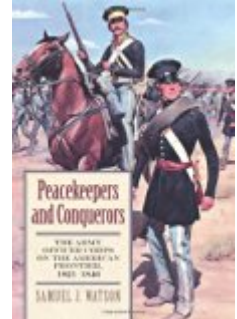


Samuel J. Watson. *Peacekeepers and Conquerors: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1821-1846.* Modern War Studies. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013. xvi + 636 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-1915-3.



Reviewed by Timothy C. Hemmis

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Samuel J. Watson follows up his acclaimed book *Jackson's Sword: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1810-1821* (2012) with another superb volume, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1821-1846*. Watson's latest work examines the growing development of the Army Officer Corps during a time of military reduction and increasing civil authority. Throughout the antebellum period, the US Army was not a dormant institution but a constantly active organization. Watson covers many events that helped shape the army, from the Trail of Tears to the peacekeeping mission along the Canadian border during the 1830s. However, ultimately the author argues that during this quarter century, the army also grew professionally by forging the officer corps that fought together in the Mexican-American War and the American Civil War.

The first few chapters deal with the Native American question. Even before the founding of the United States, Native Americans had been seen as a threat to Euro-American expansion.

Watson explains that during this period, the United States continued to “expect their physical extinction, or at best their assimilation and cultural extinction in the face of white expansion” (p. 35). Government officials used the army to regulate, control, and protect Native Americans on the frontier. The army was often the policing agency between whites and Indians and was in charge of maintaining peace during Indian uprisings as well as regulating relations with Native Americans.

For example, Watson discusses the Indian Removal Act and civil-military conflicts in the American South. He contends that the discovery of gold in western North Carolina and Georgia led to a white invasion of Native American lands. Thus, at first, according to Watson, the army's role was to prevent violence between whites and Native Americans. Army “commanders felt an empathy for the natives founded largely in the contrast with the rapacious disorder of white frontiersmen, who were actually violating the nation's law and Constitution” (p. 113). Eventually, armed vio-

lence broke out between soldiers and white squatters, which led to political action. Furthermore, when the federal government authorized the Indian Removal Act, the army was the only logical tool to enforce the new law. Nonetheless, the army went to war with tribes that refused to follow orders, leading to “American’s longest [war] between the Revolution and Vietnam” (p. 131). Watson covers Indian removal and residual conflicts in several chapters. He highlights the constant political problems that erupted during these campaigns. Thus, again the army was the instrument employed to bring order and peace to the borderlands.

Watson also illustrates the importance of the army in keeping international peace along the Canadian border. During the antebellum period, the American/Canadian border was not as peaceful as during the last one hundred years. The Niagara and Great Lakes frontier was an unstable area where locals wanted to raid Canada and vice versa. Although the US Army was used to prevent another war between the United States and Great Britain, it did little to prevent border raids between civilian groups. Military relations with civilians along the American border were tense. Civilian raiders continued to terrorize the border. The federal army was sent to New York to prevent raiders from gathering arms and using them to start a war with Great Britain. Watson shows how politicians and army officers worked together to keep relative peace along the border. In addition to the Great Lakes border activities in the late 1830s, he discusses the Aroostook War in Maine. However, by the time Brigadier General Winfield Scott arrived in Maine, peace had already been achieved. The army had become the diplomatic tool for the federal government. Watson details the professional performance of the army along the Canadian border, which is an often-overlooked feat in American history books.

Watson’s next area of study is the expansion of the United States and peacekeeping along the

Texas border. Although army officers were “ardent expansionists during the 1810s and 1840s,” they “cooperated with their Mexican counterparts in pursuit of law and order in the southwestern borderlands” (p. 317). On the frontier, especially on the southern border, law and order were attributed to the US Army. Watson demonstrates that with professional development, the officer corps became important in establishing order in the borderlands. However, peacekeeping changed to projecting power against the Mexican and British governments in the 1840s. During the Polk administration, the army was used as a tool for expansion; it moved into Texas when it was annexed and war seemed imminent with Mexico. Watson highlights that army officers welcomed the war with Mexico. The US Army saw itself as superior to that of the Mexican counterparts. Watson argues that it was the Mexican-American War that tested the professionalism of the army that had been created after the War of 1812. Furthermore, it was the Mexican-American War that trained the officer corps for the American Civil War.

Watson argues that the army and its officer corps were not as racist as other historians have claimed. He uses Indian removal as evidence, stating that they protected Native Americans from racist locals. Furthermore, he shows that the officer corps was a professional institution that followed a set of rules. In his attempt to readdress the role of the army, he comes across as a bit sympathetic to the army, especially for its role in the Indian Removal Act.

Despite these perceived biases, Watson illustrates the importance of the US Army and its officer corps in the expansion and development of the United States, a largely unexplored part of American history. Historians have glossed over the role that the US Army played along the antebellum frontier, and Watson does his best to reinvigorate that history. The author has constructed a well-researched, detailed, and well-written story

of the army and its officer corps from 1821 to 1846. As a military history, it reveals the unique relationship between American society and its armed forces. It deserves to be read by all American history scholars and the current Army Officer Corps at West Point.

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