

History 225

Re: Notes w/ Mitchell essay "Perseverance"

Contra Linderman

Source: McPherson. For Cause and Comrades (p.168)

Recall Linderman's assertion that after the initial enthusiasm and earnestness of the soldiers on both sides (full of pride and conviction about the rightness of their respective cause) the face of war with its harrowing adventures and ghastly morality eventually harden them into skeptics and they were overcome with "harsh disillusionment" that "caused them to abandon whatever idealism they brought into the conflict by the later part of the war. Then they fought not for home and cause but only to stay alive and get the job done so they could go home.

Linderman's assertions always bothered me. It never explained satisfactorily why so many on both sides stuck this horrendous war to the end. Why, in fact, the war lasted as long as it did.

I always suspected there was a strain of presentism in his analysis and interpretation. (That his writing was influenced by the American soldiers experience in Vietnam and not the Civil War).

Perhaps he was over influenced by accounts of WW I and WW II by writers like Ernest Hemingway and Paul Fussell ( a combat infantry lieutenant in the ETO) who both in their accounts of these 20th century wars were eloquent in their efforts to inculcate in readers a view that war was simply murder, there was no way of refining it with words like "glory," "courage," "sacrifice," "valor," and "sacred cause." This was the rhetoric of statesmen and politicians who did their best to make the worst appear a better cause, which is what we have come to expect from those who send young men off to die in strange lands.

*It may also be that Linderman's research was limited or influenced by his bias - as stated, he found in his searching of the primary sources what he had wanted to find, ignoring what did not fit into his controlling hypothesis.*

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My own personal interest in this from point of view of 25 years of teaching and reading in American history especially of the 20th Century. And a year I spent in a war zone.

For example, Mitchell makes a few interesting points in passing in his essay.

*Note: my  
Blessings  
w/ as  
6 Aug.*

He notes that during WW II that the military leaders (JCS) decided to place a ceiling of 100 Divisions on the manpower pool to fight this war. Feeling that this was all the public would tolerate. There was dire consequences in arbitrarily limited the US ground forces to 100 divisions. (Make point about the ETO and the possibility that the war could have been over in Europe in 1944 rather than dragging on until 1945. The longer this ETO continued the higher the American casualty rates were).

*When a  
democracy  
goes to  
war  
sensitivity -  
1st pictures of  
dead G.I.s in  
wire - 1944*

The point is that FDR and his military advisers did not want to sour the American people on the war by what they might come to regard as unacceptable casualties.

We know from our experience in Vietnam that once the casualty rates started to inch toward 30,000 to 40,000 KIAs that the home front began to turn against the war--that many Americans began to demand Washington make clear what the American war was in Vietnam and began to raise questions about the way the administration was fighting the war. When Nixon became president he had to deal with the dissent over the war by changing the color of the bodies--Vietnamization, and to start a rolling rotation program of bringing American combat troops home. Of course the war continued for another four years and another 20,000 names would be added in time to the Vietnam Memorial. Some would call these four Nixon years the most savage and bloody retreat in the history of modern warfare.

We saw the same sensitivity to casualties in Desert Storm.

Samolia was another case in which the loss of 18 American troops in an ambush by the reigning warlord in that fractured country was the deciding factor for Clinton in ending US involvement in trying to pacify the civil war in that African country.

*"Mission  
Creep"*

Then we have the Civil War. The total for both sides was 620,000 dead. *(360,000 Union dead; 260,000 Confederates - no  
w.o. of Casualty Bureau)*

We just looked at Grant's campaigns against Lee in front of Richmond and Petersburg. Grant sustains 55,000 casualties in 7 weeks. That was almost one half of the Army of the Potomac; and 60% of all the casualties sustained by all the Union armies since the

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Re: Notes w/ R. Mitchell essay "Perseverance"

Some observations derived from Mitchell's essay

A few points worth considering in Mitchell's essay:

1. He draws our attention to the Internal factors in the Civil War and their impact on the final outcome of this terrible conflict. This is really the burden of the second part of the essay where he looks at the Confederate home front.

2. That he tries to make us understand why the Union won the war. Not because of its greater manpower, or supporting infrastructure, or fire power (the beanie counting that we talked about at the very beginning of this class). All of this was unarguably indispensable but it was not decisive. That you cannot reduce the answer to Why the North Won to a game of cost accounting.

Mitchell tries to answer the question of why Union soldiers stuck this destructive war to the bitter end and why many of the Confederate soldiers left the war by going over the hill.

He tries to give the reason that Linderman in Embattled Courage avoids trying to answer.

The answer is that the heaviest battalions were infused with will; perseverance.

*MacMahan  
Syndrom  
ask for  
CompuHe -  
1968 - should  
see over in  
1966*

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Re: Outline with Election of 1864/Why Men Fought  
Use w/ Mitchell essay on "Perseverence"

I. Talk about the Election of 1864. Was it a turning point?  
Or has this been overdramatized? I don't know. But there is another  
scenerio I propose.

Ask class about the meaning of Lincoln's August 23 "blind  
memo"

"THEN IT WILL BE MY DUTY TO COOPERATE WITH THE PRESIDENT ELECT, AS  
TO SAVE THE UNION BETWEEN THE ELECTION AND THE INAUGURATION; AS HE  
WILL HAVE SECURED HIS ELECTION ON SUCH GROUND THAT HE CANNOT  
POSSIBLY SAVE IT AFTERWARDS."

2. Mitchell essay--How to treat.

Ask class about what they got out of the essay.

Ask if it rings any discordanant note with Linderman's  
Embattled Courage? See my notes on Linderman here

3. Mitchell essay in context of American history

4. The war as a holy cause--for both sides

5. Handout of Lincoln's Second Inugural Address (March '65)

e see Lincoln's struggle to explain the war to the Northern  
public.

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First Manassas.

The Three days of Gettysburg costs both sides 50,000 casualties.

Twice as many casualties as the US suffered in D-Day plus the first 10 to 20 days.

The same amount of casualties, 50,000, that the US suffered in three months of fighting to take the island of Okinawa in the summer of 1945. For the forces involved the battle for Okinawa was the bloodiest in WW II for American forces.

And yet by comparison, these were fewer casualties than Grant's Army of the Potomac experienced during May-June 1864--Wilderness, Spotsylvania to Cold Harbor. Seven weeks of combat.

Its important to remember that while US marines and the American Tenth Army was facing the most fierce resistance by The Japanese defenders in the Pacific war, the new president Harry Truman was being sworn into office after the sudden death of FDR. The campaign for Okinawa convinced the new president that he did not want another Okinawa, as he put it to the JCS, "from one end of Japan to another." The American people would not tolerate these kind of loses in bring the war in the Pacific to an end.

It was at this time that the Truman administration began the debate about how to bring this war to an end, and quickly. The ~~trump~~ card that was in the works--if it worked--was the Atomic Bomb.

*high*

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Re: Notes w/ Mitchell essay "Perseverence"

Source: McPherson For Cause and Comrades

The Civil War as a holy cause for both sides

During the Civil War they never heard of such terms as "battle fatigue." "shell shock," "psychiatric casualties." and the label "post-traumatic distress" that surfaced after the Vietnam War.

We know enough about modern warfare today about how men respond to combat after a prolonged period of fighting and just time in the war zone. The lesson in WW II was that after about 90 days on the line the best men cracked.

Studies of modern armies show that if that army or units of that army experience the loss of one-third of its strength in two back to back engagements that this psychologically wrecks this army as a fighting unit. The only thing to do is take it off the line for R & R. It has ceased to be an effective force in the field.

Here is a scenerio that applies to the Civil War on both the Richmond-Petersburg front in 1864-1865.

To a lesser degree, but nonetheless true, it applies to Sherman's invading force in the West and the Confederate defenders in 1864-65 also. While the fighting was less heavy, both armies were subjetced to strenuous marching and maneuvering than was the case with the Grant and Lee's forces in the East.

And yet they did not crack wide open. The Union never did; while the Confederates did but not before savagely punishing the Union armies, especially in the East.

Add here as far as the Confederates were concerned--the lack of food (half-rations), the weather, shortage of every thing (except ammunition), lice, fleas, chiggers, letters from home, camp diseases, etc.

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The Union side:

1. A key to the determination of the Union and dedication to the CAUSE--that is Union (and for many the end of slavery) reflected in the re-enlistment of the volunteers of 1861. When their time was up in 1864 some 136,000 re-uped, while 100,000 decided they had enough and stacked arms and went home. Still this was more than 50% of the original volunteers. Without them the Union efforts to end the war would have crashed. As MCP points out the substitutes, bounty-men, and conscripts were not thought very highly of by Union officers and the men in the ranks. Most could not be counted upon.

In doing the math, it is clear that the 180,000 black soldiers were essential to make up the losses of the 100,000 Union men who left the ranks. (I think one out of every 8 Blue bellies in the siege of Petersburg was a black trooper).

Have to account for the enducements that the Union offered for re-enlistment: the \$400.00 bonus (with state and local bonuses); the 36 day furloughs; the promise that if 2/3s of a regiment re-up that the regiment would stay in tact--maintain the unit bonding that grew up among men who had confronted the elephant for three years.

But it had to be more than this.

2. A second indicator was the Election of 1864. Here was a referendum on the Union war and its war aims. An overwhelming majority of Union soldiers saw it that way.

A striking majority of Union troops who could vote by absentee ballots--some 78%, compared with only 53% of the civilian vote in 1864 went to Lincoln. This was all the more remarkable because 40 to 45% of the Union army voting in 1864 had been Democrats (or came from Democratic families) in 1860, and many of these were from the slave-holding border states.

In voting for Lincoln they were all aware of what it meant: That the war would continue until one side or the other prevailed. For a year, two years, . . . . as long as it would take.

This is a dramatic affirmation of why the Union had the heaviest battalions. Heaviest, in the sense that Mitchell uses this term, in will power and perseverance.

The war for these men had become a holy cause. That cause was Union and freedom.

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Re: Notes w/ Election of 1864

Introduce

Election of 1864 shaped up as a decisive test about convictions.

Democrats nominated McClellan, who professed to stand for the restoration of the Union by military victory. The problem was that the so-called Peace Democrats wrote the platform, whose critical plank, drafted by our good friend none other than Clement Vallandigham (the greatest exponent of error since Milton's Satan). Vallandigham branded the war a hideous failure and called for an armistice and peace negotiations. Looking over McClellan's shoulder if the Democrats carried the election, would be McClellan's VP, a character named George Pendleton, a Peace Democrat from Ohio.

Set piece scenerio: If McClellan won, most expected a peace short of Union victory.

If Lincoln prevailed there as no question but that the fiery trial of war would continue to unconditional victory.

Well maybe.

I asked class last period what the made out of:

Lincoln's letter to Raymond to the effect "let Jeff Davis try me.

And espically Lincoln's August 23. 1864, "blind memorandum"



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Re: Notes/ Election of 1864

Davis, p.3

Scenerio: Assuming Lincoln had lost in 1864 would this have meant Southern Independence?

There are five major actors that make this 1864 election as a turning point that wasn't--Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, McClellan, and Jeff Davis.

Point Davis makes is that from November 1864 to March 4, 1865, Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, would still be in control of Union war policy.

No question but that Lincoln would have prosecuted the war to the hilt during his lame-duck presidency. He would have urged Grant to continue his campaign through the winter months to take Richmond and destroy Lee's Army of No. Virginia,

Sherman's force even if he failed to take Atlanta could have been used to strengthen Grant in Virginia. Sherman's mammoth army could afford to both lay siege to Atlanta and send 30 to 40,000,000 troops to cut off Lee in Virginia.

The other two actors in this scenerio are McClellan and Jeff Davis.

If McClellan was elected President by the time he took over the White House in 1864 the Confederacy, if not already defeated, would be on the verge of total collapse. Safely assume that Lee would be out of the war and so the army of No. Virginia.

Mac would take over a c-in-c of the Union armies when they were on the very verge of victory. He could enjoy the sweeping victory in the field that he was unable to claim as a military commander.

He would be in a position to claim the ultimate victory.

Richmond, Nashville, Chattanooga, New Orleans, Mobile, Pensacola would all be in Union hands. Would Mac turn around and give these all back to the Rebels in addition to the 10s of thousands of square miles of Confederate territory occupied by Union armies?

The Democratic platform in 1864 was for peace but it was for peace with reunion. Lincoln and McClellan were on the same page as far as this was concerned.

Even w/ McClellan in the White House any thing less than peace based on reunion would not only break with that party's platform pledge but it would be a slap in the face of all Union men with empty sleeves, ruined faces, and blighted lives, not to mention the that ghastly roll call of those who gave their last full measure.

The nation would never forgive McClellan and his party if it

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settled for any thing less than restoration of the Union. The Democratic party would face a voter revolt in 1866 and certainly be ousted by Unionists/Republicans in the next presidential election if not runied as a national political party for all times.

The last factor or personality we have to consider is Jeff Davis.

From the outset of the war Davis supported nothing short of Southern independence. He never changed one iota on this goal. Davis was a bitter-ender. It was either independence or it was gotterdamerung. He was not open to any other middle course. Such an reunion with security for slavery.

*His tenure in office lasted effectively until 1865.*

*unless he was removed by assassination.*