

MR. LINCOLN GOES TO WAR

By William Marvel

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Xviii, 387p., illus., maps, two Appendices, Notes, Bibliography, Index
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No president came into office with bigger problems facing him than Abraham Lincoln. Seven Southern states had already seceded from the Union; many federal military installations in those areas, most notably Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, were under siege and in need of supply; and the capitol itself, surrounded by two slaveholding states, was in peril. Could Civil War have been prevented? In *Mr. Lincoln Goes to War*, a provocative and critical new look at Lincoln in 1861, noted and prolific historian William Marvel contends that Lincoln was too clumsy and aggressive in dealing with the “wayward sisters”, setting the nation on a bloody course that could have been averted.

Marvel pens an excellent narrative of the first year of the Civil War, which in many surveys gets covered all too briefly because of the huge events and titanic battles of 1862-5. He portrays the sense of chaos, conflict and uncertainty on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line in the spring of 1861, and shows how economics as well as patriotism motivated enlistment in the North after Lincoln’s call for troops. The two major battles of Bull Run and Wilson’s Creek are studiously related, with Orders of Battle. The story of Ball’s Bluff is told too, a relatively minor clash but a Union defeat that led to the creation of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, and the imprisonment of Charles Stone. The sad saga of this patriotic Union officer is covered in detail, along with the rise of the Radical Republicans and Lincoln’s suspension of *habeas corpus* and increasing expansion of Presidential power, a serious point of contention with the author.

This reviewer does not agree with all of Marvel’s assertions and assessments, and wonders how any duly elected government could be perceived as overly aggressive in acting against secession, itself an aggressive act, without ceasing to be perceived as wielding any power. However, this reviewer never objects to a fresh assessment of conventional wisdom, which is always good grist for the historical mill. *Mr. Lincoln Goes to War*, by William Marvel, published by Houghton Mifflin, is available at the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, with bookplates signed by the author, and is priced at \$30.00.

The great conflict that began in 1861 produced a wealth of memoirs and first-hand accounts. One of the most important and most quoted is Johnson’s and Buel’s *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, a gold mine of primary material from many of the war’s leading participants, as well as common soldiers and civilians. Many of these soldiers, from general to private, continued their army service after Appomattox, fighting Native Americans on the frontier until that frontier was no more.

In his five volume anthology series *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars, 1865-1890*, published by Stackpole, 2001-05, Peter Cozzens has done for the military struggle for the American West what *Battles and Leaders* did for the Civil War. Expertly edited by Cozzens, the first four volumes are each devoted to a specific region of conflict: Volume One the Apache Wars of the Southwest; Volume Two the Pacific Northwest, which includes the Nez Perce War; Volume Three the Comanches, Kiowas, and others on the Southern Plains; and Volume Four the Sioux and Cheyenne on the Northern Plains, and, of course, George Armstrong Custer. The Fifth Volume moves beyond geography with a more general look at the post-Civil War army and its relationship with the Native Americans of the West. Among the contributing authors in the series are George Crook, Nelson Miles, Winfield Scott Hancock, William T. Sherman, and Elizabeth Custer, as well as some of the Indians they were up against. Also included are the narratives, many obscure or previously unpublished, of army wives, junior officers, scouts, and non-combatants.

Each volume can stand alone as a major achievement and a work unto itself. Together, *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars* is an invaluable documentary record, reference set, and narrative for anyone interested in Western Americana, Native Americans, or the history of the United States Army. Volumes One and Two are \$49.95 each; Volume Three \$54.95; and Volumes Four and Five \$69.95 each.