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Timothy D. Johnson. *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998. xi + 315 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-0914-7.

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That is the phrase Timothy D. Johnson uses repeatedly to describe Winfield Scott, and any honest student of the man and his times will be hard pressed to disagree. Yet Johnson does an admirable job describing the whole man, not always an easy thing to do with so complex a man as Scott. Adding to this problem are Scott's own quirks and habits, which alienated many of his peers and can do so to historians as well. It is to Johnson's credit that he has written an accurate biography which, as he put it in his commentary on the book at Amazon.com, "is at once the most laudatory and the most critical ever written." Within the constraints of the book, it does accomplish its objectives.

I will not retell Scott's life, in part because Johnson does not do so completely. John S. D. Eisenhower's recent biography is a more thorough telling, but Johnson focuses from the beginning on Scott's "quest for military glory," and while he does not omit other factors of Scott's life and amazingly varied career, his primary focus is on Scott and the American army. His discussion of Scott's private, economic, and political lives are discussed in only as much detail as they are relevant to Scott's military career. All of his references are well documented by quite useful endnotes.

When Johnson lapsed in historico-psychobabble regarding the early loss of Scott's parents (p. 7), I despaired of the book, but happily this was the only place that happened. The book is well written and scholarly, two terms which all too often do not occur together. Thus, I am reduced to minor quibbles. First is Johnson's comment that the U.S. Army lacked the discipline "to maneuver in formation and load and fire on command (p. 44). While this is certainly true, it is even more necessary for the maneuver that actually won battles in that period, the bayonet charge. Musketry was to soften the enemy's morale so that they would break when it came to the press of bayonets. The English are cited as being impressed by the American bayonet charges, but Johnson does not stress this seminal part of Napoleonic warfare (p. 61). Similarly, while he regularly notes Scott's use of French military manuals and his emulation of their military system, and further describes Scott's penchant for taking the initiative, I find it odd that Johnson never cites Napoleon's oft-cited maxim, "L'audace, l'audace, et toujours, l'audace¡' (Please forgive whatever errors may be in the quotation!).

One final military quibble: in two places Johnson refers to the British firing grape and shot. While most military history readers will be able to differentiate between the grapeshot and round shot to which he is referring, other non-technical readers might simply assume it is a misprint for "grapeshot." Again, a minor point.

Further minor points are mainly those of failures of

the proof-readers, such as Secretary of War John Eaton being referred to as James (p. 103, although correctly cited elsewhere in the text and in the index), and in using the lower case when referring to the Catholic Mass (pp. 179, 194). I also found it mildly irksome when the middle names of many of the generals are omitted, as this is a good way to reassure the reader that, for example, William Worth is really William Jenkins Worth. Again, these are minor issues which should not detract from the overall impact of the book.

Johnson hits on an excellent device when he uses Andrew Jackson, Zachary Taylor, and Edmund Pendleton Gaines as archetypal Democratic foils to Scott's aristocratic airs. They illustrate well Scott's inability to stem the flood of egalitarianism and establish a military aristocracy. Yet in pointing out Scott's problems with his excessive ego and tender sense of honor, sometimes Johnson overstates himself, as when he refers to Scott's "fatal character flaws" (p. 64). As Scott did not die of them, and as he did rise to the pinnacle of American military glory, they could not have been too fatal, although they did prove to be to his political aspirations. I chose to write and submit this review on President's Day quite conciously, if ironically.

His political alliances also cause some confusions. Johnson, for example, observes that Martin Van Buren and Scott were such good friends that "The Little Magician" named his fourth child after Scott (p. 64), yet later Johnson says that Scott considered him "an unscrupulous manipulator" without telling the reader how such a shift had come about (p. 109). This is further compounded when Johnson states that Scott "had sufficient reason to anticipate a better relation with Martin Van Buren's administration" (p. 129).

Such observations aside, Johnson truly hits his stride in his coverage of Scott in the Mexican-American War. This was also where Scott had his greatest victories. In Scott's investiture of Veracruz, the much-derided "Anaconda Plan" of "the slow, scientific process" is foreshadowed (p. 176). His audacity of Lundy's Lane was replaced by a studied and calm war of maneauver, the "turning" of the enemy into surrender being preferable to the bloodbath frontal assaults of such rustics as Taylor. Not for "Old Rough and Ready" were the complex evolutions of the highly-trained army, and subordinates who initially condemned Scott as not having the craw for battle that Taylor had came to admire him for being sparing of his own troops in the accomplishment of his ends.

Johnson handles Scott's diplomacy in Mexico well in his aptly titled chapter on the war, "Olive Branch and Sword," taken from a quote by Scott. Scott kept the political objectives of negotiating a peace constantly in mind and, while I personally would have enjoyed more of the Scott-Nicholas Trist correspondence (the art of the high-toned invective was never better done, and all resolved by a case of guava marmalade), the discussion of Scott's complex campaign is excellent.

There is a sense of the anti-climactic following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as Johnson almost hurries Scott to the end of his days, and while there is some truth in saying that Scott's sun was setting, his handling of the Mormon situation following the Mountain Meadows Massacre is quite note-worthy, and his creation of the blockade plan that eventually led to the South's defeat deserve more attention.

As the reader may tell from my e-mail address, I have long been a fan of "Old Fuss and Feathers," and I have been continually frustrated at the lack of scholarship on Scott. Between Messrs. Johnson and Eisenhower, that gap has been greatly filled. As for Scott, I can think of no better way to end than did Johnson, who borrowed a comment from Winston Churchill about Charles de Gaulle: "Why he's selfish, he's arrogant, he thinks he's the center of the universe....He...you're right, he's a great man!" (p. 242)

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