also describes the army as an institution and tells about the lives of not only officers and enlisted men, but wives, children, and servants as well. The author even devotes space to describing the grinding lives of the laundresses, prostitutes, and other assorted civilians who were a part of army life. He deals with racial problems as they affected blacks and Indians, but has nothing to say about the cultural confrontation that took place between the army and Mexican Americans in the Southwest.

Coffman is particularly good at describing the problems always present in training an army of enlistees drawn largely from urban centers and comprising for the most part the flotsam and jetsam of the cities, including thousands of recently arrived immigrants. The task of training was made more difficult by the makeshift methods that had to be employed to train and equip men who were largely illiterate, in poor physical condition, and unable either to shoot a gun or to ride a horse. They were indeed a varied lot for whom enlistment was “a leap in the dark . . . a choice of evils” (329). They lived in a garrison world where discipline was stern, pay was low, rewards were few, living conditions were primitive, life was lonely, promotions were few, and the hazards of occasional skirmishes and battles, dangerous assignments, and the ravages of disease were constant threats.

Why then did they do it? For some there was little choice. Once enlisted, they were caught up in an existence that formed a love-hate

relationship. While they were always possessed of complaints and grouching, some yet felt like one who wrote in 1856, "I like the wild excitement of such a life and do not think anything would tempt me to resign my commission for the monotonous routine of civilian life" (102). Not all soldiers accepted their lot so happily. A trooper suffering from illness after his arrival at Ft. Ellis in Montana wrote to his brother, "I am learning to die in this place" (381). Fortunately, he recovered and returned to duty after this traumatic experience that was common in the lives of many soldiers. One veteran in later years wrote of his days in the old Fourth Cavalry, "Memories of the wild night rides with no sound to break the monotony but the twang of the prairie breezes in my ears and the lonesome howl of a lobo or coyote. With my leg over the saddle, packet full of ammunition and my trusty Spencer in my hand, the world was a good place to live and life held no cares" (399). This trooper survived to travel widely and finally settle on a Texas ranch. He was one of the more fortunate.

Coffman is just as perceptive in his treatment of the officer corps. His descriptions of the petty quarrels and jealousies that often caused officers to be divided and resign their commissions are both lucid and accurate in analyzing the causes of such behavior. The problem included not only junior officers but field and general officers as well. Low pay, undesirable assignments to forts that were hellholes, and slow promotions created almost unacceptable lifestyles. Officers were often forced to choose between separation from their families or uncomfortable quarters for them. In addition to their professional duties, officers were plagued by the problems of securing education and decent lifestyles for their families. It is small wonder that so many left the army to return to more comfortable civilian existences, particularly following the Mexican War.

There were periods of even more extreme neglect of the army, as in the aftermath of the Civil War. With the return of southern representation in Congress there was present a strong antiarmy bloc. Combined with public indifference, this antiarmy sentiment left the army in sad straits. One officer met a woman at a reception who thought the army had been disbanded after the Civil War; and from 1877 to 1898 neither enlisted men nor officers received any raise in pay! This was during the period when they were called upon to quell the last ditch stands of many Indian tribes, including the Comanche, Sioux, and Apache nations.

There are many other sectors of interest that make Coffman's book fascinating and informative reading for both the lay reader and the professional historian. He describes the services or lack of services provided for troops along with their "social" activities, including gam-

Book Reviews

bling, drinking, and carousing. The work of women in providing a more civilized existence and programs of relief are also covered, as are army health conditions. Particularly good is Coffman's treatment of the background for the progressive medical advances made in the army to practice preventive medicine in relation to illnesses such as dysentery, diarrhea, cholera, and scurvy, along with the more dreaded diseases. The revolutionary advances in bacteriological medicine, anti-septic surgery, and sterile childbirth based on the work of Louis Pasteur, Joseph Lister, and Ignaz Semmelweis were mirrored in the pioneer work of army surgeons such as George M. Sternberg, Joseph J. Woodward, and Walter Reed. Even more revolutionary discoveries in the treatment of yellow fever and malaria would be made during the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection.

It is hard to imagine any historian seeking to cover the same research ground in the near future. Coffman has written a comprehensive work that will rank as the most important and informative treatment of the evolution of the United States army as an institution before the dawn of the twentieth century. The book should be read by everyone interested in the human factor in military matters. It tells of a body of neglected people whose services were so important that they deserve a paraphrase of Winston Churchill's message of praise for the Royal Tactical Air Force. Never in the course of human events had so much been done for so many by so few for so little reward.

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*"The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866*, by James L. Morrison, Jr. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986. xii, 255 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50 cloth.

Through much of its 185-year history, the United States Military Academy has been a center of controversy, eulogized by its supporters as the seedbed of American military genius, reviled by its critics as an inbred, authoritarian institution, academically weak and out of step with the larger society. Never was this controversy more intense than during the antebellum and Civil War years, the period examined by James L. Morrison, Jr., in *"The Best School in the World."*

Morrison starts with the resignation in 1833 of Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer, the "Father of West Point," who introduced the basic curricular orientation and disciplinary system that have survived to the present. In Morrison's opinion, the dominant force in shaping the school was the academic board, a small group of long-term professors

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