

# The Week That Led to Greatness

***The Seven Days: The Emergence of Lee***, by Clifford Dowdey (Little, Brown. 380 pp. \$7.50), underscores, from the Southern point of view, a tragedy that grew out of failure in military communication. Clement Eaton's most recent book is "Mind of the Old South."

By CLEMENT EATON

THE GUNS of the Civil War are still booming. The latest salvo is by Clifford Dowdey, who maintains that the Seven Days' Battle before Richmond in June 1862 constituted its most significant military engagement. The central figure in his narrative is Robert E. Lee, who had played a disappointing role in Confederate military affairs until the wounding of Joseph E. Johnston led to his appointment as commander of the army defending the Confederate capital against McClellan. Though a devoted Virginian, Mr. Dowdey does not portray Lee as the perfect general. The Seven Days of the Peninsular Campaign mark the apprentice period of Lee's growth into a great general. Here Lee displayed the aggressive spirit that was to characterize his leadership, but he was sadly deficient in maintaining communications with his generals and in supervising inexperienced officers in carrying out his complicated battle plans. But then, as the author observes, "none of the generals knew how to cooperate. Nobody sent messages to anybody."

One of the most uncooperative generals—a key figure in Lee's strategy—was "Stonewall" Jackson. Jackson's conduct during the Seven Days has been an enigma in Confederate military history. Mr. Dowdey makes his most important contribution in analyzing the reasons for Jackson's strange apathy and failure to execute Lee's plans. In "four straight failures" following his arrival in Richmond from the Valley he disappointed Lee. More than any other element in the campaign, his inaction and lassitude cost the Confederate army a decisive victory—the opportunity to destroy McClellan's huge army. His derelictions, Mr. Dowdey thinks, were a consequence of "stress fatigue," and in support of his theory he has presented a persuasive argument.

*The Seven Days* is a book of notable

merits and serious faults. Virtually every Civil War author has had his pets and his individual prejudices. Mr. Dowdey, for example, gives very low marks to Joseph E. Johnston, so that the reader is likely to become disgusted with this vain and overcautious general. He also presents Lincoln and Stanton in a most unfavorable light. His hero, on the other hand, aside from Lee, is Ambrose Powell Hill, of whom he draws an exceedingly attractive portrait.

In addition to his strongly felt prejudices, the greatest fault of the author is his wearisome detailing of geographic and topographical information. Focusing on the trees, at times he loses sight of the forest. Furthermore, the reader may be annoyed by repetitions and by the poor proof-reading of the volume.

On the other hand, Mr. Dowdey writes with fine dramatic talent; he is good in the critical evaluation of evidence; he gives subtle and fascinating



Generals Joseph E. Johnston and Robert E. Lee—low marks for vanity.

portraits of the officers (his book is concerned primarily with the officers); and he vividly depicts the tragedy, from the Southern point of view, of the seven days of desperate battle—the tragedy brought by the failure of the generals to carry out Lee's orders and, even more, the pathos of human valor and devotion spent in a mismanaged series of battles—"Confederate infantry against Union guns, spirit against iron." *Seven Days* is a moving book.

## Loyal, But a Loser

***Portrait of a General: Sir Henry Clinton in the War of Independence***, by William B. Willcox (Knopf. xvii, 534 pp. \$8.95), contends that the British commander could have defeated the colonial rebellion had Sir William Howe not interfered. Esmond Wright is professor of modern history at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. He wrote "Washington and the American Revolution" and "Fabric of Freedom."

By ESMOND WRIGHT

Behold the Cerberus the Atlantic  
plough,  
Her precious cargo, Burgoyne,  
Clinton, Howe.  
Bow, wow, wow!

THE FIRST and third of this ill-starred triumvirate have left familiar marks on history. The best known of the three because of his surrender at Saratoga, Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne was a man so various that he could be

at once soldier, King's Friend, Member of Parliament, and popular dramatist—a man of affairs and *affaires*. Sir William Howe, if less richly gifted and (in all respects) less versatile, was politician, soldier, and not only King's Friend but King's cousin; yet perhaps from his fatal dilatoriness in New York in 1776 he was far more the real author of British disasters in the War of Independence than was Gentleman Johnny.

Clinton has waited longest for a place in the record. Indeed until the last decade he remained a dimly-glimpsed, shy, and hesitant figure who inherited Howe's command at precisely the moment when that command became part of a global conflict; after the disaster at Yorktown he was recalled in ignominy; and nothing was known of his private life. From these shadows he has been brought vividly to light by the patient exploration of William B. Willcox in the Clinton papers at the Clements Library in Ann Arbor—researches that led in 1954 to the publication of Clinton's Narrative of his campaigns (*The American Rebellion*)—and by this brilliantly-drawn picture of the man. We can now see him in detail and in the round, and

the portrait of him is far richer and more realistic than those available of any other of the British commanders.

The book is to be welcomed not only because of its style and presentation, but for the number of theses that are clearly maintained, theses that go to the core of our understanding of the war: It was not won by the United States so much as lost by the divided counsels of, and lack of sustained strategic planning by, the British politicians and commanders. ("The principle of policy-making," Willcox says, "seemed to be that sufficient unto the day are the expedients thereof.") It could never be won—as Clinton alone of all the British commanders realized—without a firm control of the sea and of the major harbors and a firm grasp of the logistic principles involved in movement on a continent. It was be-deviled, and hardly ever aided, by the existence of Loyalist groups, a nuisance in London, unreliable in America. And there were, as Gage and Clinton both said *ad nauseam*, never enough troops to do the job. "If you can't afford the expense of war, don't go in it," said Clinton.

For the confirmation he offers here to all these theses Professor Willcox is to be warmly commended. And he makes equally clear that Clinton could have won the war by defeating Washington's army in New York in 1776 had not Howe stopped him and after 1778 it was too late. This book becomes essential reading for any study of the reasons for Britain's first Imperial defeat.

And the man? Superficially he was very like his companions in disaster—unhesitating in physical courage; politician and would-be-intriguer always but statesman only occasionally; a summer soldier who could find solace, although less easily than they, in the ennui of his long winter evenings. But he lacked con-

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—From the book.

Sir Henry Clinton—"fatal hesitations."

## Skirting an Ocean of Violence

*Along That Coast*, by John Peter (Doubleday. 275 pp. \$4.95), the publisher's Canadian Prize-winner, concerns the racial situation in South Africa. Edward Hickman Brown, a former South African, is a free-lance writer in New York.

By EDWARD HICKMAN BROWN

JOHN PETER is blessed with the power to conjure up the Natal South Coast area, with its wild beaches and crashing breakers, and to do so in a lucid and lyrical prose. This book abounds with beautiful descriptive passages that succeeded in transporting me straight back to that lush and green subtropical strip along the Indian Ocean on South Africa's eastern shoreline.

If the author were equally adept with dialogue, this would indeed be a masterly novel. For, apart from the passages referred to above, it is written like a two-character play. The characters are Laura Hunt, a year beyond her Cambridge graduation, and Denton Todd, thirty-five and divorced after an unhappy marriage. We learn their previous histories mainly from their conversations, which is perhaps why they never quite came alive for me, never seemed wholly three-dimensional. And because Todd is the main protagonist of the novel, the girl suffered more in this respect.

Laura, a Canadian, is visiting South Africa in order to get to the center of what she calls "... the most important single problem in the world, in this century ...," the problem of race. She meets Todd at a resort town a couple of days following her arrival, after she has witnessed an utterly unbelievable "racial" incident that culminates in an innocent, middle-aged Zulu's being hurled from a bridge into a lagoon fifty feet below. Todd and Laura spend their time discussing the South African situation as they walk along the beaches (thus giving Mr. Peter continued opportunity to bewitch the reader with his poetical imagery). Their attraction turns to love, and they are contemplating marriage when the novel's final tragedy overtakes Todd.

Three African characters are briefly introduced about a third of the way into the book, and they reappear at the end in order to bring it to a close. It is a measure of Mr. Peter's strength as a



John Peter—"the power to conjure."

writer that whereas I found these Africans to be contrived and unreal and the symbolism of the dénouement altogether too pat, I nonetheless could not help being carried along by the sheer power of his crashing finale.

MY main objection to the book is that it evades its implied objective, the analysis of the universal race issue as microcosmically represented by South Africa. Instead of such an examination, which would have necessitated the introduction of characters drawn from the conflicting groups, we are served up the jaundiced and bitter opinions of the thoroughly inconsistent Denton Todd. He has given up his legal practice in silent protest against what he believes to be a double standard in judicial administration; he calls himself a liberal, and yet at times he speaks and behaves like a caricature of the most bigoted racist. He tells the girl that "... the only real way to restore sanity to the white population ... is to psychoanalyze every man jack of them. ... " or, alternatively, "Kill the lot. ... " He offers no hope at all concerning the current white injustice and its inevitable black counterpart, apparently oblivious to the latter possibility. If such an oversimplified attitude, brought on by despair, can be sympathized with in an individual, it can hardly be accepted as a philosophical judgment.

Perhaps these are mainly the objec-