

Risking High Intensity and Managing Lower Intensity Conflicts via the Approach to Readiness for Mobilization Crafted by the Madison, Monroe and Adams Administrations, 1814-1829; Peter J. Aschenbrenner, Department of History, Purdue University, Paper to be delivered, at the U.S. Army Historians Training Symposium, CMH Conference, 27-31 July 2015, Crowne Plaza National Airport Hotel, Crystal City, Alexandria, Virginia

To begin I examine the state of the American land forces within the military establishment at the 'watershed' or 'cusp' of the war. I define the watershed as occurring at (or slightly before) the 30-month mark from the outbreak of hostilities.

I begin with a survey of the border war in the North. It features a bad start, with a respectable finish. The US lost seven major battles in the first 17 months of fighting; the US didn't lose a battle in the year before the Treaty of Ghent.

The number of land battles surveyed on the northern frontier, as per the above, is 19; the canonical list of land battles fought in the Second War was 47. This survey is designed to background one of my themes: the war hinged much earlier than the Americans expected. High-intensity conflicts usually change their character at about month 30.

At fifteen months the United States had recovered Detroit and a month later native allies of the British – tribes loyal to Tecumseh or following his leadership – are defeated at the Battle of the Thames. How does this acceleration play in other facets of the war effort? From January, 1812 to November, 1814 Madison minted 32 general officers; hence, the rate of $32/35$ month or $.91 / \text{month} = \text{one a month}$.

His rate of appointments to both ranks was over one a month = $41/35 = 1.17$ month.

WLD scoring is out of hand as soon as the first bullet is fired. It may even be out of the control of field commanders. So I'm taking an opportunistic view of causation.

Find what you can and do what you can with what you find. The Madison administration worked its way through the inventory of candidates with political/civil résumés by the time the war had run into the watershed. If you start a war and you have 2/2.5 years to appoint general officers, you're probably going to run out of available 'top heavy' political/civil candidates before you get to the watershed of the conflict.

To put this in perspective: Of the 120 graduates of West Point by 1814, 25% graduated during wartime. The "concept of proper training methods," Kreidberg & Henry sum up, "was beginning to take root in American military consciousness." In perspective: in 1809 Madison's newly minted Secretary of War is selling off the artillery's cart-horses, rendering the Army's field artillery useless. In five years, West Point students are graduating to the battlefields of America's Second War, in which, by no small coincidence, New York state militias are winning a reputation for their courage and determination.

Once the reader accepts (a) that the militia system failed its purpose, ranks and lower- middle-echelon officer procurement, and (b) that Americans were incredibly slow to give up on the creaky old system until the National Defense Act (1916), 39 Stat. 166, then the reader can appreciate that there were Americans who accepted the burdens of military life, in the short or long term. Moreover, this population of available talent was sufficiently large for planners to project operations which assumed

efficient links in procurement, from operations back to recruitment. The Senate resolution of September 23, 1814 asked for a report from the Committee on Military Affairs on the subject, “Whether any further provisions, by law, be necessary for ... the state of preparations for the defence of the City of Washington.” Neither the Committee nor the Senate asked for a top-to-bottom review of the state of the American military. What followed, necessarily, was Monroe’s second report (titled “Relative Powers Of The General And State Governments Over The Militia”) in February, 1815; this addressed the constitutionally flawed militia-based procurement system, which I have characterized (in other work) as ‘Have Gun, Won’t Travel.’

Voluntary recruitment, Monroe proposed without any prompting, as noted above, promoted by enhanced financial incentives, will be conducted by the present officers who will fill the ranks of existing forces from these new recruits.

“The officers who may be appointed to command these corps should be charged with recruiting them.” Levies by ‘draught’, in detail, by conscription of 4 of every 100 eligible men, serves as the back-up method to bring manpower levels up from the authorized strength of sixty thousand to the desired level of one hundred thousand.

Monroe offers a highly refined conception of how this will all work out, given that the war is the on-going threat that his plan should address. “Long continued invasions, conducted by regular, well-disciplined troops, can best be repelled by troops kept constantly in the field, and equally well disciplined. Courage in an army is, in a great measure, mechanical. A small body, well trained, accustomed to action, gallantly led on, often breaks three or four times the number of more respectable, and more brave,

but raw and undisciplined troops. The sense of danger is diminished by frequent exposure to it, without harm; and confidence, even in the timid, is inspired by a knowledge that reliance may be placed on others, which can grow up only by service together.”

The “system” of recruitment and training between the militia, on the one hand, and the regular army must diverge, Monroe argues. It will not be possible to preserve “the same degree of system in the militia as in the regular service.” In general, as a matter of defensive operations, “to repel these predatory and desolating incursions,” military force should be dedicated to “following the movements of the enemy, with the greatest possible rapidity, and repelling the attack wherever it may be made.”

Monroe had ambition written all over his résumé. But he served as no man’s toady. And he certainly was not a sycophant of either Jefferson or Madison. He had taken care to make sure this was clear to anyone following the political scene. As a political matter, 1814 and post-Bladensburg was the moment when Madison caved in. If Monroe advocated a six figure regular standing army funded to the tune of millions a year in new spending, with artillerists, engineers, cavalry, a surgical corps and quartermasters then let him campaign for it.

Monroe contemplated “concentration of all our troops along the sea coast.” This may be taken as a branch of the ‘Stubborn Pebbles’ approach to homeland defense. This approach forces the invader to accept battle from a determined homeland force on ground not of the invader’s choosing. But there is a broader perspective at work.

Monroe had more going for his hundred thousand man army than adroit but

necessarily focused planning for defensive operations projected into the coming year.

This mid-war change of thinking is reflected in the following:

Selection actions which favor career military candidates.

- Battlefield post-mortems which focus on “great and manifest failures” in constitutionally mandated procurement. Doc. No. 137, ASPMA at 524 (11.29.1814)
- Adoption of a single service-wide tactical manual.
- Slightly improved rate of satisfactory battlefield outcomes (northern frontier).
- Congress received Monroe’s report “requiring union of thought and action” re structural failure in manpower procurement. Doc. No. 142, ASPMA at 604 (2.28.1815)
- An officially proposed hundred thousand man regular army with officers trained to train men to fight defensive operations anywhere in US.

Here is Kreidberg & Henry’s take on Monroe’s Report. “5. Untrained troops of any classification, be it Militia, Volunteers, or Regulars, are unsatisfactory and expensive. The inescapable corollary of this is that proper training of troops requires a certain minimum time and that if Militia are to be employed as soon as they are mobilized, their peacetime training must be efficient.” It is a century ahead of its time, according to K & H. The “recommendations of Monroe contain most of the principles of the selective service system which finally evolved in the United States in the 20th century world wars.”

But K & H do more than praise Monroe’s report. They detail the structural failures in manpower and mobilization in the Second War in twelve points. In short,

they thread their entire work around the central theme of giving operational planning its best shot at success via sound procurement.

I turn to less-well-known instances in which potential and actual use of force were successfully deployed in the later Madison, Monroe and Adams administrations. This will be an additional demonstration of the post-war rethinking, what I call the militarization of the military, from the top down. These actions supplement the well-known lists of wars and other military actions in the ante-bellum interval, which follow: The first two involve: 1813–14 – Marquesas Islands (French Polynesia): U.S. forces built a fort on the island of Nuku Hiva to protect three prize ships which had been captured from the British. and 1814 – Spanish Florida: General Andrew Jackson took Pensacola and drove out the British forces.

Now for the threats of force as a means of achieving trade or foreign policy objectives: The “Act to Regulate the Trade in Plaster of Paris” follows: “From and after the fourth day of July next, no plaster of Paris, the production of any country, or its dependencies, from which the vessels of the United States are not permitted to bring the same article, shall be imported into the United States in any foreign vessel. And ... the vessel in which the same may be imported ... shall be forfeited to the United States; and such plaster of Paris, vessel and cargo, shall be liable to be seized”

There are two points I want the reader to take away. First, wars frequently ‘hinge’ or ‘pivot’ at a point which supplies a ‘cusp’ or ‘watershed’ in the consciousness of the parties to the conflict. The parties have to spill enough blood and spend enough money to get some distance from the rhetoric of war aims which features, as I have asserted,

either zero or negative connection to strategy. For an historian to get to the watershed is essential because historians judge the past. That's okay. The dead expect to be judged. They risked their blood to be judged. But let's be fair to the departed. After 2 or 2.5 years their comprehension of what ordered violence means to them changes dramatically. We should take account of what they learned. And most surprising of all is Madison's learning curve. At the end of June, 1814 he was ready to receive the counsels of wisdoms as divergent as 'bayonets to the front line' vs. 'every man a bastion for his defense.' Madison was a man who was always one or two beats behind the band. This is why he sounds like he is singing off-key.

But taken all-in-all he made his peace with the necessary vision of an American war machine. Oddly, it was not even Armstrong's vision, even if Armstrong did more than anyone to bring in the fresh blood that Henry Adams honored in his Histories. It was Monroe's vision and Monroe had powerful allies in Congress: Giles in the Senate, Calhoun and Johnson in the House; Clay was in Ghent by the opening of negotiations in August, 1814. Monroe's gift was to offer himself as voice of a nascent understanding of the American way of war.

Madison made Monroe's path to the presidency a foregone conclusion by endorsing Monroe's 'hundred thousand man' army; this insulated Monroe from Madison's loss at Bladensburg, and what Madison couldn't do, Rufus King, Monroe's opponent in 1816, did for him. A quarter million man regular army could defend the imperial frontier from Mauretania to the Black Sea, from Gaul to Palestine, according to Caesar Augustus.

But it was not unknown in early modern history to call for the *lévee en masse* and every detail of Monroe's plan (November 5, 1814) has its precedent in the early and desperate days of the French republic. For the first time in our history (but not the last), presidential politics plays a vital role. Monroe positioned himself as future warrior-president by proposing a military system which – approved or not – stood for the virile and even aggressive vision of the early American republic which white male voters wanted to carry into effect.

There were a dozen 'touch-points' at which Madison could have trashed Monroe's career after August, 1814. Instead he backed him to the hilt, even as Monroe proposed scrapping the militia system which R.M. Johnson's committee had accused – and rightfully so – of bringing a "great and manifest failure" down upon the republic.

If Madison were the brittle doctrinaire whom academics delight in taunting with Bladensburg – and this scorn is now heaped upon his head by British scholars, no less! – then why not credit Madison with the 'U' turn that he made after Bladensburg? Or inquire when he began to understand that, if the existence of the republic is in danger, then doctrine is a luxury to be enjoyed in the havens of post-war repose, if the republic's heart is then beating.

This is the extension of my thesis that wars hinge or watershed at cusps: This Second War hinged on Madison's slow but steady grasp of "military consciousness" that Kreidberg & Henry credit to the American military. It may be time to rethink Madison, the leader whom historians will always find weak after Bladensburg while Alexander stands resolute after Borodino. What is in play here is the time it takes a

civilian leader to acquire some sense of his own role in bringing positives to a transitional phase in conflict that is difficult for anyone to grasp with clarity and determination.

Madison is the first President in American history who learned enough of the craft of civilian leadership with other men's blood on his hands, to make a difference. The difference became visible in the post-war militarization of American thinking.

The way up (or out of) of this second-class status, as Madison discovered, is straight-forward. If you have enough young men who want to make military service their profession, then splatter the globe with glancing pebbles. Unleash them from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, from one Red River to the other, with missions to land, combat, and pacify.

There is no real mystery or even originality about this.

'These are your arts, Americans,' a poet said long ago, 'to pull down the arrogant from their seats of power'

Suddenly, post-Bladensburg, post-New Orleans and post-Ghent, Americans got it. Operational competence. This means of accomplishment commanded the officer class and ranks alike to train themselves together. And together to achieve the mission assigned to them. As a unit. But there is no substitute for planning and executing – and on the fly, no less – rethinking the operational while the operation devolves in progress and executing the just-rethought-never-before-conceived-plan. The problem that historians have with the Second War for American independence is this: 'professionals against amateurs' has soiled many a forest with its well-turned prose.

But the British schooled us, as they schooled so many so well around the globe. A nation conceded at Paris in 1783 turned out to be, just as Washington predicted, too big to conquer. This is the point that Wellington made. ‘You can,’ he said, in my paraphrase, ‘make the war go on for as long as you have the stomach. But the Americans will only learn how to win victory from defeat. Eventually we will beg cessation from this process of making America into a world-class military power. At our expense.’

The following sums up these two points. “War exists,” James Monroe reported to Congress. The “enemy is powerful; his preparations are extensive; we may expect his attacks from many quarters.” Operational competence, drilling backwards, takes us to a national commitment to wartime footing via peacetime mobilization. When the nation was ready for ranks and officers to make a commitment to the regular army, the army was far enough into its rebirth to accept the commitment of ranks and officers.

The mission turned out to be and become everything. In short, this was how America militarized the American military. This is, above all else, America’s victory after Bladensburg.