



Augustus

A GOOD MEASURE of a work of history is whether it changes the way we understand its subject. By that measure, David J. Silverman succeeds admirably in **THUNDERSTICKS: Firearms and the Violent Transformation of Native America** (Belknap/Harvard University, \$29.95).

The surprising villains in Silverman's study are the Dutch of New Amsterdam, who introduced firearms on a large scale to North America by selling them to the Iroquois of today's New York State in exchange for beaver pelts. By doing so, they kicked off a North American arms race that rages to this day.

Using their newfound military advantage, the Iroquois conducted slaving raids as far west as the Mississippi River. The tribes they attacked were forced to face annihilation or acquire arms themselves. In Silverman's sober, sprawling account, America is a nation built on slaves and guns — the slaves often Indians taken captive by other Indians in order to obtain the guns.

Yet Silverman, a professor of history at George Washington University, also notes that the tribes frequently held the upper hand over the colonists. For example, by 1776, the Comanches possessed so many firearms that they were trading some of them to the European settlers of Taos, N.M.

As the "gun frontier," as Silverman calls it, moved westward across America, it destroyed entire populations, partly through slaving and violence, but also through the European diseases that ravaged Indian populations, especially as native peoples sought protection by building fortifications and other concentrated encampments. In just 45 years, he notes, the Indian population of the Southeast declined by two-thirds; the collapse in southern New England was even more catastrophic. This was key to their ultimate defeat: They lost not on the battlefield but demographically, swamped by Europeans.

Ancient history is also getting some helpful new looks. In **PAX ROMANA: War, Peace and Conquest in the Roman World** (Yale University, \$32.50), Adrian Goldsworthy, the author of biographies of Julius Caesar and Augustus, among others, offers two cheers for imperialism, saluting the Romans for bringing peace and stability to the Mediterranean basin on a scale and duration not seen before or since.

**THOMAS E. RICKS** is the author of five books about the American military, as well as the forthcoming "Churchill and Orwell: The Fight for Freedom."

Yes, he says, they could be savage. But, he adds, so could everyone else. The difference was that the Romans, after the savagery was over, successfully absorbed populations. Roman reprisals against rebellions were fierce, but such revolts were few. And Roman officials could be surprisingly soft by our standards. For example, when Pompey the Great cleared the Mediterranean of piracy, he was remarkably generous, settling many of the brigands and their families "on better land so that they should not need to resort to raiding in the future."

Two lessons for today stand out in the book: First, it is hard to make and keep a peace. Second, the greatest threat to the Pax Romana came not from foreigners but from the internal power struggles of the Romans themselves. "Are we Rome?" Cullen Murphy asked in a book of that title several years ago. The answer here seems to be: No, we are not as good at running an empire.

Making a case for the Spartans is harder. Paul A. Rahe tackles the job in **THE SPARTAN REGIME: Its Character, Origins, and Grand Strategy** (Yale University, \$38). He is persuasive in arguing that the Spartans, while exceedingly militaristic, also were extremely egalitarian, with a robust en-



Tancred's forces claim Bethlehem, June 1099.

joyment of life. They sustained their success with what Rahe, a professor of history at Hillsdale College, calls the first known complex system of governmental checks and balances.

It is even more difficult to mount a defense for the actions of the crusaders. Malcolm Lambert, whose previous books include "Christians and Pagans," does a workman-like job of clearly summarizing a vast sweep of history in **GOD'S ARMIES: Crusade and Jihad: Origins, History, Aftermath** (Pegasus, \$27.95). If you don't know much about the Crusades or the Middle East, and are confused by all the characters, from Baldwin the Leper to Godfrey of Bouillon, plus a host of Raymonds and Reynauds, this book is a good place to start. Lambert's core argument is that "crusade and jihad were twins and the one reacted on the other." His sturdy prose and thinking falter only in his concluding chapter, when he strains to show that the Crusades had some beneficial results. Among these, he avers, was that Europe, "a once hemmed-in society, was given a prolonged geography lesson." One suspects there are better ways to learn geography than sailing to a far region and making war on its people.

There is no end of making books about the Civil War. Indeed, there is something biblical about it — as if "Lincoln and His Generals" begot "Lee and His Generals," which in turn fathered "Lee and His Generals in War and Memory," which is somehow related to — I am not kidding — the recent "Lincoln's Generals' Wives."

What new could there be to say about the afternoon of the third day of the fight of Gettysburg, the most scrutinized battle in American history? Plenty, if it is examined with a microscope, as Phillip Thomas Tucker does impressively in **PICKETT'S CHARGE: A New Look at Gettysburg's Final Attack** (Skyhorse, \$27.99).

Tucker, who has written many books of military history, makes the contrarian argument that the attack, far from a blunder, was a brilliant tactical move by Gen. Robert E. Lee that nearly succeeded. "Pickett's Charge was indeed a very close thing," Tucker states. "If the attack had been supported in a timely manner, Lee would have certainly achieved his most decisive victory of the war." One eyewitness, a Texan Confederate officer of Italian heritage memorably named Decimus Et Ultimus Barziza, as he lay wounded and watched the fight, thought the Federals were "a routed and panic-stricken army."

But the book is most interesting for the bright nuggets of information Tucker presents as he unfolds the attack minute by minute, foot by foot. Three of the regimental commanders under Pickett had been roommates at the Virginia Military Institute, and all three died in the charge. (One of them was a granduncle of Gen. George S. Patton.) One of Lee's division commanders, James J. Pettigrew, was a published author ("Notes on Spain and the Spaniards in the Summer of 1859"), fluent in Latin, Hebrew, Arabic and Greek. Brig. Gen. Richard Garnett rode into battle wearing a splendid gray uniform recently tailored for him in Richmond; he was mounted on Red Eye, which at a price of \$675 was the second-most-expensive horse in Gen. James Longstreet's corps. Gen. A. P. Hill performed badly at the battle in part because he was suffering from "a bad case of gonorrhoea" acquired from a prostitute in New York City before the war. At the climax of the battle, the Union captain John Burton happened to comfort a dying Virginian officer of the same name, Lt. John T. Burton, who was shot through both cheeks.

The goat of the book is Longstreet, whom Tucker depicts as lethargic at best. Longstreet, he charges, "failed to properly organize and hurl forward a second wave of



Clashing with crusaders, circa 1200.

larger numbers of troops or adequate support — infantry or artillery — especially on the flanks.” Tucker’s surprising hero is the relatively unsung Gen. Henry Jackson Hunt, chief of Union artillery, who deployed his guns and ammunition with deadly effectiveness, especially in mowing down those unprotected flanks of Pickett’s Charge. One such enfiladed unit, the Ninth Virginia Regiment, lost 185 out of 200 men.

Tucker is occasionally repetitive, and his book sometimes reads like a play-by-play sportscast, as when he writes, “To the right (south) of Brockenbrough’s brigade, Davis’s brigade (especially on its left — on Brockenbrough’s right — on the north) also took a severe pounding from Osborn’s artillery fire from the northeast and Sawyer’s flank fire from the north.” But most of the time, the account is a mosaic of thousands of tiny pieces that, seen whole, amounts to a fascinating picture of what probably was the most important moment of the Civil War.

Landing like a dud artillery shell is a new biography of a Confederate general, **BRAXTON BRAGG: The Most Hated Man of the Confederacy** (University of North Carolina, \$35), by Earl J. Hess, who holds the Stewart W. McClelland chair in history at Lincoln Memorial University. Bragg has been disrespected, mocked and tarred as a quarrelsome loser. In his case, the reputation remains well earned. You know the general is in trouble when his own chief of staff writes home that “he is very earnest at his work, his whole soul is in it, but his manner is repulsive.”

One particularly bothersome sentence in the book is this: “Peter Cozzens authored the standard history of Stones River for the past 20 years, and he also largely followed the lead established by McWhiney and Connelly.” This seems the worst sort of history. First, it isn’t well written. (I doubt the prolific Cozzens actually has devoted the last two decades to “authoring” that one book.) Worse, it reveals the actual narrative of this book: It isn’t so much about Bragg as it is about academic studies of him. Reading the book feels like listening to five people carry on a trivial, unresolvable argument they have been having for years.

Our two most overstudied conflicts are the Civil War and World War II. It seems as if every episode or personality of those wars has been written up once, twice, even thrice. This may be why we now have triple titles appearing, as in Lloyd Clark’s **BLITZKRIEG: Myth, Reality, and Hitler’s Lightning War — France, 1940** (Atlantic Monthly, \$27). Picking



Putting Gettysburg on the map.

up such a book, one wonders once more what new there is to say.

Yet again and again, as with Tucker’s account of Pickett’s Charge, historians are able to offer new facts, different perspectives and novel ways of telling their stories that make these volumes about aspects of World War II quite compelling. In “Blitzkrieg,” Clark, who is a senior academic in the department of war studies at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, provides a good battlefield view of a crucial phase of World War II, the German invasion of France in 1940, that Americans often neglect because it preceded by 18 months the United States’ entry into the war. More than earlier studies, like Alistair Horne’s “To Lose a Battle,” Clark focuses not on generals and premiers but on the voices and experiences of the soldiers involved.

In **PEARL HARBOR: From Infamy to Greatness** (Scribner, \$32), Craig Nelson, the author of “Thomas Paine” and other books, also takes a granular approach. But he is less successful, perhaps because he has no particular argument to make, so the small, precise details don’t seem to add up to much. For example: “At 0755, 41-year-old Navy machinist’s mate first class Norman Rapue was work-



The Nazis establish a French occupation zone, June 1940.

ing aboard the YT-153, a 65-foot tugboat heading out into Pearl Harbor’s channel with a harbor pilot to man incoming cargo ship U.S.S. Antares.” In this sentence, the time is significant, but not the age of the sailor or the length of the vessel.

In **COMMANDER IN CHIEF: FDR’s Battle With Churchill, 1943** (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$30) the hyperproductive Nigel Hamilton, the author of numerous works of history and biography, ably dramatizes Roosevelt’s wranglings with Churchill during World War II over Anglo-American policy. His provocative judgment is that the British prime minister was “more millstone than help” in winning the war. Many historians would disagree, but it is stimulating to follow Hamilton as he lays out his argument. (For fans of acknowledgments, which smart readers of history books learn to look at first, to better discern an author’s influences and contacts, Hamilton takes an unusual poke at “my longtime London publisher” for bailing out on his planned multivolume study of Roosevelt as a wartime commander, of which this book is the second.)

The Cold War and its many conflicts, by contrast, are



Gen. Douglas MacArthur

relatively understudied. For example, a good overview of the operational level of the Vietnam War — that is, what happened militarily on a week-by-week basis — has not appeared for several decades, since Dave Richard Palmer’s “Summons of the Trumpet” in 1978.

Two authors who have set out to fill some of the gaps of Cold War history enjoy mixed success. One of the less explored aspects of the period is the American military occupations of Germany and Japan after World War II, especially from the point of view of the occupying troops. In **THE GOOD OCCUPATION: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace** (Harvard University, \$29.95), Susan Carruthers demolishes the stories Americans told themselves, exemplified by “Teahouse of the August Moon,” which was a hit novel, play and movie, the last starring Marlon Brando, who played an Okinawan interpreter in yellowface. One of the movie’s laugh lines was delivered by a frustrated American officer who vows that “these natives” are “going to learn democracy if I have to shoot every one of them.”

Yet Carruthers has tackled a challenging subject, because military governance does not usually make fascinating reading. The soldiers themselves knew that their tales were not stirring. One American officer observed that being in Germany in May 1945 was “like remaining in a ballroom after the ball is over.” Carruthers, a professor of history at Rutgers University, Newark, also seems less familiar with the American military and its history than she should be to write such a study. She says that Gen. George C. Marshall was secretary of war in 1942, when of course he was Army chief of staff. She refers to enlisted soldiers as “subalterns,” which generally is used as the British term for junior officers.

In **THE GENERAL VS. THE PRESIDENT: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War** (Doubleday, \$30), H.W. Brands, who has written several books of American history, does a fine job of covering a major episode that deserves the thorough treatment it receives here. With the passage of time, it becomes clearer that Truman, an accidental president, showed great courage in facing down one of the most prominent military officers of the 20th century, who early in 1951 wanted to risk dragging the United States into a nuclear war against China. It is a good story, and Brands generally tells it well, except late in his tale when he relies too much on lengthy quotations from transcripts of congressional testimony. □