

Explore the evolution of American warfare
through key battles, strategies, weapons, and leadership

U.S. Military History

FOR
DUMMIES[®]

John C. McManus, PhD

*Associate Professor, U.S. Military History
Missouri University of Science and Technology*

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**by John C. McManus,
PhD**



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About the Author

John C. McManus, PhD, is an associate professor of U.S. military history at Missouri University of Science and

Technology. He teaches courses on the Civil War, World War II, Vietnam, Americans in combat, and the broad sweep of American military history. A prolific lecturer on military history, he has received numerous awards for outstanding teaching.

He has written several books on the American military experience, including *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II*; *The Americans at D-Day*; and, most recently, *Alamo in the Ardennes: The Untold Story of the American Soldiers Who Made the Defense of Bastogne Possible*. He is a member of the editorial advisory board at *World War II* magazine and has served as an historical expert for numerous battlefield tours.

He lives in St. Louis, Missouri, with his wife, Nancy.

Dedication

To the soldiers, sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and airmen who made this history.

To my students, whose insatiable curiosity about U.S. military history inspires me to keep learning more about it.

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Introduction

American military history is fascinating. Like any high drama, it has everything you can want in a story. It has tragedy. It has inspiring and not-so-inspiring leaders. It has heroes and villains. It has blood, sweat, and tears, but also humor, comradeship, and revelry. More than anything, American military history is about the ordinary American in extraordinary circumstances.

Perhaps that's why it's such a popular topic. Go to any average bookstore, and you'll see that books on military topics usually comprise anywhere from one-third to one-half of the history section. Go to the video store, and you can't help but notice the huge quantities of war movies and combat video games that clutter the shelves. Military stories sell, even if they're inaccurate or poorly told, as so many are.

Military history, though, is much more than just another entertaining diversion. It's the story of this country's past, present, and future. Anyone who wants to understand the first thing about American history, and even American society today, must know military history.

From the earliest days of the American colonies to our own time, warfare and the armed forces have had a major impact on everything that has happened. In colonial times, European settlers fought Native Americans for land. In later years, Americans did the same. Indians fought just as hard to hang on to their land, sometimes against whites, other times against other Native Americans. Americans earned their independence as a result of two wars with imperial Great Britain. Major disagreements about slavery, race, federal power, states'

rights, and economics led to a ruinous war between northerners and southerners that marked the country forever. Generations later, America's participation in World War II transformed the country more than any other event, before or since. All these wars, like most, accelerated the pace of change.

Military history isn't just about wars, though. It's about average Americans and their lives. Who served in the armed forces and why? How closely do America's military forces reflect our society? Why do American soldiers risk their lives in combat? Do major American problems, such as drugs, racism, sexism, and corruption, carry over into military life?

Military historians debate these issues and so many others. They argue about everything from Robert E. Lee's decisions at the Battle of Gettysburg to the Army's treatment of female soldiers in the 1970s. They debate everything from the reasons for American victory in the Revolution to the reasons for American defeat in Vietnam.

In these troubled, warlike times, nearly everyone has an opinion about some aspect of American military history. If you're one of those people, then reading this book will let you know which of your opinions carry some weight and which may need some revising. The book also may provide you with some ammo to use in a debate over nearly any aspect of American military history.

About This Book

I teach U.S. military history at Missouri University of Science and Technology. Each year, when I get a new set

of introductory students, their main complaint is that history is boring. To them, history is nothing more than a remote series of names, dates, and facts to be memorized for the test and then discarded. I actually don't blame them for feeling that way because that's how history is often taught and written. Well, the first thing I assure them — and you — is that history is not just names, dates, and facts. It is the story of people and the challenges of their times. History is about *why* and *how*, not *what* and *when*. The study of history is all about bringing people of the past to life. It's also about understanding what their experiences can teach us about ourselves and our own challenges. When I present history to my students that way, you'd be amazed at the transformation in their interest level. They actually start enjoying it.

History is for everybody, not just a few scholars in some little elitist club. This book is written from an inclusive perspective. Each chapter explains unfamiliar terms, breaks up complicated information into easily understandable groupings, and avoids arcane jargon. The other great thing about the book is that you don't have to read it chronologically, from the front cover to the back cover. You can start anywhere you want, skipping what doesn't interest you and concentrating on what does. Maybe you're only interested in the post-World War II period or the Civil War or the 18th century, or maybe you're into every aspect of American military history. No matter what your interests, you'll find something you like in this book. And I promise there won't be a test!

Conventions Used in This Book

I use the following conventions in this book to help you navigate your way:

I *italicize* all new words and terms that are defined.

I **boldface** keywords or the main parts of bulleted items.

I use monofont for all Web addresses.

Throughout the text, I sometimes refer to Native Americans as Indians.

What Not to Read

Although I cover the highlights of U.S. military history in this book, I just can't resist sharing some additional facts and anecdotes that enhance the story. I've put these interesting but nonessential tidbits in sidebars. You can skip the sidebars — shaded boxes that appear here and there — if you'd like.

Foolish Assumptions

The literature on American military history is enormous and growing each year. No one can possibly keep up with all of it. *U.S. Military History For Dummies* is designed for the reader who wants to be informed but without getting overwhelmed by the details. I don't claim to provide a

description of every incident, battle, issue, or personality in American military history. The topic is way too large for that.

Because you picked up this book, I assume you're interested in a quick-hitting, lively, accurate overview of U.S. military history, and you probably fall into one of the following categories:

You want a general overview of U.S. military history that answers the questions of who, what, where, why, when, and how.

You want a compact reference guide to major subjects in American military history.

You're interested in discovering how the military and warfare have shaped American life, society, politics, economics, and culture.

You want to brush up on the topic without having to plow through scholarly minutiae, military-buff Web sites, or incomprehensible military terms.

How This Book is Organized

I have organized this book into six major topical and chronological parts, each of which covers important aspects of American military history.

Part I: The Nitty-Gritty of U.S. Military History