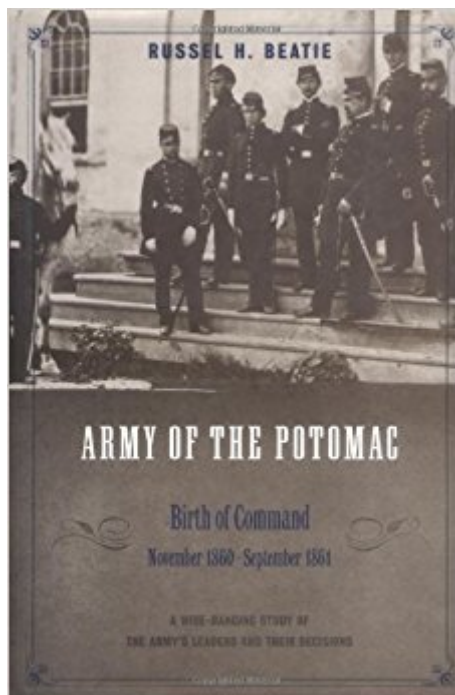




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The Army Of The Potomac: Birth Of Command, November 1860-September 1861



Synopsis

There have been many studies of the generals who commanded the Union's victorious Army of the Potomac, but none has considered the corps, division, and brigade commanders (and their all-important staff officers) through the entire war--until now. Placing their actions in the social, political, military, and economic context of the day, this original and thought-provoking book examines in meticulous detail the command and performance of the brave and controversial officers of the Union's main fighting force. This study in command, the first of a multi-volume work, is based entirely on manuscript sources, many of which have never before been examined. As a result, the narrative and conclusions about the actions of many of the Union's prominent generals differ--often significantly--from traditional historical thinking. What emerges is a much different picture of these men and how their personalities influenced their command decisions and the political atmosphere that influenced and determined their military careers. The Army of the Potomac is about the leaders as men--their successes and failures commanding the Union's largest army.

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Customer Reviews

Russel H. Beatie, a former army lieutenant, is a graduate of Princeton University and Columbia Law School. He has been a trial lawyer in New York City for almost four decades. He is the author of many articles about the Civil War and the book Road to Manassas.

Russel Beatie has done an excellent job with his first volume on the long and storied history of the

Army of the Potomac! In this first volume he seeks to do for the greatest of the Union armies what Douglas Southall Freeman did for the fabled Army of Northern Virginia. It is probable that Beatie's book will sell far fewer copies than did Dr. Freeman's classic work. However, the book is well worth pouring over its detailed pages as lawyer Beatie sketches the first confusing months of the Civil War from the Union viewpoint. As someone who has read Civil War literature for many years I confess that my knowledge of the Army of the Potomac is vastly inferior to what I know of Lee's legions. Beatie is strong on character sketches of such men as Winfield Scott, Irvin McDowell and the enigmatic and controversial George Brinton McClellan. For these sketches alone the book is valuable. His battle descriptions are succinct but well done. The maps are helpful to the text and easy to read. I noticed a few typos and factual errors but am much impressed by the long years of Beatie's resources. His bibliography of first person eyewitness accounts and unit histories is vast. I look forward to volume two which will pick up the story from September, 1861. I am in awe of his research and dedication to getting this book published!

July 2, 2002. - The Eastern Theater of The American Civil War - The curtain rose from the stage at the premier of Da Capo Press' newest production, to reveal "Army of the Potomac: Birth of Command November 1860 - September 1862." Authored by Russel H. Beatie, it is the first of a series covering the history of the Army of the Potomac. Mr. Beatie has been kind enough to present us with a *Dramatis Personae*, a playbill, if you will, providing us with the briefest of possible biographical sketches of the players about to grace the stage. Receiving top billing, of course, is Winfield Scott, the hero of the Mexican War. He is supported by a cast of subordinates: Charles P. Stone, Robert Patterson, Fitz-John Porter, Benjamin F. Butler, Elmer Ellsworth, J. K. F. Mansfield, Irvin McDowell, Samuel P. Heintzelman, David Hunter, George B. McClellan and Nathaniel Prentiss Banks. The stage has been carefully set. On November 6th, 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States without a single electoral vote from any of the Southern states. Shortly thereafter, on December 20th, South Carolina was the first state to secede from the union. It is January 1861 and Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia & Louisiana have now also left the Union. Texas will join her sister Southern states on February 1st. Lincoln, having been confronted with the problem of resupplying or reinforcing Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, immediately upon his inauguration, chose the less confrontational route: to resupply it, thus, maneuvering the South into firing the first shot of the war on April 12th, 1861 and providing the inciting incident of our national drama, and the beginning of the Civil War. Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee soon after seceded and joined the Confederate States of America. Mr. Beatie illuminates the central

question in the first act of his drama, "How does one create an army?" by shining his spotlight on New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Ohio, where from nebular clouds regiments of soldiers begin to emerge. Maryland provides our first plot point. Heavily secessionist in sentiment, Maryland surrounds Washington D.C. on three sides. With Virginia having already seceded, if Maryland were to cast its lot with her sister slave states, Washington would be cut off. Now that there is an army, fractured though it is, how does one move it through hostile territory to Washington where it is needed? Here the author shifts his focus from upstage to stage center, narrating Abraham Lincoln's steps to ensure that Maryland stayed in the Union by suspending the writ of habeas corpus and arresting the state legislators who sided with the South. All the while, Patterson, Porter, Butler, Keyes, Lefferts & Stone began to secure routes both through and around Baltimore, a city seemingly seething with anti-unionist sentiment, to Washington, D.C. The first Battle of Bull Run is the center piece of Mr. Beatie's second act, as the action moves down stage to Virginia. Mr. Beatie deftly weaves together the fate of Harper's Ferry and Patterson's attempts to keep Joseph E. Johnston's southern soldiers bottled up in the Shenandoah Valley and preventing them from joining the rest of the Confederate Army under P.G.T. Beauregard at Manassas. Patterson's ultimate failure allowed the two Southern armies to join in battle against the Federal Army, led by Irvin McDowell at Bull Run Creek. The battle is the midpoint in Mr. Beatie's drama. As the two armies collide on the field of battle, the point of view is strictly from the vantage of the men and commanders of the Federal army. Mr. Beatie presents the facts and events throughout his narrative as they happen, this technique can some times be confusing to the audience, and the one critique this reviewer has is the wish for more maps in this section to allow the audience to better follow the action as it proceeds. The fog of war envelopes the Union forces, facts are misinterpreted, mistakes are made, and ultimately the failure of the command structure results in a Confederate victory, and the curtain falls on a defeated demoralized Federal army as they gradually make their way back to Washington. George B. McClellan enters from stage right at the beginning of the final act. Having been called from the West after several small but impressive victories to assume command of what will soon come to be known as the Army of the Potomac. Mr. Beatie concentrates on the bickering between Scott, the General-In-Chief and his subordinate officer, McClellan, and as the light shines brighter on McClellan, Scott's time in the light begins to fade. Scott's letter of resignation sent to Lincoln serves as the last plot point and the final curtain falls to the stage floor with George B. McClellan soon to be commissioned as General-In-Chief. Mr. Beatie's "Army of the Potomac: Birth of Command November 1860 - September 1862," has been well received and hailed as a critical success. Not since Douglas Shouthall Freeman's, "Lee's Lieutenants," has a work of such

magnitude and scope as Mr. Beatie's graced the literary stage of the American Civil War. An appendix, "Officers and Battlefield Maneuvers," as well as a fully annotated bibliography citing the strengths of weaknesses of the source materials used, serve as Mr. Beatie's curtain calls. And on a production note, the book is fully noted with footnotes at the bottom of every page. This, Mr. Beatie's first production in the series, has already spawned two sequels, and if they are its equal, I'm sure they will be followed by others.

I was skeptical of this book when I first picked it up. I mean the book only covers the Army of the Potomac from November 1860 to September 1861 and yet is a good 600 pages long by a writer for all intensive purposes is an unknown. I was half expecting a very dry read but boy was I wrong. Instead I got one of the best Civil War books I've read in a while. The book is intended to be the first in a series of books covering the history of the Army of the Potomac. This volume covers the formation of the army in the early days of the war. I think one of the things I really enjoyed about this book is it dealt with areas, details and people that few other books deal with. How does one create an army? How do you get these regiments from the north down to Washington which is almost cut off due to the city of Baltimore? The problems were immense. Attempting to solve these problems were men whom we have seldom heard much about or if we have we have heard about them it's mostly from later in the war for other things. This book deals with men like Benjamin Butler, Charles Stone, Robert Patterson and Elmer Ellsworth. Footnotes in many other books, here they take center stage alongside more familiar names like Fitz-John Porter, Irvin McDowell, Winfield Scott and of course George McClellan as they do their part in securing Washington DC and helping in the early creation of what would become the Army of the Potomac. Russel Beatie definately has written a great book here that I think most Civil War enthusiasts will greatly enjoy. It has wonderful detail and yet is never slow or dry. I really can't wait to read the other volumes in the series. I think once completed it will be an important part of anyone's Civil War book collection.

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