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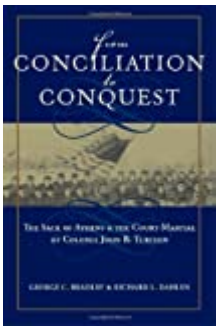

George C. Bradley, Richard L. Dahlen. *From Conciliation to Conquest: The Sack of Athens and the Court-Martial of Colonel John B. Turchin.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006. 312 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1526-9.

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Published on H-CivWar (February, 2009)

Commissioned by Charles D. Grear (Prairie View A & M University)

A Russian in the American Civil War

At first glance, readers will think that George C. Bradley and the late Richard L. Dahlen's work is a biography of a little-known colonel in the Union army and an even lesser-known battle in Athens, Alabama. However, this work focuses on a larger issue, of a policy change at the Federal government level. The battle is a microcosm of that policy shift, which Colonel John Basil Turchin enforced.

The authors of this work are an unlikely combination; Bradley and Dahlen both have backgrounds in law and are amateur historians. Bradley became involved in the project at Dahlenâs request to see that the work was completed. Both men realized that this book not only should be about Turchin but also should further study the debate surrounding U.S. war policy toward the Confederacy during the Civil War. Around the time that Turchin and his men sacked the town of Athens, the government in Washington DC was grappling with questions with which the nation can identify today. âWill we liberate, occupy, conquer or punish? Why have the people volunteered? What happens when anticipated liberation becomes an occupation of an area inhabited by a mixture or welcoming and hostile citizens? How should an army of occupation behave? What can we reasonably expect of volunteers in uniform, giving due consideration to their reasons for enlisting, their training, and the level of leadership they have? Knowing what we can or cannot expect of them, is it proper, advantageous, or disadvantageous to deploy them in the troubled territoryâ (p. 8)? The authors focus their study on the events that brought Turchin and the men under his command to the center of a national debate following their actions on May 2, 1862.

Turchin was born Ivan Vasilevitch Turchinoff on January 30, 1822, in the province of the Don Cossacks, Russia. His father served as a major in the Imperial Russian Army, and Ivan was destined for a similar career. Upon completion of the local elementary school and gymnasium at Novocherkassk, the school where nobility and other officials sent their children, Ivan was sent to the cadet academy in St. Petersburg. After graduation in 1841, Turchinoff joined the horse artillery and in 1849, now a lieutenant, helped end the Hungarian Revolution

of 1848. The next year, he was sent to study at the Nicholas Academy of the General Staff where the curriculum included âhigh tactics, the military history of famous campaigns, topography, and geodesy, military statistics, and military administrationâ (p. 20). Following graduation in 1852, Turchinoff was assigned to the Imperial Guards in St. Petersburg as a staff officer and received promotion to captain. After the Crimean War, Turchinoff received another promotion, this time to colonel and was transferred to southern Poland.

The death of Tsar Alexander brought changes to the Russian military and for Turchin a change in assignment, to stage a military review for the coronation of Nicholas I. Despite his rise in rank, Turchin was, by his account, wanting to live in a more democratic society. After his marriage in 1856, he took a furlough in Germany never intending to return to Russia. He and his wife eventually made their way to the United States. In between emigrating and the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, Turchin attempted numerous professions. He started as a farmer in New York, then worked for the United States Coast Survey in Philadelphia, and ultimately moved to Illinois where he worked for the Illinois Central Railroad in Matoon and later Chicago.

Upon the recommendation of John W. Foster, who worked for the railroad, Turchin was made a regimental commander with the rank of colonel. This book focuses on the sack of Athens on May 2, 1862, committed by Turchinâs men during a two-hour period with his consent. Turchin opposed the sentiment of his commanders, Generals Don Carlos Buell and George B. McClellan who wanted to pursue a gentler policy with the Southerners. They sought to treat them not as a people in rebellion but as a people who wanted to be liberated by the Union army. Townspeople reported the incident to General Ormsby Mitchel who gave them no redress without specific details about the soldiers who committed the crimes. Turchin was himself charged and ordered for a court martial in Athens.

Brigadier General James A. Garfield, who was inclined to like Turchin personally, oversaw the trial. The board, however, found Turchin guilty of failing to control his men and violating Buellâs General Order No. 13a, which forbade depredations, and recommended he be discharged. They also recommended leniency, which General Buell opposed. In the midst of the trial, Turchin received a promotion to brigadier general and he never was discharged. Instead, he was temporarily removed from command and later received a brigade command within the Army of the Cumberland under General William B. Rosecrans. The policy of conciliation was also traded for the stronger policy of total war, which did not tolerate treason and rebellion. Turchin left the army on July 15, 1864, due to illness; he made a number of career changes before his death in 1891 in Illinois.

This book is unique in the literature of the Civil War. To date, this is the only work on the battle of Athens, Alabama, and one of two works focusing solely on Turchin that are not autobiographical. The prior work on Turchin is Stephen Chicoineâs biography *John Basil Turchin and the Fight to Free the Slaves* (2003). Turchin also wrote his personal memoirs in *War Rambles* (1865) and *Chickamauga* (1888). The battle of Athens is briefly discussed in a number of Civil War histories and biographies, including Mark Grimsleyâs *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (1995).

Bradley and Dahlen have done an excellent job of merging Turchinâs life with the events taking place nationally. Readers will be able to follow the Unionâs path toward the change in policy during the Civil War. All of the key military and political leaders are included in this work, and the events take place in chronological order. The authors heavily consulted primary sources from the military, the National Archives, and the Library of Congress, and the book has a thorough set of notes. This book is recommended to students, historians, and general readers alike who have an interest in military history and war policy.

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Citation: Theresa Storey Hefner-Babb. Review of Bradley, George C.; Dahlen, Richard L., *From Conciliation to Conquest: The Sack of Athens and the Court-Martial of Colonel John B. Turchin.* H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. February, 2009.

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