

# Emory Upton: Misunderstood Reformer

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## Review

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**Fitzpatrick, David J.** *Emory Upton: Misunderstood Reformer*. University of Oklahoma Press, \$39.95 ISBN 9780806157207

At the time of his tragic death at his own hand in March, 1881, Emory Upton had emerged as the foremost military thinker in the United States Army. Born to a deeply devout Methodist family outside Batavia, New York, Upton attended Oberlin College in Ohio prior to entering the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Upton graduated in the Class of May 1861 and served on Gen. Daniel Tyler's staff during the First Battle of Bull Run. The following month, Upton transferred to Battery D, 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Artillery. He fought in the Seven Days' Battles around Richmond and in the Maryland Campaign. He headed the Artillery Brigade of the First Division in the VI Corps during the Battle of Antietam.

In October, 1862, Upton was commissioned Colonel of the newly formed 121<sup>st</sup> New York Infantry. He ably led the regiment through the spring and summer campaigns of 1863. In July, Upton was elevated to brigade command. On November 7, 1863, he was instrumental in directing an attack that captured a Confederate position at Rappahannock Station.

Upton's experience through the first few years of the Civil War had taught him that technology and the emergence of intricate field fortifications had rendered traditional, linear tactics obsolete. The following May at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, Upton planned and coordinated an attack on what became known as the Mule Shoe Salient. With twelve regiments at his disposal, Upton formed his men in a column and utilizing the terrain, launched a bayonet assault. Although initially successful, the offensive was eventually driven back due to lack of support. This tactic was unofficially adopted by the Army of the Potomac and used again at Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor and during the final assault on Petersburg.

Upton was wounded at the Battle of Third Winchester in September, 1864. Following his recuperation, he transferred to the Military Division of the Mississippi and took command of a cavalry division under James Wilson. In the spring of 1865, Upton participated in Wilson's expedition through Alabama and fought at the Battle of Selma.

Although Upton served in the infantry and artillery as well as the Commandant of Cadets at West Point, his main focus in the post-bellum years was the revision of tactics used by the U.S. Army. Upton traveled extensively to study first hand Asian and European armies. His insights contributed to proposed reforms of the American military system. On the night of March 14, 1881, Upton committed suicide at the Presidio in San Francisco.

David J. Fitzpatrick, a Professor of History at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has breathed new life into Upton's story and military career. Prior to Fitzpatrick's biography, only two other major studies of Upton's life had been written; one by his former comrade, Peter S. Michie and by the late Stephen Ambrose. Fitzpatrick's is the most comprehensive to date. His. The author has mined and combed through numerous repositories and archives to present a complete view of Upton. His research is superb. In very clear and direct prose, Fitzpatrick traces Upton's life from his early beginnings to the battlefields of the Civil War to the European and Asian continents by utilizing many of his subject's own writings. The Civil War chapters are supplemented by the excellent maps of Erin Grieb. While Fitzpatrick focuses primarily on Upton's military career, especially in the post-bellum years and his foreign observances, he expertly weaves together a picture of Upton the man. Fitzpatrick gives the reader insight into Upton's personal life. He discusses Upton's ambitions along with his thoughts on slavery, religion and politics. Fitzpatrick details and explores Upton's relationship and brief marriage to Emily Martin and how it influenced and impacted him for the remainder of his life. He also explores both personally and medically, the possible reasons surrounding Upton's untimely and far too early death. Fitzpatrick then carries Upton's memory and work forward and discusses its impacts on the U.S. Army in the latter part of the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. This biography crosses a broad spectrum. Fitzpatrick's work will appeal to those interested in the Civil War in the Eastern Theater, the Army of the Potomac and military reform in the post-bellum years. It is highly recommended.

*Daniel T. Davis is the author or co-author of six books in the Emerging Civil War Series by Savas Beatie, LLC as well as articles in Blue & Gray Magazine, Civil War Times and Hallowed Ground. His next book in the Emerging Civil War Series, The Most Desperate Acts of Gallantry: George A. Custer in the Civil War will be released later this spring. He is currently working on a study of George Custer in the Gettysburg Campaign.*