

Reviews

Riding for the Lone Star: Frontier Cavalry and the Texas Way of War, 1822-1865, Nathan A. Jennings, Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2016, 402 pages (including photographs and maps), \$32.95 cloth, \$26.36 ebook.

ARMOR readers should recognize the name of an Armor Branch brother-in-arms and author of several articles published in the branch's professional-development magazine. Winner of the Armor School's 2015 Starry Writing Competition for his essay, "Balancing the Combined-Arms Force" (published in **ARMOR**'s July-September 2015 edition), MAJ Nathan Jennings' thoughtful writing has recently been showcased in a book called ***Riding for the Lone Star: Frontier Cavalry and the Texas Way of War, 1822-1865***.

The cavalry officer's subject of frontier Texas is a topic he has previously forayed into in **ARMOR** with "Learning the Long-Distance Raid: Comanche, Rangers and 2nd U.S. Cavalry on the Texas Frontier" (July-September 2014 edition) and "Unleashing Tactical Audacity: 8th Texas Cavalry Regiment in the Civil War" (July-September 2015 edition). In ***Riding for the Lone Star***, Jennings greatly expands on his concepts of the evolution of Texan militarism and Texas' signature "way of war."

The idea of "Texas" – an idea that carries through to today – "was forged in the crucible of frontier warfare," writes Jennings. "It emerged desperately and violently between 1822 and 1865 as Anglo-American settlers encountered mounted combat north of the Rio Grande." This vast land area – long the domain of the Plains Indians and the Spanish – was a cavalry-centric battlefield that included the presence of the most lethal cavalry society in America (the Comanche), among other Plains Indian warriors, so the protection that settlers demanded "compelled an adaptive martial tradition that shaped and informed early Lone Star culture." Beginning with initial tactical innovation in Spanish *Tejas* and culminating with mobilization for the Civil War, Jennings examines the distinctive "way of war" that Texas society developed: armed horsemanship, volunteer militancy, event-specific mobilization, nationalistic tradition, "outsized firepower" and heightened masculine ideals.

Texas made this way of war its own because it "imported weaponry and tactics from [immigrants'] home states, especially Tennessee, that included predilections for irregular warfare and reliance on field musketry," Jennings writes. "They also adopted horse mobility of Plains tribes and mirrored previous adaptation by Spanish presidios. Fusion of these military attributes resulted in a new type of frontier cavalry which eventually gained regional fame, and notoriety, as the Texas Rangers."

Riding for the Lone Star explores the historic rise of the Texas Rangers and Texas society's passion for mounted combat in general through unflinching examination of territorial competition with Comanche, Mexicans and Unionists. While statesmen Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston emerged as influential strategic leaders, captains like Edward Burleson, John Coffee Hays and John Salmon Ford attained fame for tactical success – success often achieved due to cultural, racist and ethnic contempt of their federal, tribal and international opponents.

"[Jennings] recognizes that the Texas way of war often entailed a fearsome, racially and ethnically charged ferocity," comments Robert Wooster, author of ***The American Military Frontiers*** and ***The Military and United States Indian Policy 1865-1903***.

The U.S. Army bears some culpability once the United States annexed Texas as a state, as federal military forces could not protect Texas's borders and Anglo settlements. "Federal protection remained comprehensively inadequate to protect rapidly expanding settlements lines and left ambitious pioneers to grapple with ethnic competitors, victims and opportunists," Jennings writes. "This security lapse, even though often exaggerated by settlers, politicians and [newspaper] editors alike, ensured that Texas's way of war remained relevant. ... The Lone Star military tradition, which could have potentially elapsed had the U.S. Army managed to pacify volatile border regions, was sustained and validated by continuous border warfare. As a result, Texas again called citizens to militarize against the chaos of its volatile position between competing tribes, lawless marauders and an unstable Mexico."

So Texas learned some lessons that would (controversially) apply today: its Rangers were equipped, trained and organized as highly mobile formations, able and willing to proactively carry the fight to the enemy. Unfortunately,

Texas' way of war was also to conduct warfare against the "civilian population" (women and children in Native American villages, for example); capture horses (the means of attack) in those villages; and destroy the villages (centers of supply and rest).

In addition to the articles mentioned in this review, Jennings' work for **ARMOR** includes "Cavalry Branch: a Redesignation for the 21st Century" (January-February 2014), "Arming for Impact: Empowering Cavalry to Enhance Joint Combined-Arms Operations" (January-March 2015) and "Armored Forces: an Indispensable Component of Strategic Deterrence" (July-September 2015).

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Patton at the Battle of the Bulge: How the General's Tanks Turned the Tide at Bastogne, Leo Barron, New York: Penguin Random House Publishing, 2015, 410 pages (including endnotes and cited works), \$16 softcover.

In ***Patton at the Battle of the Bulge: How the General's Tanks Turned the Tide at Bastogne***, Leo Barron discusses 101st Airborne Division's relief during one of World War II's famous battles. Barron – who is coauthor of the book ***No Silent Night*** and who has written articles about the Battle of the Bulge and World War II published in professional military journals – pulls from mostly primary-source interviews and official reports of personnel and units to support his thesis that 4th Armored Division's successful mission to relieve 101st Airborne was due to its exceptionalism as unit, combined with the U.S. Army's superior capabilities.

It's not primarily about Patton, as the title suggests it is.

The book exhibits excellent depth and multiple points of view. It incorporates not only American primary sources, but also German and Belgian first-hand accounts. The narrative is organized chronologically, focusing on initial movements of both the United States and Germany and then engagements between 4th Armored Division and the Germans in towns on the approaches to Bastogne. Barron's points are well supported by multiple sub-arguments, focusing on logistics and leadership, backed by credible evidence from his primary sources.

One of Barron's best sub-arguments centers on the gifted mid-level officers of 4th Armored Division. He highlights how many of these officers, such as Creighton Abrams, were some of the best in the Army, and their success was due to their "tactical acumen and quick thinking," which "led directly to the division's success." Abrams' tactical decision-making, in particular, is well displayed in the final breach at Assenois.

In addition to the unit's great leadership, Barron also highlights 4th Armored Division's advantages. Another one of the most detailed sub-arguments contrasts the motorized capabilities of the two armies. Barron clearly demonstrates the U.S. Army's advantage of being "almost completely motorized, [while] the German army still relied heavily on horse-drawn transport." This provided a logistical advantage for the United States and a severe disadvantage for the Germans, as they were unable to transport food or vital equipment such as anti-tank weapons.

Another key point Barron highlights were advantages in U.S. air support. The "Luftwaffe never seriously challenged the American advantage in close air support" and 363rd Fighter Group "wreaked havoc on the Wehrmacht."

Clearly the strength of Barron's book is the superior level of research. Although it is a very detailed account of 4th Armored Division's path of advance, the book's organization represents its greatest weakness. Since it is organized by battles, it is harder to interpret and assess his sub-arguments since the focus of each chapter rests on that particular engagement, requiring the reader to focus hard on each chapter.

Another criticism, as referred to, is that the title is misleading; there is actually little discussion of Patton's role in this event. ***Foreign Affairs*** expressed a similar critique in its review. (See Lawrence Freedman, "Three Books on the Battle of the Bulge," ***Foreign Affairs***, March/April 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/three-books-battle-bulge>.)

Barron's claim that the exceptional 4th Armored Division, supported by U.S. industrial advantages, was key in relieving 101st Airborne is a valid argument and is well-asserted and well-defended. Overall, it is a well-written book providing multiple perspectives through its in-depth research. Despite its misleading title, this book deserves

serious attention for its depth of scholarship and relevance to the military profession. Barron provides an excellent example of how an officer – in this case Abrams – exercised disciplined initiative to seize fleeting opportunity in battle and achieve great success. This work also provides a detailed account of the individuals who fought during the Battle of the Bulge and explains why 4th Armored Division was so successful.

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