



Lincoln's War: The Untold Story of America's Greatest President as Commander in Chief

By Geoffrey Perret

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Drawing on newly discovered documents in the National Archives, **Lincoln's War** is the only full-length account to date on Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief. For the first time, readers will see the war unfold as Lincoln saw it.

This wide-ranging account casts new light on Lincoln and his generals, his admirals, his controversial Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, and his outspoken confidant Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy. The reader will also learn the true story of Lincoln's experiences as a soldier and encounter Lincoln as amateur strategist, Lincoln in his relationship with black servicemen, Lincoln in his dealings with the Committee on the Conduct of the War, and Lincoln in his friendship with weapons pioneer Christopher Spencer, the creator of the Spencer repeater. And **Lincoln's War** is filled with myriad illuminating anecdotes—including how the President, a frustrated inventor, liked to conduct his own hands-on weapons tests on waste ground near the White House.

It was Lincoln who, over the course of four years, created the role of Commander in Chief as we know it today. In doing so he saved the Union and changed the nation. This was the most important of his duties, and his greatest success. In **Lincoln's War**, Geoffrey Perret—the acclaimed biographer of Ulysses S. Grant, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy, and the author of four well-received works of military history, including **A Country Made by War**—offers an original, vivid portrait of both a great leader and a tumultuous conflict.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Americans have grown so accustomed to presidents asserting and exercising extensive powers in that role that Perret's thesis may prove as surprising as it is accurate. Until "Lincoln's War," Perret (*Ulysses S. Grant*) argues, there were serious questions as to how far the president's powers to determine military policy extended—or whether, indeed, they existed at all. The Constitution assigned the great issues, declaring war, raising armed forces, ratifying treaties, to Congress. At the other end of the spectrum the Mexican War had created a precedent of leaving strategy and operations to the professionals, particularly Gen. Winfield Scott. Perret argues convincingly that Scott's initial plan against the Confederacy, far from calling for its gradual economic strangulation, provided for replicating his triumph in Mexico by combining a holding action in the east and a decisive thrust down the Mississippi, designed to cut the Confederacy in half by the spring of 1862. Lincoln saw even that delay as unacceptable. While he did not have an expanded idea of presidential power at the time of his election, the comprehensive threat to national survival posed by the South's secession changed his mind. Perret uses archival and published sources to show how Lincoln, pragmatic in this respect as in so many others, put national survival above military, political and legal restraints. Creating by stages a "war power" nowhere described in the Constitution that made him a virtual dictator, Lincoln at the same time consistently appealed for support and validation to Congress, the court system and public opinion, themselves all significantly divided on how best to proceed. The president worked closely as well with a fractious high command incorporating military professionals, like Grant and Henry Halleck, and amateur "political soldiers," like Ben Butler. Developing increasing sophistication in coordinating battlefield victories with the wider political objectives of restoring and reintegrating the union, Abraham Lincoln won his war and in the process redefined the presidency.

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From [Booklist](#)

Lincoln is lauded for his skills as a political leader, his moral strength, and his unyielding devotion to popular government in the U.S. as the "last, best, hope of man." He is seldom praised for his military acumen or even for his choice of subordinates in his role as commander in chief. Perret has written three presidential biographies and four works of military history. Here he provides an interesting and sometimes provocative view of Lincoln that credits him with far greater skills as a commander than is generally realized. Furthermore, Perret asserts that Lincoln redefined forever the role of commander in chief, assuming powers that were previously considered the province of Congress. This is a well-argued work that will be a valuable addition to Civil War collections. *Jay Freeman*

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About the Author

GEOFFREY PERRET is the award-winning author of **Old Soldiers Never Die: The Life of Douglas MacArthur**, **Ulysses S. Grant: Soldier & President**, **Eisenhower**, and, most recently, **Jack: A Life Like No Other**, a biography of John F. Kennedy. Perret was educated at Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley and served for three years in the U.S. Army. He has been a consultant on documentaries for PBS, C-Span, ABC, Fox News, and the History Channel, and is also a contributor to *American Heritage*, *Military History Quarterly*, *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute*, *North & South*, and *Civil War Book Review*. He is a member of the advisory committee of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

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