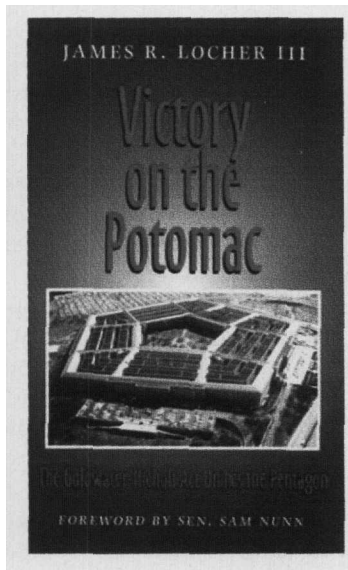


Decisive Victory?

reviewed by LtCol F.G. Hoffman, USMCR

VICTORY ON THE POTOMAC: Goldwater-Nichols Unifies the Pentagon. By James R. Locher III, Texas A&M Press, College Station, TX, 2002, ISBN 1585441872, 443 pp., \$34.95. (Member \$32.00)



A decisive battle in American history began on the morning of 4 February 1986. This battle was not a typical clash of arms with bugles blaring and flags waving. Instead, it was a horrific exchange of salvos with volleys of ripostes between contending sides. There were numerous casualties, but the outcome was a victory for those who took on what Jim Locher calls the "deeply entrenched, outmoded traditions and practices" of the U.S. Armed Services. *Victory on the Potomac* is written by a survivor of that titanic battle, a struggle that culminated on 16 October 1986 when the Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (more commonly known as Goldwater-Nichols Bill) became the law of the land.

This is a carefully crafted and exquisitely edited work. One might expect to find little of interest in the vicious but bloodless firefights in the corridors of the U.S. Senate. Yet, the final product is as readable as any battle history. It ranks up there with Hedrick Smith's *The Power Game* in

its ability to capture the inner sanctum of Washington's power politics and personalities. Furthermore, *Victory on the Potomac* is impressively researched, further reinforcing the author's own detailed participation at every stage of this "conflict."

This attention to detail is not surprising to those who know Mr. Locher. A graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, Locher worked in the Pentagon as a "whiz kid" in the Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation in the latter days of the Vietnam War. He also served as a Senate staffer where he was instrumental in other key reform efforts including the creation of the U.S. Special Operations Command

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and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict position in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Locher later served in that position before retiring from public service. He continues to serve as a consultant and is widely recognized as an expert in defense management. How he developed this expertise is quite evident in the cut and thrust of the debate surrounding Goldwater-Nichols.

The bulk of the book retells the clash of perspectives that led to

Goldwater-Nichols. The aim of the book and the defense reform effort was to establish a balance between the perspectives of the various Services and the operational requirements of the combatant commanders. The author uses the Marine ill-fated experience in Beirut as one example where an imbalance injured the Nation's interests. Marine readers will not be comfortable with the author's assessment.

To be sure, Goldwater-Nichols was a necessary corrective, but at times the story becomes tendentious, a sort of morality play pitting courageous reformers (Senators Sam Nunn and Barry Goldwater, ADM William Crowe, GENs David Jones and Edward C. "Shy" Meyer) against a recalcitrant band of "Service Supremacists" including Caspar Weinberger; Secretary of the Navy John Lehman; Gen P.X. Kelley; former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), ADM Thomas H. Moorer; and LtGen Victor H. "Brute" Krulak. The reformers got the better of the argument in 1986, which the book reflects.

Clearly the Nation has been well served by the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Bill. Service on the Joint Staff or with the regional combatant commanders is no longer shunned. Professional military education (PME) has been improved throughout all of the Services, and joint PME has been substantively increased. This has appreciably improved the quality of the personnel serving on the staffs and enhanced the quality of those staffs and the advice that senior joint officers provide. The author notes that military operations have improved and expresses disappointment that greater efficiencies in defense spending have not been achieved. There is little debate here.

All in all, Locher's evaluation that joint military operations have improved is fair, but a critical distinction between correlation and causation should be made. There is clear evidence that U.S. military operations were shortchanged by the Joint Staff during the end game of Operation DESERT STORM and in adjusting means to ends during the weeks before the tragic events of Mogadishu. Mr. Locher overlooks

these failings. More recently, GEN Wes Clark's memoirs from Kosovo offer additional insights before declaring victory. In *Waging Modern War*, GEN Clark noted that "In Operation Allied Force, the provisions and intent of the legislation were severely challenged."

Additionally, while the author is satisfied that civil-military affairs have been improved, there is a growing body of literature that suggests this area warrants more detailed review. (See Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*, and Eliot Cohen's exceptional *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesman, and Leadership in Wartime*.) Goldwater-Nichols did not cause an erosion in this critical element of national security, but it needs to be reexamined in the light of today's context and concerns.

The sole deficiency in the book involves the brief epilogue and the author's decision to stop short when it comes to the future. 11 September 2001 made manifest the dynamic nature of the strategic environment facing the United States, one that is remarkably different than the bipolar competition that shaped security priorities and structures during the Cold War. Regrettably, Mr. Locher chose to limit his evaluation to the 1986-99 time period and did not extend his analysis to future extensions or revisions. Is Goldwater-Nichols in need of strengthening or adjustment? Is it outdated? Some scholars (Tom McNaugher from RAND, Dr. Paul Bracken from Yale, and Eliot Cohen from Johns Hopkins) suggest that less centralized, less hierarchical, and more competitive organizational models would be more appropriate to an age where change and innovation are the order of the day. Many Marines (including Col Mac Owens, LtGen Paul K. Van Riper, and this reviewer) have written similar warnings about increased centralization and homogenization when it may be more appropriate in order to preserve a wider, more adaptive portfolio of capabilities for the joint combatant commander in a dynamic and uncertain world. This debate finds no traction in *Victory on the Potomac*.

Recent operations in Afghanistan (after *Victory on the Potomac* was penned) offer a counterweight to the debate. Operation ENDURING FREEDOM highlighted the great effectiveness of joint forces working together, combining the agility of seabased Marines, highly skilled special operations forces aboard camels or horses, and networked unmanned aerial vehicles and bombers providing precise supporting arms. U.S. Central Command's success benefited from the reforms of the past, but the operation suggests that greater interoperability is necessary at far lower levels than before—greater understanding

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of the capabilities that each force is needed, also at a much lower level. Such requirements suggest that the joint community needs to review organizational models, training methods, and our PME system to bring joint warfighting to the tactical level. U.S. Joint Forces Command should be given clear authority and the requisite resources to experiment with and propose necessary organizational, equipment, and training reforms to bring this about. Additionally, as Gen Peter Pace, the Vice Chairman of the JCS, has urged, the Joint Requirements Oversight Council should stop “grading other people's papers” and start *initiating* efforts to produce the next-generation joint force. All of this suggests that jointness can and should be extended.

Many Marines will have difficulty swallowing this conclusion. We are genetically encoded to despise unification, technocentric perspectives on warfare, and bureaucratic staffs. This cultural attribute comes across in

this book. We, more than any other Service, however, appreciate the value of combined arms and the synergies that only a tightly integrated and cohesive team can bring to the battlefield. This degree of integration will rely more and more on the combined competencies of a joint force in the 21st century. While our Nation will fight as a joint force in future wars, the Marines have much to offer the joint warfighting community. We owe the country our insights, and rather than ignore today's security context and resist the operational implications, it is time to move ahead and make it work. Anticipating threats and opportunities is our forte, and the Corps has historically harnessed change and exploited uncertainty. One again, this tradition will serve the Nation's best interests.

All in all, this is a genuinely important contribution to the study of American military affairs. Locher's exceptional work extends our understanding of the evolution of jointness and our recognition of those who paved the way. Far too often the organizational dimension of strategy is given short shrift by scholars. *Victory on the Potomac* deals with this aspect well and is very relevant today as the Nation's leadership once again undertakes a difficult reframing of our security architecture.

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