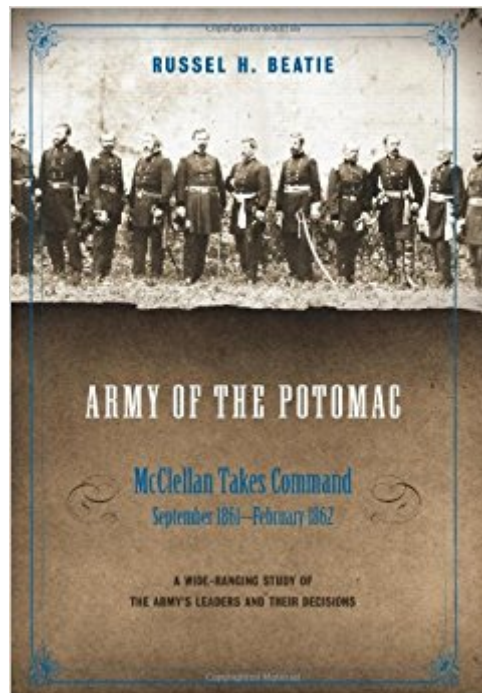




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Army Of The Potomac, Volume II: McClellan Takes Command, September 1861-February 1862



Synopsis

In this second volume of a multi-volume work, Russel Beatie continues his detailed study of the generals who commanded the Union's victorious Army of the Potomac. When the first volume appeared, Civil War News commended Beatie's monumental study, noting that "readers will find its thoroughness and extensive detail useful to their efforts to better understand the Union war effort." This new survey of the war's first six months of fighting places the command decisions of the army's senior officers in the social, political, military, and economic context of their day. Thought-provoking and original (the book is based entirely on manuscript sources, many of which have never before been examined), Beatie's account and his conclusions about the actions of the Union's high command differ-often significantly-from traditional historical thinking. What emerges is a fresh understanding of these men and how their personalities influenced their command decisions, and the political atmosphere that influenced their military actions. The Army of the Potomac is about leaders as men-their successes and failures commanding the Union's largest army.

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Customer Reviews

"Impressive beyond words...[A] superb contribution...to Civil War literature." -- Civil War News 2/24/05
"Offers the most accurate and unbiased account to date of McClellan...[The] definitive history." -- Midwest Book Review 12/6/04

Russel H. Beatie, a former army lieutenant, is a graduate of Princeton University and Columbia Law

School. He has been a trial lawyer in New York City for almost four decades. He is the author of many articles about the Civil War and the book *Road to Manassas*.

Lawyer-historian Russel H. Beatie's second volume on the history of the Army of the Potomac is a welcome addition to my vast Civil War Library. Like most Civil War buffs my shelves teem with big volumes on the Army of Northern Virginia but lack good histories of the Army of the Potomac! Beatie's series is sure to become the sine qua non for anyone wanting an in-depth study of this much maligned but eventually magnificent sword of Lincoln. Beatie is a writer more interested in the political and strategic thinking of war leaders in Washington than he is in blow-by-blow descriptions of battle. In this second volume in the series he does discuss in depth the battle of Ball's Bluff fought on Oct. 21, 1861 in which Lincoln's old law partner the inept Edward Baker died. Beatie explores the impact of this small battle on the competency of Union leaders; how it helped foment the call for a Committee on the Conduct of the War led by Radical Republicans such as Benjamin Franklin Wade to control the strategy of the War. Beatie explores how the pool of military commanders was drawn from professional soldiers who graduated from West Point; political generals and those who came from the ranks of volunteer companies mustered in by individual state governors. He also explores how foreign born leaders came to leadership roles in the army. Beatie's pen is adept at drawing incisive portraits of Northern leaders such as Winfield Scott; Fitz John Porter; Joe Hooker and the star of this book William McClellan. McClellan took the commanding position of Union forces following the retirement of old, crusty Winfield Scott. McClellan could train and equip an army to fight but was slow in launching an assault against the rebels. His thoughts about launching the Urbanna water assault on Richmond, the Occoquan plan and the Peninsula Campaign strategy are explored in depth! Beatie writes in an adequate style but he lacks the skill of writers such as Foote, Freeman and Catton to entrance the reader with the magic of words. Maps are adequate. In addition to the military leaders the author sketches such luminaries as Edwin Stanton (whom he dislikes) and of course the Commander in Chief Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln had to steer the war effort handling with deft genius the Radical Republicans, conservative forces in the army and government, abolitionists and others who disdained his leadership. The book is dry to read but contains invaluable information on the Army of the Potomac. Well recommended for the serious student of the Civil War in the Eastern Theatre.

George B. McClellan is easily one of the most misunderstood and maligned people in history. Though not a McClellan apologist, Russel H. Beatie, in his second of three so far published volumes

(of what is sure to be a massive multivolume work) on the history of The Army Of The Potomac, demonstrates what many people have come to believe about McClellan isn't a true and accurate portrait of the man that was. A lawyer by profession and an historian by avocation, Mr. Beatie slowly builds his case against misconceptions of the perceived historical McClellan. As if peeling an onion, he removes layer after layer of historical half truths and misinformation, he shows the reader the mechanizations of politicians intent on pointing their fingers, placing the blame and passing the buck, and he explains the "why" of McClellan's actions in regards to Winfield Scott, Edwin Stanton, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the war and, most of all, President Abraham Lincoln. Picking up where volume one left off, Winfield Scott's resignation has been accepted by Lincoln and McClellan appointed the General-In-Chief of all the Union forces. Though not a battle book, a considerable portion of the book does involve The Battle of Ball's Bluff, where Senator, General and close friend of Abraham Lincoln, Edward Baker is killed in action. Though paled in comparison to later battles of the war to follow, Ball's Bluff is not important tactically to the story, but politically, having given Congress (and more notably the Radical Republicans) an excuse to form The Joint Committee On The Conduct Of The War. In another large portion of the book, Mr. Beatie discusses in depth the various pools of men from which the Federal Army drew its generals: The Bull Run Officer Pool, The West Point and Regular Army Pools, Foreigner and Politician Pools and the Gubernatorial Pool, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the various men who came out of those pools, but most notably he notes the bias against officers from the West Point Pool, being viewed as largely sympathetic to the Confederacy. The last major portion of this book covers the McClellan-Lincoln relationship. Mr. Beatie shows us that McClellan did not trust the President or members of his cabinet and therefore kept his plans largely to himself. When McClellan was struck down by the effects of typhoid fever, Lincoln was confronted with politicians who were demanding military action. With the General-In-Chief confined to his bed and refusing to share his plans, Lincoln had no other option than to borrow the army for a while and begin to make plans of his own. McClellan, alerted by friends of the President's actions, rose from his sick bed before Lincoln had the chance to put his plans into action. The book finishes with McClellan in the planning stages for what will become known as The Peninsula Campaign. Mr. Beatie's research is exemplary. He has unearthed many first hand accounts that until now have never been published anywhere. Though his narrative is at times dry and sometimes strays a bit from the path, much of the material between the covers of Russel H. Beatie's *Army of the Potomac, Volume II: McClellan Takes Command*, September 1861-February 1862 has not previously been covered, nor found in any other published works on the topic, and Mr. Beatie provides a fresh look and new interpretations on many of the

historical controversies surrounding George B. McClellan and the army he commanded.

This is the second volume in Beatie's potentially monumental multi-volume effort attempting to cover the command decisions in the higher levels of the Union's most famous Army. Volume 2 picks up where Volume 1 left off. George B. McClellan had been appointed to command the Army of the Potomac after McDowell's less than stellar showing at First Bull Run. Throughout this book, Beatie attempts to explain how McClellan, his subordinates, the politicians, and everyone else involved created an Army out of the ashes of the Manassas defeat. Beatie argues that there was an unfair prejudice against West Pointers and that political appointees many times were in over their heads at various levels of command. He also details the events that led to McClellan outmaneuvering the venerable Gen. Scott into a not-so-early retirement and the interference of politicians in the day-to-day workings of the Army of the Potomac, especially with regards to the notorious Committee on the Conduct of the War, led by Radical Republican Benjamin Wade, and late in the book when Edwin Stanton became the Secretary of War, and McClellan's immediate enemy. But to me, the most important contribution Beatie makes is his painstaking recreation of the relationship between McClellan as General-in-Chief and Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief. Beatie seems to be more tolerant of McClellan's peculiarities and less impressed with Lincoln's understanding of military affairs than the average writer. I do not mind this at all because Beatie has done such an enormous amount of research and has dug into so many manuscripts that we may be seeing for the first time a fair and unbiased opinion on a very controversial time in the Army's history. 636 pp., 21 maps

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