

## Lack of common strategy may have caused longer, bloodier civil war

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(Phys.org) -- Lacking firm ideas on how to fight and win the Civil War, Northern military commanders and politicians struggled to find a viable strategy, resulting in a long and horrendously costly conflict, according to a Penn State historian. This experience influenced how the U.S. Army thought about the art and science of war and how they selected leaders to design and execute military strategy in future conflicts.

The absence of a commonly accepted and shared body of military thought hampered the North's efforts to identify and pursue strategic objectives, plan military operations and choose leaders to successfully execute those plans, said Carol Reardon, George Winfree Professor of American History. A lack of understanding about the complexity of war on a grand scale often contributed to poor planning, frequent leadership changes and long campaigns with high casualties during the war, she said.

A common belief that the writings of Antoine-Henri Jomini, a Swiss-born officer who served on the staff of Napoleon Bonaparte, served as the strategic foundation for most [Civil War](#) commanders is a misconception, according to Reardon.

"Marine Corps Brigadier General J. D. Hittle said in 1947 that many Civil War generals went to battle with a sword in one hand and a copy of Jomini in the other," Reardon said. "In fact, Jomini was just one voice among many voices in this search for a winning strategy during the war."

Reardon, who published her analysis in, "With a Sword in One Hand and Jomini in the Other" (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), found a number of direct references to Jomini in the popular press during the time, but found little evidence that ideas unique to him played a central role in the decision-making of officers during the war. She found only three references to the military theorist in the 128-volume "War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies."

"The fact that Jomini was only mentioned three times in this comprehensive collection of primary documents bothered me just enough that I wanted to take a look at the subject more deeply," said Reardon.

Americans in the North also debated whether officers educated at military academies or officers born with innate genius for warfare made better senior commanders. People who favored the genius option cited George Washington and Andrew Jackson as examples of senior leaders who had limited military educations, but became solid commanders. Early in the war, West Point-educated generals, such as George McClellan, served as models for the pro-education side.

The lessons of the Civil War shaped American military policy and education for decades to come, Reardon said.

"There were lessons learned," Reardon said. "We learned very quickly we needed a body of professional literature and military theory that not only could be applied to the American military experience, but also fit with the American character."

After the war, the U.S. Army decided in favor of education, rather than military genius, as the preferred way to fill the ranks of senior leadership. For instance, the U.S. Army founded the Artillery School for officers of that branch in 1878 and General William Tecumseh Sherman named

Emory Upton to head it. Upton, who rose from the rank of second lieutenant to major general in the Union Army during the Civil War, proved to be an excellent choice. His school became a model for American professionalmilitary education well into the 20th century.

The founding of the schools showed that the Army learned not to rely on military genius, as Reardon said, "What if someone starts a war and your genius doesn't show up?"

Reardon also said that Civil War generals faced a particularly thorny problem during the war of considering human elements that were not addressed by contemporary [military](#) theory. The worksavailable to the generals of that era had little to say about the human elements of war.

Soldiers did not exist as individuals who became tired, thirsty, cold, or frightened and were portrayed as nameless and faceless entities, according to Reardon.

"This kind of literature did not meet the needs of generals who commanded armies of volunteers in a democracy," Reardon said. "As a consequence, they had to learn the importance of considering their troops to be their most important asset thehard way, and at the cost of many lives."

The book began as lectures prepared for the 2009 Steven and Janice Brose Distinguished Lecture series.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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