

### The Confederacy At Flood Tide: The Political And Military Ascension, June To December 1862

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## Review

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**Leigh, Philip** *The Confederacy at Flood Tide: The Political and Military Ascension, June to December 1862*. Westholme, \$28.00 ISBN 1594162484

### Flood Tide: A Decisive Moment

Philip Leigh's book, *The Confederacy at Flood Tide*, begins with the Peninsula Campaign, the beginning of the flood tide, and ends with the Emancipation Proclamation, "the most decisive event of the flood-tide period" (204). The author lays out his theses in the Introduction explaining why he uses "flood tide" rather than "high tide" which many readers might associate with Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. Leigh maintains it was during this time that the European powers were most likely to have recognized the Confederacy and possibly intervened or pursued policies that could have meant Confederate success. He explains that either Confederate independence or Union victory depended not only on military factors but on espionage, as well as diplomatic and political events.

The author, in his well-written book, uses many secondary, as well as, a few published primary sources to support his theses. While he ends each chapter with a brief summary of political events and diplomatic maneuvering of European powers, especially England and France, the principal focus is on the military aspects of the war. He includes well drawn maps of the battles and campaigns of which those illustrating Robert E. Lee's actions are the easiest to follow.

The chapter dealing with Emancipation Proclamation stands out in that it demonstrates Abraham Lincoln's gradual change from tentativeness to fully embracing emancipation. It demonstrates Lincoln's shift in rhetoric from questioning the wisdom of the policy urged by more radical Republicans since the first days of the war to the actual issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation in spite of the fears of some Americans and Europeans that such a move would inspire slave insurrections and possible genocide.

Leigh keeps the general reader's interest in that he enlivens the military narrative with a combination of short personal biographical information about major military figures, comments by combatants that bring to life the everyday activities of soldiers or comments of major historians concerning the significance of major events. For instance on page 31 he quotes from James McPherson on Major General John B. Magruder's colorful activities during the Seven Days battles: "The grey-costumed thespians responded enthusiastically. . . .{and} stentorian voices called out orders to imaginary troops in the wood." He especially uses anecdotes, some well-known, to add to the military descriptions. He cites on page 6 a comment from William Watson, a British citizen living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, taken from Amanda Foreman to describe the corruption of Benjamin Butler : "Butler continues to hunt for treason, and all material that could contribute to it he confiscated. He found it existed extensively in the vaults of banks . . . ." In addition, Leigh adds references soldiers' lives with their personal anecdotes in order to bring humor to the military narrative. In order to illustrate the crushing boredom experienced by all soldiers, on page 25, he cites Private Sam Watkins', who served with Company H of the first Tennessee infantry, a story which Leigh claims rivals Mark Twain's story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County": "The boys would frequently have a louse race. There was one fellow [Dornin] who was winning all the money. . . . We could not understand it. . . . The lice were placed on plates . . .and the first that crawled off was the winner. At last we found Dornin's trick; he always heated his plate." In addition, on page 120, he uses the well-known possible myth of Barbara Frietchie waving a Union flag when Stonewall Jackson's troops marched by her home at the beginning of the Maryland campaign.

Leigh writes an engaging account of this crucial year using this technique of quoting from many sources. As a result the battle narrative moves along quickly without getting bogged down in the many details of tactics or strategies of the many military engagements and campaigns. The book is highly recommended for amateur historians and for libraries catering to the general public and undergraduates. Its bibliography offers a good beginning reference for those who wish for more detailed studies.

Philip Leigh authored *Trading with the Enemy: The Covert Economy During the American Civil War* (2014) and *Lee's Lost Dispatches and Other Civil War and Controversies* (2015). He also contributed twenty-four articles to the *New York Times* "Disunion" series. He edited the memoir of Sam Watkins, *Co. Aytch, or a Side Show of the Big Show* (2013).

Leigh holds a BS degree from Florida Institute of Technology and an MBA from Northwestern University.

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