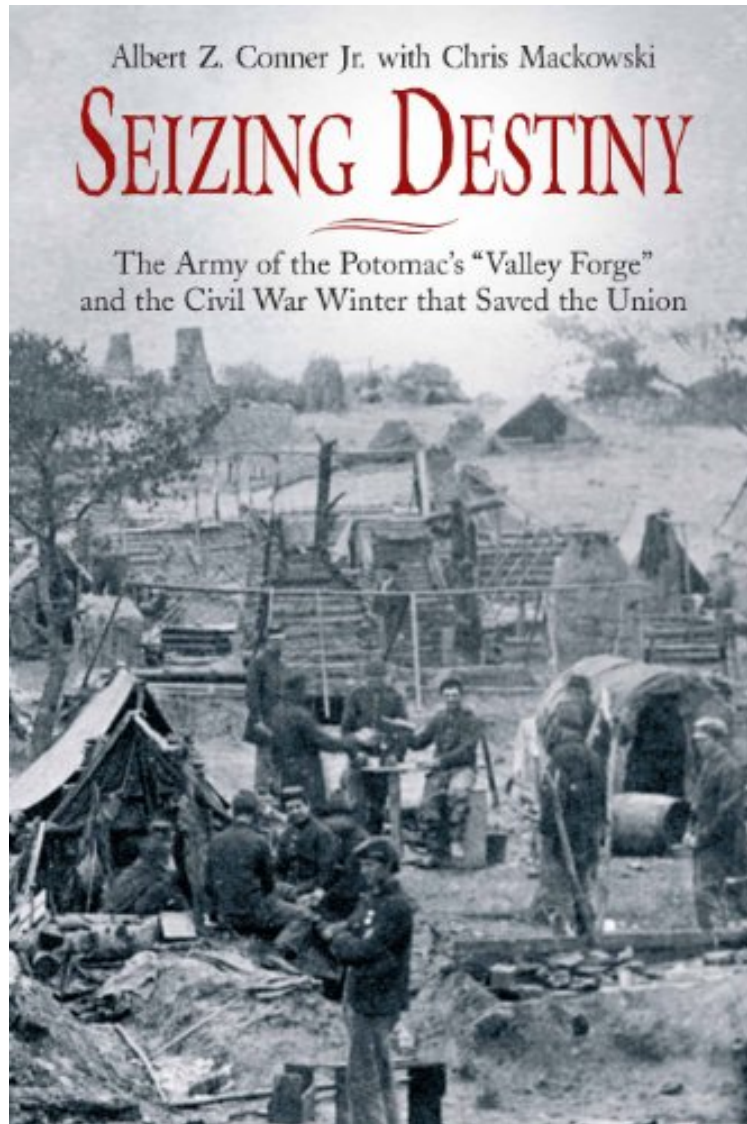


[FREE] Seizing Destiny: The Army of the Potomac's "Valley Forge" and the Civil War Winter that Saved the Union

Seizing Destiny: The Army of the Potomac's "Valley Forge" and the Civil War Winter that Saved the Union

Albert Z. Conner, Chris Mackowski

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Albert Z. Conner, Chris Mackowski : Seizing Destiny: The Army of the Potomac's "Valley Forge" and the Civil War Winter that Saved the Union before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Seizing Destiny: The Army of the Potomac's "Valley Forge" and the Civil War Winter that Saved the Union:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Book That Enthusiasts Will Want To Read And Purchase By David Marshall This publication is the story of how citizen soldiers of the Army of Potomac found a way to overcome bad commanding generals, while taking hold of their future and saved the United States through loyalty, hard work, determination, inspiration and excellent direction. These significant changes came about during a non-battle period in the winter and spring of 1863. While losing both the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, self-confidence and fighting abilities were reestablished through enhanced soldier attention, the army's restructuring, collaboration and worked with the Lincoln Administration in mutual purpose. These excellent writers utilize numerous primary sources such as official records, diaries, letters, newspaper accounts and editorial letters. Together with their use of secondary sources, they have succeeded in providing an understanding of political, social and cultural history in this critical period in American history. Savas-Beatie has published a comprehensive book in 2016 with 384 pages, and 39 helpful photographs and illustrations as well as 8 outstanding Hal Jespersen's produced maps, an index, below page notes, and a thorough bibliography. Albert Z. Connor and Chris Mackowski used many firsthand accounts and anecdotes of interesting aspects of this wonderful story. Some of the colorful historical individuals that are discussed in this treatment include Union Major General Joseph Hooker, Union General Dan Butterfield, Union Major General George Meade, General-in-Chief of the Union Army Henry Halleck, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and President Abraham Lincoln. Additionally, the 3 Appendices enhance the understanding of the Civil War's turning points. Historians such as John Hennessy, Eric Mink, Don Pfanz, Bob Poirier and Kristopher D. White assisted these writers with this work. This publication allows the reader to feel like they are with the Army of the Potomac during its reorganization in 1863 prior to the Battle of Gettysburg. Most examinations of citizen soldiers during this crucial period in American history books concern a specific battle while this useful tour covers the aftermath of several battles/fights between the Federals and the Confederates during 1861-1865. These historians have produced a title; *Seizing Destiny: The Army of the Potomac's "Valley Forge" and the Civil War Winter that Saved the Union*, which is a fine addition to Civil War literature. Experienced readers will find new and helpful information. The author has created a well written, very organized, readable, clear, concise, and balanced title that offers an excellent start to this important topic. A personal and accessible narrative that tells a remarkable story yet is grounded in scholarship. Enthusiasts will benefit from reading this useful publication. Connor and Mackowski are able to shed important light on the crucial changes that the Army of the Potomac made to survive Burnside's failed advance at Fredericksburg and his terminated Mud March follow up in January 1863, when his army was frustrated by bad weather conditions before it could cross the Rappahannock River as preferred. They point out that these important modifications ultimately helped lead Union forces to a great victory at the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863. The principal merit of the author's book "Seizing Destiny" is in making students feel that without the 93 day recovery in 1863, the fortunes of this important army may have been lost forever and the war's results could have been ultimately lost. This reviewer recommends the purchase of this wonderful and important book.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Filling in the Details Between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville By Ryan Q. After the Federal disaster at Fredericksburg in December, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln moaned, "If there is a place worse than hell, I am in it." The Union war effort, at least in the east, had been met repeatedly with setbacks, and the latest defeat came at a time when Lincoln hoped to drive home his ultimatum with the upcoming Emancipation Proclamation. If Lincoln was in hell, what of the Army of the Potomac, the Union's fighting force in the east? Fredericksburg marked the darkest period for the army during the entire Civil War, and they went into winter quarters in nearby Stafford County a nearly broken lot. And yet, just a few months later, the army went on to fight Robert E. Lee at Chancellorsville, and though a defeat, the Federals absorbed the loss and, two months later, win the battle of Gettysburg. What happened in Stafford County is the subject of a new book, *Seizing Destiny: The Army of the Potomac's "Valley Forge" and the Civil War Winter that Saved the Union*. Authored by Albert Conner and Chris Mackowski, *Seizing Destiny* is the perfect book to explain what is usually shrugged off as "Joseph Hooker replaced Ambrose Burnside, and fixed morale in the army." How? remained the pertinent question for historians to answer in the interlude between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, and Conner and Mackowski answer the question and then some. Brimming with first-hand accounts, the two authors allow the soldiers and officers of the Army of the Potomac to do a lot of the explaining. Reading the letters, one can trace as the army starts to believe in itself again—humor replaces deep skepticism, and the soldiers start to look forward to their next engagement with Lee's men to try and prove what they were capable with. These primary sources are drawn from all over the army, allowing for a full panoramic view of the Army of the Potomac. Though not fully focused on battles, the two authors do go into detail of the cavalry actions in the winter and early spring of 1863, culminating with the battle of Kelly's Ford on March 17, 1863, St. Patrick's Day. There are plenty of maps to allow the reader to follow along. If the book will have its naysayers, they will come against the book's subtitle, claiming the winter of 1862-63 to be the "Valley Forge" of the Federal army. The authors are fully aware of what a large claim this is, and they rely on soldiers like Rufus Dawes from the famed Iron Brigade, whose own writings allude to the Continental Army's experiences in 1777-78 during the American Revolution in comparison to the Army of the Potomac. While not a perfect comparison (George Washington and his men were, after all, dealing with the loss of their own capital, something the Army of the Potomac didn't have against them), the allusion does have its points. *Seizing Destiny* is a

great resource for the Army of the Potomac scholar, or someone looking for that background information on the period between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. It is truly an unfortunate case that one of the book's authors—Al Conner—recently died after a long fight against cancer. But Conner's contribution to the Civil War scholarship alongside Mackowski, a topic that sometimes seems maxed out, is a lasting one that readers will pick up for years to come. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Rebuilding an army By James W. Durney Very few armies suffered as the Army of the Potomac did. In July 1862, they stood at the gates to Richmond ready to enter the capital of the Confederacy and win the war. The Seven Days, a series of brutal battles, drove them away from Richmond forcing a general withdrawal. Antietam is a slugfest where they attack as individual units with little chance to win. Their popular general is replaced by a fumbler that sends them against an impregnable position at Fredericksburg. The final insult is the infamous "Mud March" that mires them in a sea of mud for nothing. In winter quarters, the food is so bad that men have scurvy. An army of citizens, that expect to go home after the war, they are almost ready to mutiny and unwilling to reenlist. "Fighting Joe" Hooker inherited a demoralized group of men, angry, sullen if not hostile and in a few months had made them into an army again. Sears book on Chancellorsville is one of the few histories that touch on what Hooker accomplished in a few months. This book takes a close, detailed look at how an army is built and what good officers can accomplish. This book covers what make Civil War armies so hard to destroy and the soldier so ready to return to a fight after being beaten. The authors look at the army as a society and as people, keeping both views and showing how each responds and interacts. Not being a battle history, many will overlook this book. In doing so they will reduce their understanding of how the war was fought and where it was won.

FINALIST, 2017, RICHARD HARWELL AWARD, GIVEN BY THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF ATLANTA "Depression. Desertion. Disease. The Army of the Potomac faced a trio of unrelenting enemies during the winter of 1863. Following the catastrophic defeat at the battle of Fredericksburg in December of 1862, the army settled into winter quarters and despair settled into the army. Morale sank to its lowest level of the war while desertions reached an all-time high. Illness packed the hospitals. Political intrigues, careerist schemes, and harsh winter weather demoralized everyone. Even the army's livestock suffered, with more than 1,000 horses and mules dying every week. Major General Joseph Hooker, a pugnacious tactician aptly nicknamed "Fighting Joe," took command of the army. And then a remarkable thing happened: a man known for his hardscrabble battlefield tenacity showed an amazing brilliance for organization and leadership. With Chief of Staff Dan Butterfield working alongside him, Hooker literally rebuilt the army from the bottom up. In addition to instituting vital logistical, ordnance, and administrative reforms, he insisted on proper troop care and rigorous inspections and battle drills. Hooker doled out promotions and furloughs by merit, conducted large-scale raids, streamlined the army's command and control, and fielded a new cavalry corps and military intelligence organization. Hooker's war on poor discipline and harsh conditions revitalized a dying army and instilled individual and unit pride. During this 93-day resurgence, the Army of the Potomac reversed its fortunes and set itself on the path to ultimate victory. No other American citizen-army at war has engineered a more complete turnaround in the field. Hooker's achievement represents nothing less than the greatest non-battle turning point since Valley Forge in the American Revolution—a linkage recognized by hundreds of contemporary soldiers and civilian participants. Modern historians, however, have either failed to notice or have made only a passing reference to that link. *Seizing Destiny: The Army of the Potomac's "Valley Forge"* is the first in-depth examination of one of the war's true crucial turning points, a time when the army nearly dissolved from its own despair even as the nation depended on that body of bayonets to defend the promises implied by the Emancipation Proclamation. Authors Albert Conner and Chris Mackowski ground their research in hundreds of primary sources and let the soldiers speak, from the lowest private to the highest general. The result is a rich and satisfying portrait of an overlooked success story that made Appomattox Court House in 1865 possible. Here, finally, is the full story of how the citizen-soldiers of the Army of the Potomac overcame adversity, seized their destiny, and saved the nation through leadership, perseverance, patriotism, and faith."

From the back cover: "War is tumult, but sometimes change finds root in the quietude between battles. The chill, mud, defeat, and depression of the winter of 1862-63 coincided with a white-hot debate about the nature and purpose of the American Civil War. Years of research by Al Conner and a collaborative writing effort with Chris Mackowski bring light and insight to a critical time in the history of the Army of the Potomac, and a time of dramatic change for our nation." -- John Hennessy, author of *Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas* "How did the Army of the Potomac, so badly defeated at Fredericksburg in December, 1862 manage to recover its morale, confidence, and fighting strength in the following six months? Here is your answer! This exceptionally well-written study is the result of painstaking research in soldiers' records, diaries, and letters from the huge Federal camp in Stafford County, Virginia. The authors take us right in among the dedicated Union soldiers and their leaders during the long cold winter of 1862-63. We are witness to the amazing revitalization of the army under the leadership of "Fighting Joe" Hooker. *Seizing Destiny* is the finest account yet written of the "Valley Forge" of the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War. It is an absolutely essential addition to your Civil War library." -- Brig. Gen. John W.

Mountcastle, U.S.A.(Retired), Former Chief of Military History, U.S.Army "Far too often, the actions of the Army of the Potomac take a back seat to those of their adversary, the Army of Northern Virginia. There is no better example than the period between the Confederate victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. This five-month void in the Army of the Potomac's history has been filled by the splendidly written and superbly researched work by Albert Conner and Chris Mackowski. Conner and Mackowski convincingly argue that the rebuilding of Lincoln's principal army was a vital turning point in and of itself. The authors offer a keen insight and lucid understanding of an often-overlooked aspect of the Civil War's Eastern Theater, while providing an enormously impressive volume on a forgotten period of the conflict." --Kristopher D. White, author of Chancellorsville's Forgotten Front: The Battles of Second Fredericksburg and Salem Church "From its creation under George McClellan to the surrender at Appomattox, the Army of the Potomac proved itself as a resilient combat force. At no other point was this determination forged than during the despair of the winter encampment of 1862-1863 following the failure at Fredericksburg and the Mud March. Al Conner and Chris Mackowski have made a superb addition to the scholarship on the Potomac army by examining this overlooked and long-forgotten period in their story. Through quick-paced prose, their narrative recounts the major events of that winter and how it impacted the men who would go on to fight at Gettysburg, Spotsylvania, and Petersburg. Seizing Destiny is an essential study for anyone interested in the Eastern Theater." -- Daniel T. Davis, Chief Historian, Emerging Civil War "Conner and Mackowski weave a great story on the "rebirth" of the Army of the Potomac in Stafford County in the winter of 1863. Few people understand the depths of despair the army went through and how its transformation led to military and political success for the Union." -- Rob Orrison, Historic Sites Supervisor, Prince William County, VA