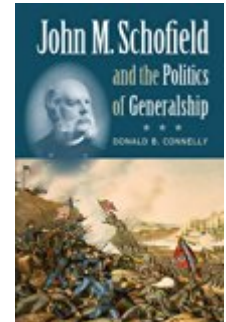


**Donald B. Connelly.** *John M. Schofield and the Politics of Generalship*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. xiv + 471 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-3007-9.



**Reviewed by** Christiane I. Reinhold

**Published on** H-War (December, 2006)

With *John M. Schofield and the Politics of Generalship*, Donald B. Connelly has masterfully illuminated the life and career of a lesser known but vitally important figure in U.S. civil and military affairs during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Despite winning the Medal of Honor and serving as both Secretary of War and as Commanding General of the Army, Schofield's name often escapes mention in modern military history texts. His contributions to a Union victory in the Civil War and a reformed army command structure that affirmed civilian oversight and improved relations between the Chief and Secretary alone should guarantee him a place in history, but his ability to maneuver in the complex political arena of the period makes his biography a relevant and useful read. As Connelly notes, the "volatility of American politics made it prudent for an officer to avoid identification with one political party or faction" (p. 3) and Schofield resolved these difficulties with an exemplary combination of professionalism and political subordination. The various nuances of Schofield's diverse career are clearly captured in a meticulously researched and highly readable narrative that will

be of interest to both scholars of the period and readers concerned with the history of U.S. civil-military relations.

While the idea that war and politics are inextricably linked is certainly not new, Schofield's career offers ample evidence of the political dexterity required of Civil War-era commanders in order to survive and succeed. Schofield's remarkable ability to operate within an existing, if fluid, political system, as evidenced by his service in Missouri at the outset of the war, demonstrates the value of an apolitical commander in a highly charged political environment. Schofield skillfully maneuvered between competing factions of radicals and conservatives, and earned both the praise of his Commander-in-Chief as well as a field command with the Army of the Ohio. In his examination of Schofield's service in the Atlanta and Franklin-Nashville campaigns, Connelly reveals that the battlefield was not immune from politics, although more frequently it was politics of the army variety, and that Schofield was as equally skilled in this environment as he was on the battlefield. Throughout his career on active

service, Schofield demonstrated that, for commanders of the day, political savvy was often just as important as tactical or operational expertise.

While his field service was valuable, if not remarkable, Schofield's most important contributions to the military establishment came in the post-war period. Service as the military governor of Virginia and as Secretary of War in both the Johnson and Grant administrations prepared him for his subsequent postings as the Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, as commander of the three main departments of the army and then the army itself. His numerous contributions to the reforms eventually enshrined by Elihu Root are adequately detailed, and his proposed consolidation of the War and Navy Departments eighty years before the National Security Act of 1947 demonstrates his remarkable foresight. Connelly's thorough discussion of the origins of the *Posse Comitatus* Act is highly relevant in today's national and internal security environment as are his observations on the benefits of harmonious and mutually respectful relations between the service's senior military officer and his civilian secretary.

Historians of military education will find interesting Connelly's ample descriptions of Schofield's role as an educator and reformer. Schofield's untiring advocacy of critical thinking and the value of a strong liberal arts curriculum are still relevant, and the deans of our service academies would be wise to heed them. Additionally, his advocacy of and support for military training at civilian universities should merit his consideration for the title "Father of the R.O.T.C." Even today, cadets at service academies across the country still recite the text of Schofield's August 1879 address to his cadets on the relationship between leadership and discipline in a democratic military, and Connelly wisely includes the text verbatim as both a refresher and to illustrate Schofield's personal philosophy.

Connelly refutes some of the more damaging allegations leveled against Schofield in James L.

McDonough's *Schofield: Union General in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (1972), and by so doing establishes himself and his text as the authority on the subject. If Connelly's work has any flaws, it is his overly flattering portrayal of his subject. While Schofield's unwise (if contemporary) racial views and his heightened sensitivity to criticism of his exploits on the battlefield, even years after the fact, are given ample coverage, one wonders if the General suffered from any other unmentioned character flaws, given the prevalence of corruption during the period and Schofield's comfort and familiarity with prominent business leaders of the day.

The book's primary thesis, that the political and military spheres are inextricably linked, but that military officers most frequently find success when they can clearly define the boundaries of each, is amply illustrated through the life of John M. Schofield. Overall, Connelly has masterfully filled one of the few remaining voids in biographies of Civil War generals, and his work is a must read for anyone interested in the development of American civil-military relations. Rich footnotes and high quality maps and illustrations further enhance a first-rate work that will grace bookshelves as long as the institutions Schofield devoted his life to advancing and preserving still exist.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

**Citation:** Christiane I. Reinhold. Review of Connelly, Donald B. *John M. Schofield and the Politics of Generalship*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. December, 2006.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12686>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.