Reviews

Guerrilla Warfare in the Philippines

American Guerrilla: The Forgotten Heroics of Russell W. Volckmann—The Man Who Escaped from Bataan, Raised A Filipino Army Against the Japanese, and Became the True "Father" of Army Special Forces. *Mike Guardia. Casemate Publishers. 240 pages; maps; black-and-white photographs; index; $32.95.*

By COL Stanley L. Falk
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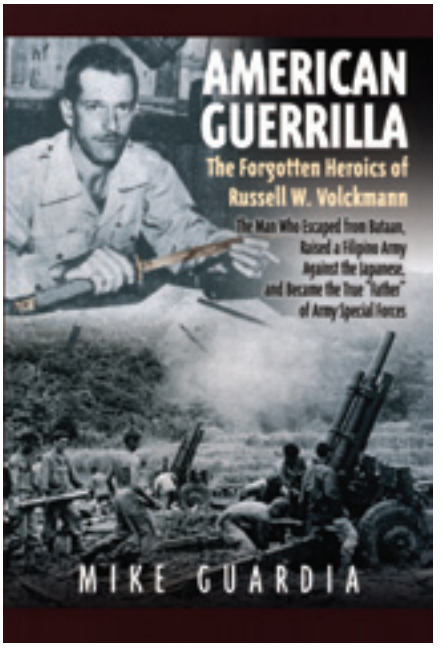
During the World War II Japanese occupation of the Philippines, at least 75 guerrilla organizations of some significance conducted operations against the Japanese. Among the largest, most active, and most important of these organizations was the U.S. Army Forces in the Philippines (Northern Luzon), or as it was simply referred to, USAFIP (NL). Led by COL Russell W. Volckmann, an Army officer who had escaped from Bataan after the American surrender there, it initially concentrated on gathering intelligence for GEN MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area headquarters while running occasional harassing raids on the Japanese. Once MacArthur's forces landed on Luzon in January 1945 and were able to deliver large quantities of supplies and equipment to Volckmann, USAFIP (NL) grew into an aggressive division-size combat unit capable of conducting full-scale operations. It was an effective fighting force against the stubborn Japanese.

In *American Guerrilla*, Mike Guardia, a young armor officer with a master's degree in history, has undertaken to update and expand on Volckmann's own 1954 memoir—*We Remained: Three Years Behind the Enemy Lines in the Philippines*—and to emphasize the accomplishments of that brave, determined and "forgotten" guerrilla leader. He has based his work largely on Volckmann's memoir and diary, the written and oral testimony of those who served with him, and official records in the archives. He has succeeded by and large in his mission, although weakening his presentation by clearly inflating Volckmann's otherwise important contributions.

When Bataan surrendered on April 9, 1942, then-MAJ Volckmann was serving with the 11th Philippine Army Division. Determined not to fall into Japanese hands, he was one of scores of other Americans who were able to escape through enemy lines and make their way out of the occupied peninsula. It was a difficult and perilous trip, well described by Guardia. Volckmann and a few companions dodged Japanese patrols, crossed mountains and swamps, scrounged for food and water, and fought off the ravages of dysentery and malaria. Not until early September were Volckmann and those still with him able to reach the safety of northern Luzon and link up with other American and Filipino guerrilla forces.



The USAFIP (NL), as it had already been designated, had been established by American officers who had slipped out of Bataan during the early stages of the fighting there. As directed by MacArthur, they had set about organizing guerrilla units in northern Luzon. By June 1943, however, the top American leaders had been killed or captured by the Japanese, and Volckmann, as the senior officer in northern Luzon, now found himself in command.

It was a badly disorganized, widely scattered group of perhaps 8,000 men that he now led, but Volckmann soon brought order to these disparate elements by establishing five military areas or "districts." To each of these he assigned a single infantry regiment, the remnants of Philippine army units that had managed to escape destruction by the Japanese. These units included the bulk of his forces and constituted the combat echelon of USAFIP (NL). A smaller service echelon and command group completed the new organization. Volckmann also set up an effective signals network to coordinate activities and reestablish communications with MacArthur's headquarters.

USAFIP (NL) was still operating under its original directive to concentrate on gathering intelligence, but this would change with the landing of then-LTG Walter Krueger's Sixth Army on northern Luzon in January 1945. Krueger's forces began delivering supplies and equipment by small craft and by airdrop to Volckmann. At the same time, a growing number of Filipino volunteers soon brought guerrilla troop strength up to about 18,000 men. As this strengthened organization began taking on combat missions, Volckmann was able to activate a battalion of mixed field artillery equipped with ordnance captured from exposed Japanese outposts. USAFIP (NL) was now the equivalent of an American light infantry division, able to assume a full combat role.

Although not as strong as Krueger's regular divisions, USAFIP (NL) made a sizeable contribution to the Sixth Army's battle against those Japanese forces concentrated in the high mountainous area of northern Luzon. The enemy there, about 150,000 troops of Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita's 14th Area Army, included about two-thirds of the Japanese troops on Luzon and was led by Yamashita himself. He hoped that a protracted defense of this rugged terrain would delay and punish the Sixth Army advance.

While Yamashita would indeed hold out until the end of the war, Volckmann's forces played an important role in reducing the enemy stronghold. They successfully cleared and held important coastal and other areas, prevented Japanese use of key roads, and forced Yamashita to redeploy one of his four infantry divisions in an unsuccessful attempt to reopen those routes. Maintaining continuous pressure, USAFIP (NL) thus diverted and helped to pin down and destroy not only that division but also other major units of the 14th Area Army.

Volckmann's command, which eventually grew to a force of some 21,000 well-armed and experienced troops supported by two U.S. Army field artillery battalions, gave Krueger an additional division with which to press Yamashita. It inflicted about 10,000 casualties on the enemy between mid-January and mid-June 1945, while suffering nearly 4,000 of its own. It far exceeded Krueger's expectations and, with the formal Japanese capitulation in August 1945, it was to USAFIP (NL) that Yamashita himself offered his surrender.

While Volckmann's accomplishments were thus valuable and impressive, Guardia has unfortunately exaggerated them. His major claim that the actions of USAFIP (NL) forced Yamashita onto the defensive on Luzon and specifically caused him to withdraw to his mountainous retreat is just wrong. As early as mid-November 1944—long before Volckmann's forces were in any way capable of carrying out major offensive operations—Yamashita had concluded that he had no choice but to retreat with the bulk of his army to northern Luzon. There he would conduct a drawn-out delaying defense against what he knew would be the overwhelming strength of the expected Sixth Army assault. He deployed his remaining forces to hold two other natural defensive positions in the mountainous area north of Bataan and the rugged heights east of Manila. USAFIP (NL) actions did not determine any of these dispositions.

Nor was it Volckmann who chose Lingayen Gulf as the landing site for the Sixth Army, as Guardia indicates. The choice of Lingayen had been made in MacArthur's headquarters at the very beginning of the Luzon invasion planning cycle the previous fall, without any input from Volckmann. USAFIP (NL) did report the absence of Japanese defenses on Lingayen's beaches, but this was considerably after that site had been selected.

Guardia's description of USAFIP (NL)'s operational contribution is also misleading. He constantly suggests that Volckmann's force undertook the main offensive effort against the Japanese, with the Sixth Army playing only a backup or supporting role. Krueger's operations, he writes, were merely a "diversion" or "distraction" from the key assaults by USAFIP (NL). This was hardly the case.

Guardia also sometimes overstates USAFIP (NL)'s tactical accomplishments. For example, the reader is informed that USAFIP (NL), assisted by the distraction provided by I Corps, destroyed the bulk of Yamashita's "fearsome Type 89 and 97 battle tanks." Actually, the Japanese tanks were only mediums, easily outgunned by the heavier American armor, and most of them had been dispersed and eliminated by Krueger's main forces. These exaggerations, and others like them, mar an otherwise impressive account of USAFIP (NL)'s important contributions.

American Guerrilla concludes by describing Volckmann's contributions to the development of Special Forces;

Guardia calls him "the progenitor of modern counterinsurgency doctrine and the true 'father of the Army Special Forces.'" Volckmann wrote two basic Army field manuals on guerrilla warfare, laid down the operational concepts for Army Special Forces and worked energetically to spread the doctrine. His efforts led to the establishment of the Army's first special operations unit, the 10th Special Forces Group.

Yet despite Volckmann's important role in this development, the credit as "Father of the Army Special Forces" has usually been given to COL Aaron Bank, who also has strong credentials for this title. Bank worked with Volckmann in convincing the Army of the need for special forces and was, indeed, the first commander of the 10th Special Forces Group. Guardia spells out in detail his argument for supporting Volckmann, and perhaps both officers are equally deserving of the honor. The reader may want to consult Bank's own 1986 memoir, *From OSS to Green Berets: The Birth of Special Forces* (curiously absent from Guardia's bibliography), before reaching any conclusion.

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Excellent Analysis of the Civil War's Turning Point

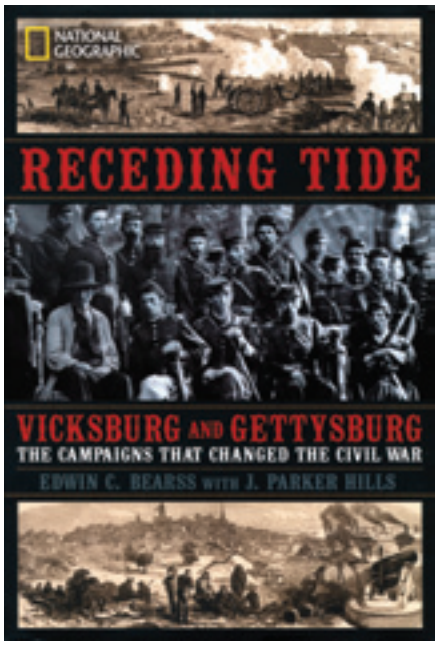
Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg: The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War. *Edwin C. Bearss with J. Parker Hills. National Geographic Society. 400 pages; maps; index; $28.*

By COL Cole C. Kingseed
U.S. Army retired

As the nation approaches the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, readers can expect a number of good books on the central event in America's history. Establishing a standard for literary excellence is Edwin C. Bearss' *Receding Tide*. Written in collaboration with J. Parker Hills, *Receding Tide* chronicles the decisive third summer of the conflict when the Confederacy's military fortunes took an irreversible turn toward defeat during the first four days of July 1863. According to Bearss' coauthor, *Receding Tide* encompasses Civil War "'factual fables' as told by the master historian-warrior of our time."

Both Bearss and Hills come to their subject well prepared. Bearss is America's premier battlefield historian of the period and the historian emeritus of the National Park Service. Since his retirement in 1995, Bearss has led historical tours approximately 275 days a year. He is the author of 13 books, including *Fields of Honor;* he served as a consultant on Ken Burns' PBS documentary "The Civil War." Hills served almost 32 years as an Army officer, both active and reserve, and retired as a brigadier general, Mississippi Army National Guard. A graduate of the U.S. Army War College, he is the author of *A Study in Warfighting* and coauthor of *Vicksburg Campaign Driving Tour Guide.*

In examining how the actions of one army affected those of the opposing army, Bearss also connects the eastern and western theaters of the war in a clear, concise narrative. Although the



maps throughout the text are adequate, they do not portray troop positions, thus straining the reader's understanding of the ensuing battles. Coauthor Hills adds extensive editorial comments to amplify Bearss' engaging story of war and politics. Regrettably, *Receding Tide* contains no bibliography as the work is drawn mainly from Bearss' words in the field.

Bearss is superb in analyzing the war through its sociological, political and military dimensions. He begins his account by briefly examining how Confederate military victories in late 1862 led to increasing discontent over "Mr. Lincoln's War," characterized by incomprehensible casualties and the rise of the peace movement in the states formed from the Northwest Territory. Fortunately for the administration, the Southern tide began to ebb with the advent of 1863, culminating in the midsummer Gettysburg, Pa., and Vicksburg, Miss., campaigns.

In his examination of the Gettysburg campaign, Bearss provides an intriguing and somewhat controversial assessment of GEN Robert E. Lee. In contrast with Lee's previous campaigns, Gettysburg marks the first battle in which all of Lee's corps commanders "seem to be working against him." July 1, 1863, witnesses a disobedient A.P. Hill, an indecisive Richard Ewell, an uncooperative James Longstreet and an absent J.E.B. Stuart. Having had "enough of foulups and recalcitrant subordinates," Lee began issuing orders directly to his division commanders as the battle evolved. Lee's disruption of the already troubled chain of command resulted in failed opportunities as corps commanders sought to compensate for the army commander's interference in their respective operations.

Though Lee subsequently assumed total accountability for his defeat at Gettysburg, Bearss reserves his harshest criticism for Longstreet, Lee's First Corps commander. Throughout the battle, Longstreet repeatedly failed to anticipate Lee's intent to conduct offensive operations and executed Lee's

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Thure de Thulstrup's "Siege of Vicksburg: Assault on Fort Hill" (1883) depicts the intense fighting between Union and Confederate forces on June 25, 1863, at the 3rd Louisiana Redan, known as Fort Hill during the siege, which lasted 26 hours.

orders in a lethargic manner. Bearss' Longstreet emerges as a commander of blind ambition who worked covertly with Confederate politicians to gain independent command. Using one of Lincoln's homespun phrases, Bearss states that Longstreet's unbridled ambition was the "grub that gnaws deep."

If Gettysburg remains the best-known of Civil War battles, Vicksburg constitutes the more decisive campaign. Bearss concurs, having devoted a good portion of his professional life to studying the campaign and having written the definitive three-volume work on the subject to date. Bearss posits that the "Vicksburg campaign didn't cause Gettysburg, but Gettysburg was Lee's and the Confederate government's response to the Vicksburg dilemma." If so, Gettysburg was certainly a response that failed.

Not surprisingly, then, Ulysses S. Grant receives the highest praise of all Civil War commanders. From the outset of the conflict, Grant was fast to grasp the significance of the Mississippi River, the principal line of communications and commerce in the western theater. The "Father of Waters" not only dominated the western theater, but control of it also ultimately determined the outcome of the war.

Bearss obviously appreciates Grant's

strategic acumen, but he also chastises Grant for his tendency to shift blame to his subordinate commanders when Northern attacks failed, as they did twice outside the Vicksburg defenses in mid-May 1863.

In addition, Bearss is critical of Grant for "cronyism" that frequently led to the appointment of substandard commanders.

Given his penchant for assigning Vicksburg more strategic significance than the war in the eastern theater, Bearss begins and ends his narrative by quoting from Lincoln's correspondence with Grant in the immediate aftermath of Vicksburg's capitulation. On July 13, 1863, the President wrote Grant, gratefully acknowledging "the almost inestimable service that you have done the country."

With the surrender of the Confederate garrison at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, the Confederate high tide irrevocably receded.

In the final analysis, *Receding Tide* represents a strong reminder of the exceedingly high cost of war. Reflecting upon a stellar career of touring America's Civil War battlefields, Bearss pays a fitting tribute to soldiers who serve their nation in time of war. Battlefields are sacred, he states, because they serve as painful reminders, while "soldiers serve and move on, their contributions often remembered by nothing more than a certificate or a mass-produced medal."

"Lincoln had it right," Bearss asserts, "when he spoke about the soldiers who had consecrated the ground." He appreciates battlefields as "reminders of the very high cost of our democracy" and hopes that the American public will appreciate them as well.

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New Examination of Custer's Last Stand

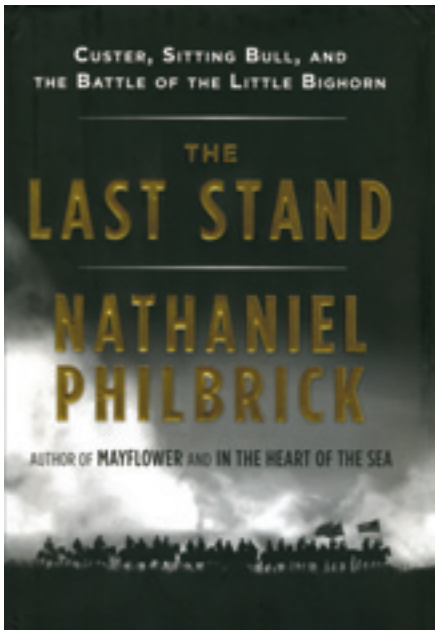
The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn. *Nathaniel Philbrick. Viking. 496 pages; photographs; maps; index; $30.*

By Nancy Barclay Graves

In describing George Armstrong Custer, Nathaniel Philbrick writes in *The Last Stand*, "Despite his inconsistencies and flaws, there was something about Custer that distinguished him from most other human beings. He possessed an energy, an ambition and a charisma that few others could match. He could inspire devotion and great love along with more than his share of hatred and disdain, and more than anything else, he wanted to be remembered."

Philbrick is an accomplished historian. In very readable prose he has previously given us *Mayflower, Sea of Glory* and *In the Heart of the Sea.* In *The Last Stand*, he has turned from New England and the sea to write about Custer in his post-Civil War role as Indian fighter. Philbrick has done diligent research; the 90 pages of notes add substantially to the book. Included also are photographs of all the central figures, photographs of the area, pictographs by Indian witnesses and maps showing the positions of the soldiers as well as the Indians during the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

An anecdote in the preface illustrates Custer's rashness and incredible luck. While moving west across the plains, he had ridden ahead of his troops and was enjoying the exhilaration of chasing a bison. As Custer came in for the kill, he accidentally shot his own horse fatally in the head. As the horse fell, Custer landed face-to-face with the bison, which then turned and calmly walked away.



Weeks after graduating last in his West Point class in June 1861, Custer was in the First Battle of Bull Run. Two years later, he was a brigadier general of volunteers, a hero of Gettysburg. By 1874, Custer was with the 7th Cavalry posted in the Dakota Territory. Many of the officers in the Indian Wars were Civil War veterans who had served together for many years. Generals Alfred Terry, George Crook and Philip Sheridan, COL Samuel Sturgis, MAJ Marcus Reno and CPT Frederick Benteen are most prominently portrayed. There were some who admired Custer, but others found him overly ambitious, even deceitful. Reno and Benteen were rivals for Custer's command but were assigned subordinate to him.

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 had granted to the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne land in perpetuity, a portion of which is now part of the state of South Dakota as the Great Sioux Reservation. By the early 1870s there was encroachment by the whites, first for a possible route for the Northern Pacific Railway and then for prospecting and mining when gold was found in the Black Hills inside the borders of the reservation. This led President Grant to send troops to protect the white invaders. The government also sent word to the Indians that they must settle on the reservation by January 31, 1876.

Sitting Bull, the charismatic and mystical leader of the Sioux nation, refused to go to the reservation. Although the herds of buffalo were dwindling and in many areas the Indians were starving,

in the spring of 1876 there was a large herd, and Sitting Bull had gathered his people for a great hunt. By late June, several thousand—warriors, women and children—were encamped along the Little Bighorn River.

On the opposite side of the river was the 7th Cavalry, not aware of the size of the encampment. The Indian scouts attached to the cavalry played a crucial role leading up to the battle: They advised Custer that the Indians were on the run. It was this inaccuracy that led him to split his force so that the companies led by Reno and those led by Benteen could cut off and capture the fleeing natives. But they were not fleeing.

Reno's detachment was the first to attack the encampment, but "fearing a trap … [and] the size of the village up ahead," he aborted the attack. Sitting Bull, unsure how to interpret the pause in the attack, prepared to send a message of peace. But before his nephew, bearing Sitting Bull's shield as a symbol for negotiation, reached the skirmish line, shots from the cavalry hit one of the emissaries. Sitting Bull mounted his favorite horse, which the soldiers also shot. Sitting Bull, realizing the time for negotiating peace was gone, gave the order to attack.

Custer's three main battalions were now separated and—in the confusion of rolling terrain, pockets of woods and deep grasses—unable to coordinate their efforts. Confusion was compounded when the Indians donned the uniforms of the dead soldiers. Maps showing the daily positions of the troops and the Indians make it easy to visualize their movements.

Of Custer's actual "stand" there is little historic record other than the accounts of the Indians as handed down to their descendants. Even in the pages of *The Last Stand* there is no clear scenario. One native account says the battle was over in 20 minutes. Evidence is also presented that gives substance to the theory that Custer was trying to capture women and children of the Indian encampment to use as shields as he had done successfully eight years earlier at the Battle of the Washita. Whatever his intent, which will remain forever unknown, Custer and all of his men died at the hands of the Indians.

After the Battle of Little Bighorn, fighting with the Indians continued, culminating four years later with the indiscriminate massacre at Wounded Knee. The role of the Indian fighter ended, and in 1890 the frontier was declared closed. In that same year, Sitting Bull, endeavoring to be the peacemaker between Indians and whites, came to a sad end when he was killed by his Lakota enemies on the reservation to which he had finally surrendered. Reno was the subject of a court of inquiry for his role in the battle, but the judges neither condemned nor exonerated him. Later dismissed from the Army, he turned increasingly to alcohol and died in 1889 following throat cancer surgery. Benteen, always vindictive, was forced to retire in the late 1880s after writing criticism of his commander, MG Crook. Despite the efforts of Terry, Reno, Benteen and even Sturgis, Custer's commander, to blame Custer for the massacre, he nonetheless emerged the hero. The most powerful hero-maker was his widow, Libbie Custer. For the last 57 years of her life she wrote books, gave lectures and succeeded in clearing her husband's name.

The Last Stand, meticulously documented, is a fast-moving account of Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn and is a good read. Philbrick gives a balanced review of the events leading up to the battle and of the various personalities and jealousies that influenced strategic decisions, but he leaves it to Libbie Custer to make her husband an icon.

Philbrick notes, however, that like the Spartans at Thermopylae and the defenders of the Alamo, "even though the odds are overwhelming, the hero and his followers fight on nobly to the end and are slaughtered to a man. In defeat, the hero of the Last Stand achieves the greatest of victories, since he will be remembered for all time." I cannot include Custer in this heroic company, but in the end he did get his wish to be remembered for all time.

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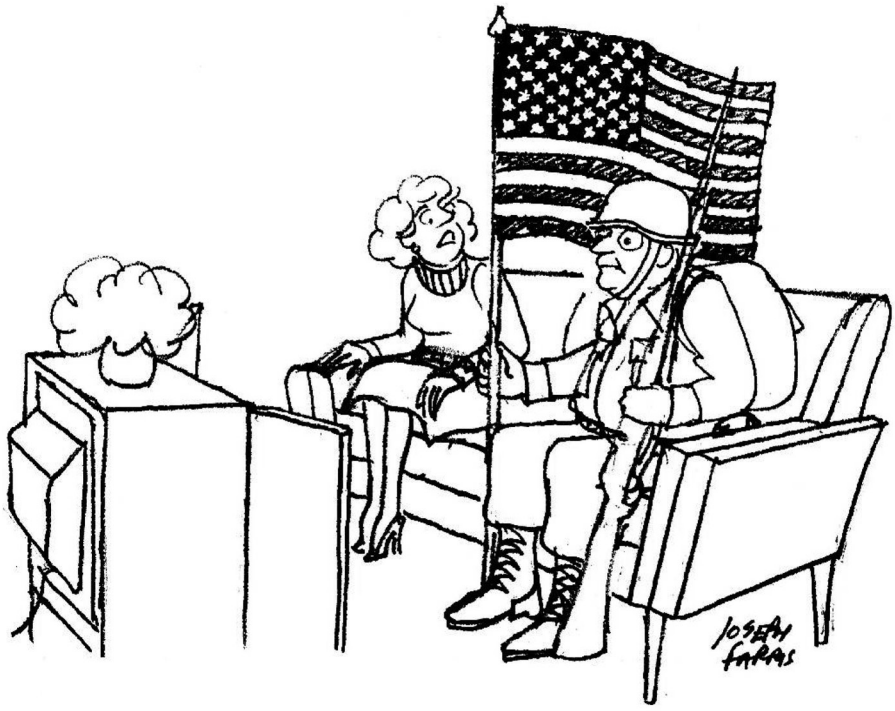

"I realize we're the only superpower in the world now but must you be so vigilant all the time?"