defeat at the hands of Russian forces under Gen. Georgy Zhukov at the now largely forgotten Battle of Nomonhan, in Manchuria, in the summer of 1939. The Japanese had won the Russo-Japanese War and taken Manchuria, so they “persuaded” themselves that they could now with equanimity take on the Soviet colossus as well as China — and what else besides?” (p. 144)

Zhukov’s victory made him one of Stalin’s favorite generals, and after the German Army invaded the Soviet Union and was approaching Moscow in late 1941, Stalin called upon Zhukov to save the day. He did, and the Germans never threatened the Soviet capital again. In part, the victory was achieved with fresh Russian divisions transported from eastern Siberia. Stalin was convinced those troops were not needed to defend against Japanese attack, and he was correct, because Nomonhan had taught the Japanese that it was not wise to taunt the Russian bear.

Japanese hubris surfaced again, however, and led to another key loss at the naval Battle of Midway in mid-1942. After handing a significant defeat to the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii, Japan was convinced that it would have no trouble capturing the American base at Midway Island. Unfortunately for Japan, American cryptologists had broken their naval code and knew exactly what the force commanded by Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto (who had been wounded at Tsushima) had in mind. Japanese and American fleets fought each other with carrier-based aircraft, and the Japanese lost four carriers (and 248 planes) and a heavy cruiser, while the Americans lost only the carrier Yorktown (and 150 aircraft) and a destroyer. After Midway, the Japanese could only manage a defensive war in the Pacific, and it was only a matter of time before they were forced to surrender.

The American officer who accepted the 1945 Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay was General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, and his hubris later caused his otherwise brilliant military career to come to an ignoble end during the Korean War. After planning and executing the magnificent Inchon landing that crushed the North Korean right flank in September 1950, MacArthur soon recaptured the South Korean capital of Seoul and then began pushing United Nations forces northward toward the border with China. MacArthur ignored warnings that the Chinese would intervene if he pushed too far north, and he convinced himself that he was invincible. He wasn’t, hordes of Chinese “volunteers” pushed UN forces back south, and MacArthur’s public criticism of American foreign policy forced President Harry S. Truman to relieve him in 1951. The author writes: “Few acts of hubris in the twentieth century were punished more savagely or more swiftly than MacArthur’s.” (p. 310)

The final example of hubris involves the French defeat in Indo-China in 1954. Convinced that they could bleed their Viet Minh enemy dry by forcing them to do battle at a place of their choosing, the French created an inland stronghold at Dien Bien Phu that could not be adequately resupplied and was ultimately overwhelmed.

Hubris represents a master historian at the top of his craft, and it is one of those books you hate to finish. All readers interested in military history will definitely want to add this book to their libraries.

Roger D. Cunningham


The Confederacy’s hopes for outright success on the battlefield, and for that matter, foreign recognition were never greater than in the period listed in the sub-title. Indeed, the odds for independence were never better than then over the course of the four-year conflict. In this instance, author Phillip Leigh has neatly consolidated, in just over 200 pages of text, the political, diplomatic, and military ups and downs for each opponent in this seven-month period, without becoming bogged down in too much detail. His conclusion regarding the climactic event of this important term should come as no surprise.

As it turns out, the year in question was very much a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, day and night kind of experience for North and South. Leigh initially summarizes the first half of the year to set the stage for his thesis that the second half was the Confederacy’s “flood tide,” using that term as opposed to the more common and popular “high tide” surrounding the events at Gettysburg in 1863.

He lists the various Union successes which seemed to indicate the South’s pending denouement, beginning in January with the victory at Mill Springs, Kentucky, and then pushing United Nations forces northward toward the border with China. MacArthur ignored warnings that the Chinese would intervene if he pushed too far north, and he convinced himself that he was invincible. He wasn’t, hordes of Chinese “volunteers” pushed UN forces back south, and MacArthur’s public criticism of American foreign policy forced President Harry S. Truman to relieve him in 1951. The author writes: “Few acts of hubris in the twentieth century were punished more savagely or more swiftly than MacArthur’s.” (p. 310)
pinning the Army of the Potomac to its “change of base” at Harrison’s Landing was only the first phase in seizing that initiative, as he then campaigned to suppress John Pope before turning his sights on Maryland and perhaps points even further north.

In the West, the intended coordination and combination of the armies of Braxton Bragg and Edmund Kirby Smith would carry the conflict into Kentucky, and hopefully to the banks of the Ohio River to regain all that had been lost, and then some, earlier in the year. Cooperation between the two, however, was not to be, resulting in the early October defeat at and subsequent retreat from Perryville.

As military events progress, the author also details the ongoing behind-the-scenes political and diplomatic events in each respective government, with particular attention paid to relations with Great Britain and France. The latter would do nothing without the intervention of the former, yet the former always seemed to wait for that one more indication from the Confederacy that intervention was justified and perhaps a viable and worthy nation-state entitled to recognition.

With the flood tide receding as a result of the battles of Antietam and Perryville, President Lincoln’s confidence in the importance and effect of the Emancipation Proclamation, on 1 January 1863, was increased to the extent that the abolition of slavery, added to the original objective of restoring the Union, would forestall any possibility of foreign intervention or recognition. This event was the real denouement of the Confederacy, Leigh contends.

Creditably, the eleven maps included not only have scale but also accompany the text in conjunction with its immediate and relevant thrust. The photographs are essentially thumbnail size mainly in the upper right hand corner of a page. They are of the two presidents, many of the generals referenced in the text, Charles Francis Adams (Ambassador to Great Britain) and Secretary of State William Seward.

Curiously, the only inaccuracy noted was Fairfax Court House being described as “only three miles short of Lincoln’s White House.” (p. 63) It is more like twenty-three miles, so it could be due to a missing word in the text. Also, the cover illustration of the Battle of Pea Ridge is not in the period covered by the book.

Although the author employed basic primary sources such as memoirs, personal papers, diaries, and other historical documents, there is evidence of strong reliance on many secondary sources from the 20th Century as well, such as Peter Cozzens, Clifford Dowdey, and William C. Davis. Not necessarily a criticism, but it should be noted that Leigh is not a professional historian, holding degrees in engineering and business administration.

In any event, this is an easily readable and comprehensible account of perhaps the most pivotal period of the war. It provides more than adequate descriptions of the major military operations, battles, and considerations behind them, hand-in-hand with the background diplomatic and political machinations which they influenced, to demonstrate that the last half of 1862 was the Confederacy’s “flood tide.”

Stuart McClung


If you are interested in the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, you need to read this book. The editors have gathered the writings of fifteen historians, who examine various aspects of the Lincoln assassination and its consequences. All the articles are well written and of interest to a person wanting to know more about Lincoln’s death and its effect upon his family and the nation as a whole.

The book’s fifteen chapters cover five general topics — the plans to assassinate Lincoln, the assassination itself, the events that took place immediately afterward, the effect of the assassination on contemporary Americans, and how the assassination has come to affect American society. While each chapter can be read on its own, the editors of this book have performed an outstanding job in allowing each chapter to provide a stepping stone into the following chapter. It is true that many of the essays in this book cover topics delved into in greater detail by other noted authors, yet as I read them, I found each of them holding my undivided interest.

Michael Kline starts the book with his “The Baltimore Plot: Was John Wilkins Booth Involved in the 1861 Conspiracy to Assassinate Lincoln?” I found this article fascinating, for it contains a diagram showing the inner relationship between the various individuals and organizations linked to the 1861 assassination attempt. One will quickly notice when looking at this chart that many of the 1861 assassination attempt players retained a similar relationship with each other in 1865. Supporting Kline’s writing is Edward Steel Jr’s essay, “John Wilkes Booth’s Confederate Connection.”

Chapters Three to Five look directly at the assassination of President Lincoln. These three chapters show various links between John Wilkes Booth and individuals directly and indirectly involved in the Lincoln Assassination. Blaine V. Houmes discusses whether modern science could have saved Lincoln in “The Wound of Mr.