



Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief

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From Reader Review Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief for online ebook

Jill says

If your own life does not offer frustrations to irritate you beyond reason, you can read this account of what Lincoln had to endure with his generals during the Civil War, most notably George McClellan.

McClellan didn't seem too interested in engaging the army of which he had command, but he was so popular with his troops that Lincoln feared mutiny if he dismissed McClellan. McClellan also had overwhelming and enthusiastic support among Democrats. Therefore, Lincoln decided he had better put up with McClellan at least until after the elections in November of 1862.

But there is much more in this book than contemplating how many lives might have not been lost if McClellan (and subsequent balky generals) had just followed Lincoln's orders.

McPherson organizes the book around five functions performed or overseen by Lincoln in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief: the formulation of policy, national strategy, military strategy, operations, and tactics. In all of these areas, McPherson shows how Lincoln based his decisions on one core concept, i.e., to preserve the *nation* by winning the war. Lincoln averred that "the right of a State to secede is not an open or debatable question" and that the President "cannot entertain any proposition for dissolution or dismemberment."

[It should be noted that there is nothing in the *Constitution* about whether or not a state may leave the Union. The South argued that the Constitution was simply a compact among sovereign states and states could opt out if they no longer found conditions for this compact favorable to them. Lincoln, however, argued that the *nation* predated the Constitution, having been declared by the *people*, not the states, in the Declaration of Independence. Therefore no *state* can dissolve the Union. This is the idea upon which he elaborated in The Gettysburg Address.]

Later in his presidency, Lincoln added two other conditions for peace in addition to the insistence that the Union be restored. One was "abandonment of slavery." Lincoln made a promise of freedom to black soldiers who fought for the Union, and, he maintained, he could not betray that promise. Nor would he agree to any ceasefire for the purpose of negotiations - he stipulated that there would be "no cessation of hostilities sort of an end of the war, and the disbanding of all forces hostile to the government."

Much of McPherson's analysis is made by reporting the content of the telegrams Lincoln sent his generals, and explaining the many excuses the generals made by way of reply for not obeying Lincoln's directions. Lincoln's suggestions for military operations were remarkably astute, but they mostly were ignored.

Lincoln was incredibly frustrated over his generals' inaction, excuses, and even insubordination, but he faced three main difficulties: (1) in the beginning, Lincoln was unsure of his own ability as a "commander in chief" and thought the West Point "professionals" perforce must know better than he, so he was apt to defer to their judgment; (2) many of the *non*-professionals were political appointments Lincoln had made to appease some faction or other, and while these men were very much out of their depth, Lincoln couldn't take the political risk of cashiering them; (3) until near the end of the war, Lincoln just had no one else qualified to whom he could turn.

By 1864, however, Lincoln finally had a competent team in place, consisting of Grant, Sherman, Sheridan

and Thomas, *inter alia* - men who not only were eager and willing to fight an offensive war, rather than strictly taking a defensive stance, but who understood that the goal of the war was to destroy Lee's army, not just to capture Richmond (whether the Confederate army was still intact or not!)

McPherson tips his hat to Lincoln's lucid and convincing explanations to the American people of the actions he took. As McPherson writes, Lincoln was "a master of metaphors" who utilized stories and homilies to make abstruse concepts seem totally clear and logical.

He also defends the measures Lincoln took to extend the wartime powers of the Executive, such as Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus and his authorization of military tribunals to try civilians. As McPherson argues, at no time in American history was the survival of the country in greater danger than in the Civil War. Yet, he reminds us:

"...compared with the draconian enforcement of espionage and sedition laws in World War I, the internment of more than one hundred thousand Japanese Americans in the 1940s, McCarthyism in the 1950s, or the National Security State of our own time, the infringement of civil liberties from 1861 to 1865 seems mild indeed."

Evaluation: This examination of how Lincoln fulfilled his role as a wartime Commander-in-Chief provides an excellent perspective on Lincoln, the military, and the many challenges facing a wartime president. In addition, you also get a brief history of the Civil War itself: one that summarizes, in a highly interesting format, most of its history.

Zena Ryder says

A great, readable book on Lincoln as commander in chief. I really felt for him as he tried to get general after general to actually *fight* this war and get it over and done with. In particular, the mystery of McClellan and how long Lincoln put up with him becomes a *little* more understandable in this book. (He was charismatic and likeable; and he was hard to replace — even if there had been a decent, available general — because his soldiers adored him.) But I suspect that without knowing McClellan first hand, it will always be somewhat mysterious.

The impression I had before was that the war took a dramatic turn for the better (from the Union perspective) after Gettysburg, but this book painted the turn less dramatically. It was less a turn, and more a slight leaning. There was still *plenty* of failure, loss, incompetence and lack of nerve after Gettysburg. If it hadn't been for Grant and Sherman, the Union probably would have lost the war — and slavery would have continued without opposition, in the independent Confederacy.

Steve says

<http://bestpresidentialbios.com/2014/...>

"Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief" is James McPherson's 2008 biography focused on Lincoln's role as the nation's chief military strategist and tactician during the Civil War. McPherson is a

historian, Professor Emeritus of History at Princeton University and a prolific author. His most notable work is “Battle Cry of Freedom” (the standard one-volume history of the Civil War) for which he received a Pulitzer Prize in 1989.

In the book’s preface, McPherson asserts that most Lincoln-related literature pays disproportionately less attention to Lincoln’s role as commander in chief than is deserved based on the time he devoted to that task. This, it seems, is his rationale for authoring “Tried by War.” And as promised, rather than writing “yet another” biography of Lincoln’s life, McPherson spends all 270 pages focused on Lincoln’s presidency – with the substantial majority focused on his prosecution of the war.

Notwithstanding his claim, the majority of the almost nine-thousand pages I’ve read on Lincoln the past three months (excluding chapters focused on Lincoln’s youth) was spent reviewing, discussing, and analyzing Lincoln’s role as commander in chief. But while I found McPherson’s justification for writing this book somewhat spurious, I was undeniably interested to experience this renowned Civil War historian’s perspective on a presidency consumed by war.

Happily, the book’s pace as well as the author’s insight into Lincoln’s management of the war are terrific. “Tried by War” is easy to read and understand, and proves consistently informative and entertaining. Where some Lincoln-oriented biographies become bogged down in dull explanations of war tactics or troop movements, this book appears calibrated for a younger, less patient audience.

However, little about McPherson’s book is truly unique. Given the author’s background, I expected deeper analysis and a richer, more robust interpretation of Lincoln’s actions during the war. Although McPherson frequently demonstrates his mastery of the subject, broad swaths of the commentary are superficial and breezy. And while the book contains new information concerning some of Lincoln’s military leaders and a few battles, none of it is important enough to alter the complexion of Lincoln I’ve gleaned from other biographies.

Readers seeking special insight into the war’s great battles, or overall military strategy, will also be disappointed. Although “Tried by War” is not intended as a Civil War primer (and makes no attempt to supplant the excellent “Battle Cry of Freedom”) McPherson’s focus is almost exclusively on Lincoln and his management of the war. The Battle of Gettysburg, for example, is dispatched in just two sentences.

Rather than writing a potent, fresh study of Lincoln’s life from an unconventional perspective it almost seems as though McPherson has taken a standard six- or seven-hundred page biography of Lincoln and condensed it dramatically by removing Lincoln’s pre-presidency and a great deal of the interaction with his mercurial cabinet members. Rather than seeing Lincoln from a new perspective, I simply saw Lincoln from only one perspective. Interesting though that perspective was, I find found the book limiting rather than revealing.

Overall, James McPherson’s “Tried by War” is an educational and entertaining book best suited for readers already acquainted with Lincoln who seek incremental insight into his management of the Civil War. For readers looking for a comprehensive cradle-to-grave analysis of Lincoln’s life and presidency, this book is clearly less appropriate. But for its intended purpose, “Tried by War” is usually satisfactory and sometimes extremely satisfying.

Overall rating: 3¾ stars

Chris says

In *Tried By War*, James McPherson focuses on Lincoln's role as commander in chief and the military decisions he made throughout the war. This book gives an overall picture of how the war progressed and covers some of the major battles in very broad brush strokes. It explains how Lincoln took a very active role in the strategic planning of the major campaigns during much of the war due to the incompetence of many of his generals. If you already have a good understanding of the Civil War, this book may be too basic. However, I thought it was a very approachable and well written book and recommend it to those who are new to learning about the war.

Steven Peterson says

This book, well written, is authored by the eminent historian James McPherson. The focus is plainly stated at the outset (Page xiv): "In the vast literature on our sixteenth president, however, the amount of attention devoted to his role as commander in chief is disproportionately smaller than the actual percentage of time he spent on that task."

Lincoln's own military experience was slender, his 1832 service in the militia. However, as McPherson puts it (Page 5), he was "...a more hands-on commander in chief than any other president." He assumed or presided over five war-making functions (in declining order of importance, as the author judges matters): policy, national strategy, military strategy, operations, and tactics.

McPherson observes that Lincoln read a great deal about military issues, to become more informed and to develop grounding in strategy and tactics. Indeed, as the book argues, he needed to, since so many of his military leaders were passive and did not "take charge." Thus, the thesis of this book makes sense, given the context of the times while Lincoln served as president.

The book covers the war, year by year, Lincoln's frustrations with his military commanders, his desire to find someone who had "it," the will and ability to triumph, to share Lincoln's vision of what had to be done. Of course, in the end, U. S. Grant and his subordinates, such as Sherman, Sheridan, and Thomas played that role, after the years of failure with the likes of Buell, Halleck, Rosecrans, Sigel, Banks, Butler, and so on.

For those not so familiar with the Civil War, this book will be most useful. For those steeped in the study of the Civil War, there is not a great deal that is new. However, what such readers know is put into useful context, as per the book's focus. So, in the end, this is a handy volume, especially for those who are not deeply read in the relevant works. For those well read on the subject, of less interest. . .

Gary Hoggatt says

Both Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War have seen countless books devoted to them, from general biographies or histories to entire books focused on single speeches by Lincoln or single battles of the war. So, the idea of a book narrowly focused on Abraham Lincoln in his role as Commander in Chief is a good one, with a great deal of potential to take a unique view of Lincoln and the war. Unfortunately, in James M. McPherson's 2008 volume *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief*, he doesn't really live up

to the potential of the premise, instead delivering what reads more like a general history of the Union war effort.

McPherson opens with setting up five main ideas about what a Commander in Chief has to be responsible for. Unfortunately, I can't recall what the five things are, since McPherson then completely forgets to mention them (not even so much as a "Lincoln's decision with X addressed Goal Y") until the epilogue. It's just sloppy writing. Without calling back to the five main points he went to such lengths to detail in the opening, McPherson seems to drift in his narrative and doesn't really get back to the premise of the book.

What McPherson gives us is a fairly general account of the Civil War from the Union side. He honestly doesn't even seem very focused on Lincoln. He spends a great deal of time in the field with the cavalcade of Union generals and in the thick of various fights. But those don't really have anything directly to do with Lincoln, much less his role as Commander in Chief. Detailing how Lincoln made his decisions about the war would be more what I'm expecting, but that's not what we get. Reading time after time how each Union general before Grant screwed up I can do with pretty much any Civil War history.

Even though it's a general biography of Lincoln, I found David Herbert Donald's Lincoln to be much better at the stated goal of *Tried by War* than *Tried by War* is. The approach Donald took was to look only at what Lincoln knew when making his decisions. Donald never goes to any battlefields in his biography, save for when Lincoln himself occasionally visited the Army of the Potomac. After all, the specifics of what happened when the battles started were out of Lincoln's hands. All Lincoln could be responsible for were the commands he gave the generals, not how those generals carried them out. McPherson really could have benefited from taking this same approach. It would have provided much more focus to *Tried by War* and kept the book to its stated premise, instead of getting bogged down as badly as McClellan leading the Army of the Potomac.

McPherson doesn't really seem to evaluate Lincoln's decisions when he does talk about them, either. Until the epilogue, there's no mention of whether or not Lincoln's suspicion of Habeas Corpus was justified or necessary, or any discussion of if his choices for general in chief could have been better, for example. For a book that is supposed to be evaluating Lincoln as Commander in Chief, those issues need to be the central conversation, not simply confined to the epilogue.

I listened to Penguin Audio's 2009 recording of *Tried by War*, read by George Guidall. Guidall was adequate, but had issues. The main problem with his reading is that he uses a single voice. Even though *Tried by War* is a history and not a novel and doesn't have characters per se, you still need to be able to hear the difference when something is being quoted. I could forgive Guidall for not inventing voices for Lincoln, McClellan, et al, but he should have still had a consistently identifiable tone for quotes. He would sometimes have a certain inflection when a quote started, but not always, and it was hard to tell at times when the quote ended and McPherson picked up, because there was no closing inflection. The audio production runs approximately 9.5 hours.

Tried by War is a perfectly solid history of the Union effort in the Civil War. Unfortunately, it aimed to be so much more than that, and made no real effort to reach its own stated goal. McPherson missed a chance for a really great book here.

Dean Morgan says

I really enjoyed this book. I consider myself a student of the American Civil War, but by no means an expert. I read widely on a variety of topics, but on occasion, I devote one or two books a year to the Civil War. Ken Burns (who most know as the creative force behind many excellent documentary films, including "The Civil War") once said of the Civil War: "I am passionately interested in how my Country works, and if you want to know about this thing called the United States of America, you have to know about the Civil War." I wholeheartedly agree with this statement, and the more I learn about the Civil War, the better I feel like I grasp many aspects of America...including government, the Constitution, the wars we have fought, the concepts of freedom, issues related to race and racism, etc. I would recommend this book for a person like myself...not an expert on the subject, but someone who has an amateur historian's interest in the Civil War. I doubt Civil War scholars or experts would find much new information in this book. A lot of what I read in this book, I previously knew, but the details of this book present many aspects of the War and the conduct of the War from the unique viewpoint of President Lincoln as a military strategist. The book points out that Lincoln was not a military strategist by trade, and he himself said he had no desire to become one. However, inept decisions by many of his generals, and blatant failure to act by many of his generals, prompted Lincoln to learn the strategy and tactics of war and battle to achieve the objectives of the Union. What were these objectives? Well, they changed over the period of the Civil War, but of course the issue of emancipation of the slaves became a major issue during the War, and was part of the War strategy in 1862. What I took from this book was that to Lincoln, the primary objective of the War was to maintain the Union, and that on this issue, there could be no compromise. However, the plans and goals of Lincoln and the various generals and armies, often changed throughout the Civil War as to how best to achieve this goal. I learned about General Winfield Scott's interesting "Anaconda Plan" near the beginning of the Civil War, and I learned about how much time Lincoln spent in the War Department telegraph office, often following the course of specific, major battles, lamenting over the loss of troops or inept, inactive generals, etc. I gathered that in many instances, Lincoln personally directed the course of the War down to the specific movements of troops. I particularly liked the story of Lincoln's visit to Fort Stevenson, where his 6'4" frame with his top hat, peered over the walls of the Fort at the Confederates, and a senior officer yelled at him to get down before he was shot. Much of my reading of the Civil War has been about the battles, but this is my first book specifically about Lincoln. I thought I might find it somewhat dry, not because I'm not interested in Lincoln, but because I thought it might be heavy on politics and light on descriptions of battles. To be certain, this is not a book about specific Civil War battles, and it certainly contains a lot of discussion on politics...but the book is most definitely not dry. In fact, though actual Civil War battles are frequently discussed, they are often discussed in context to Lincoln's involvement from the White House or War Department. The politics themselves paint a picture of a very dynamic and important battle, though a different sort of battle than that being fought by the soldiers, yet still a battle nonetheless, and a very high stakes battle at that. To read about how Lincoln masterfully navigated these issues as a politician was fascinating, and I believe I learned much about servant-leadership by learning about how Lincoln conducted himself. I was interested to learn about the frequent infighting among the various generals, and the instances where generals would try and stab each other in the back to promote themselves. To see how Lincoln handled this sort of thing greatly increased my already very high regard for him. As an example: I have always loved U.S. Grant, and everything I've read about that man gives me great respect for him. I read in this book that after Shiloh, some generals blamed Grant for the high Union casualties, even though the battle was considered a great Union victory. Some claimed that the initial high casualties were due to Grant having returned to drinking, and that he was inebriated. This would obviously have been a serious offense and would have likely cost Grant his career (and would have likely altered the outcome or length of the overall War). However, rather than just give ear to these rumors, Lincoln looked into them and spoke with those close to Grant, only to find out the stories were just that...stories, rumors, and lies. I, like many people I'm sure, have been the victim of people trying to assassinate my character to boost their own careers, and it is certainly not a good feeling. I thought how truly awesome and wise it was of Lincoln to support his generals and to genuinely seek the truth, as opposed to giving in to gossip and rumors. I wish all leaders conducted business in this fashion. This is just an

example of how Lincoln seemed involved in every aspect of the conduct of the Union armies during the Civil War...this story again gives credit to the character of Lincoln that his moniker, "Honest Abe," was more than appropriate. It also displayed that all that Lincoln did was for the preservation of the Union. Lastly, I also wanted to comment on the issue of racism, as this issue is one of the issues that prompted me to pick-up this book in the first place. When I started reading this book, it was right around the time that people seemed overcome with hate toward statues of Confederate generals and imagery. I can certainly understand why some people might have a problem with some of these statues and images, though I personally disagree with removing them. I'm not going to give my opinion as to why, as this is a book review, not a platform for my political or social views (though if anyone is interested in discussing this with me, I'd be glad to share my thoughts...just PM me). I would say this, however: The more I read about the Civil War, the more ideas and thoughts I have on this issue, and it becomes clear to me that the issues of race, slavery, freedom, and the perception of Confederate imagery (whether good or bad), is a many layered issue; it is a deep and complex issue. From what I've seen on the news and social media, I'm afraid that many that are tearing down Civil War history have a very limited understanding of the Civil War. I do not think anyone should be so quick to tear down historical monuments until they've really armed themselves with knowledge and facts. Going back to Ken Burns' quote, I believe that some people maybe don't understand certain aspects of America because of ignorance of the Civil War, when the great American "experiment" of a republic was truly put to the test. More than anything, I would hope a book like this could prompt open, civilized dialogue on the issues, as opposed to violent, destructive protests. It saddens my heart to read a book like this, and get a picture of how truly great Lincoln was as a servant-leader who had a deep love for the Union, and then to see the hate and division I'm seeing on the news. The thought that immediately came to my mind was this: The Civil War has already been fought and won, people. Quit re-fighting it! The history of the Civil War is written in the blood of hundreds of thousands, and their stories, both Union and Confederate, deserve to be told and heard.

Karla says

I thought this was a good companion history to Goodwin's *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. Whereas that one delves into Lincoln's relationship with his fractious cabinet, McPherson's is a chronological history of Lincoln's interactions with his generals. After reading this, I thought "No wonder he aged so much while in office!" The fact that some of his generals were fiercely incompetent, thereby needlessly ratcheting up the casualties, had to work on the guy's mind and conscience, day and night.

The concept of a "commander-in-chief" was a new thing at the time, and Lincoln was a trailblazer in that respect. The criticism he gets for violating civil liberties and making executive orders is understandable and in some cases warranted, but in comparison to later presidents he really is a minor offender.

If anyone wants to learn more about why the war lasted so long (and everyone should IMO), this is a good place to start. All the military and political missteps are covered, and it was an engrossing ride to see the progression of the relationship between Washington and the various battlefronts. Public opinion was as fickle then as it is now, with every defeat prompting calls for resignation and sackings, and every victory creating a surge of patriotic optimism. Living back then seems like it would have been a cycle of exciting and bleak from month to month.

One of the subjects covered here is that Lincoln's re-election in 1864 was not a sure thing by any stretch, and it was only an October surprise-type victory that pushed him over the top. That is my next subject of Civil War history to peek into.

The narrator, George Guidall, was very good - though he tended to declaim a bit in the same tone whenever he was quoting somebody being pissy and/or sarcastic. Still, I'd take him over the lousy Lorna Raver, who is currently making my life hell with her narration of *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*.

Robert says

Enjoyed this more than I thought I might. I've always been interested in Lincoln - even before the recent Obama related surge - but never been much of a Civil War buff. The book gave a great chronological sketch of the various leadership styles and strengths not just of Lincoln but other important players. Discussions include McLellan, Grant, Lee and other well know historical generals and other principals. Highly recommended for those intersted in seeing the various sides of Lincoln i.e. not just the principled leader but also the occasioanally sullen, challenged and driven president who presided over one of the toughest parts of American history.

Stephanie says

This book was a little bit difficult to get through at times, but I learned a ton. I felt like I was in a history class again in college. Unlike many other Lincoln books, this book focuses solely on his Civil Wars years. I had no idea that he almost wasn't reelected in 1864 or had to read books about military strategy so that he could help his generals fight a better war. Lincoln had to fire so many generals before he finally stopped with General Grant with less than a year left in the war. I didn't know that General Sherman's march through the middle of Georgia could justifiably be as important if not more important to winning the war as Gettysburg. I recommend this book to nonfiction readers interested in Civil War history. It's well written and very interesting.

Michael says

Mr McPherson has presented a very different view of the genius that was Lincoln. Now known for his emancipation proclamation, Lincoln did not advance freeing the slaves as his first priority during his administration. Instead, his driving ambition was union, and he was willing to fight to save the Union.

As the civil war progressed, the President and the Union Army suffered several discouraging losses and in fact were near defeat in 1862-3. As a military tactic, Lincoln first declared slaves as spoils of war, along with other southern property. This allowed new army recruits as well as northern industry labor for the war effort. Lincoln, always symphathetic to emancipation but realizing it was politically out of reach, now saw an opportunity to accomplish both victory and freedom. By interpreting new constitutional powers for the Presidency never before exercised by prior Presidents, he skillfully led our nation through the devastating civil war years, preserving both the union and freeing the slaves.

These accomplishments place Lincoln at the very top of the list of US Presidents. His attributes of intelligence, communication ability, sensitivity, and political shrewdness were highly complimented with his skill as Commander in Chief. No other President has demonstrated this set of skills and Lincoln's success as our nations leader. Reading McPherson's book will give anyone a new perspective of this great man. This

book receives my highest recommendation for your reading time.

Scott Rogers says

Disappointing; the book offers far too much linear, chronological narrative, and far too little thematic analysis of Lincoln's performance, his decisionmaking, and his evolution as a wartime commander-in-chief. This is an adequate work of introductory popular history, but there is little here of any value to anyone who is even glancingly familiar with Lincoln's presidency or the conduct of the Union war effort.

On the plus side, the book does offer a surprisingly sympathetic, though still devastating, portrait of Gen. McClellan, a figure who has too often been portrayed in Civil War scholarship as a simplistic caricature of abused hero or villainous scoundrel to score points one way or another on matters of strategy and policy. But as soon as McClellan's military service ends, so too does the author's interest in him, and we are offered very little analysis, or even description, of McClellan as presidential candidate, or of how facing McClellan affected Lincoln's political and command decisionmaking.

Idril Celebrindal says

This was great - every time a statement made me say "but why?" the following paragraph very nicely explained "here's why."

skketch says

NOVEL THOUGHTS

3.5

Tried by War was a unique perspective which is hard to do since the Civil War and the events leading up to it, during it and after it, have been written about in so many genres, it seems to me to be hard to find a new viewpoint of looking at it. However, McPherson found a way to provide a fresh take on this subject by showing the way that Lincoln took a direct approach to his role as Commander in Chief. Though the book was a bit boggy at times for my personal taste since the author spoke often of casualties at various battles and how long it took for troops to get from here to there, the information presented was nonetheless painstakingly researched. That General McClellan on paper looked like the man for the job of General in Chief, his ineptitude was staggering and it seemed to me to be part of the reason the war lasted longer than it needed to. The author hypothesizes that McClellan's own personal political feelings for the Democrats and that of slavery may have contributed to his inadequate command. But what struck me was that Lincoln let McClellan lead for as long as he did in order to have a better chance to win the White House for a second term. Think of all the lives lost because of that decision. Was it justified in order to continue the course of abolishing slavery for good or was there a more selfish reason? One other aspect of the book that could have improved the reader's knowledge of Lincoln was that while he studied a lot about the strategies of war, the author did little to demonstrate how Lincoln arrived at some of the strategies that he did and while they are by and large completely ignored by his generals in the field, he really was onto something. It wasn't until he got Grant, Sherman, Thomas and Sheridan later in the war, did he see his strategic picture of offensive attacks realized. Up until 1864, his generals chose blatantly to ignore whatever ideas he had, and who knows

how much better the war would have gone for the Union had they at least considered his plans. As a Civil War tome, the reader will make some takeaways that have always been presumed, for instance, that the Battle of Gettysburg was the defining moment of the war; in fact, this doesn't appear to be the case. While the 16th president is probably best known for the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln's very active role as Commander in Chief seems to have defined the role for future Presidents' involvement when the US goes to war.

Thomas says

Billed as one of the few Lincoln studies to focus on the 16th President as Commander in Chief, the book really offers little new information. I had hoped to learn much more about what shaped Lincoln's military thinking. For example, his trips to the Library of Congress to study strategy and tactics are legendary. But what did he study? Who were his confidants and mentors? How did he develop the suggested strategies he gave to his generals, especially early in the war, and how might we evaluate those strategies? None of these questions is addressed in *Tried by War*. Instead, the author offers simply a restatement of familiar Civil War history, omitting many important details under the stated purpose of focusing on the commander in chief. Not a satisfying read for the experienced Lincoln/Civil War scholar and not a good choice for the novice either.
