as required, and 11.23 percent of those drafted refused to go (112, 156).

The new laws and regulations made little provision for conscientious objectors (COs), whose treatment "was wildly inconsistent and chaotic" (129). Consequences were severe for resisters. The Espionage and Sedition Acts, which criminalized political speech, targeted historic peace churches, such as the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Anabaptists (Mennonites), and antiwar groups. COs also faced violence from vigilante groups and endured beatings and torture. Several died of mistreatment in custody.

During World War II, local draft boards once again ordered Selective Service. This time the laws and regulations made more generous accommodations for COs. As many as 50,000 members of the "greatest generation" served as noncombatants and another 12,000 served in Civilian Public Service camps, established by the peace churches in cooperation with Selective Service. However, some COs even objected to this cooperation with the war effort. Courts sent over 6,000 draft resisters to federal prison. Elmer briefly describes the further injustice of African Americans drafted into a Jim Crow Army by all-White draft boards, and Japanese American men drafted from behind the barbed wire of government internment camps.

Congress reauthorized Selective Service in 1948 in time to fight in Korea and maintained a postwar army of over a million soldiers. However, the system faltered when America committed ground troops to South Vietnam. Selective Service faced wide-ranging opposition, from the peace churches to individuals who were opposed to a war they considered morally outrageous. Many African Americans objected to being conscripted to fight what many believed to be a White man's war.

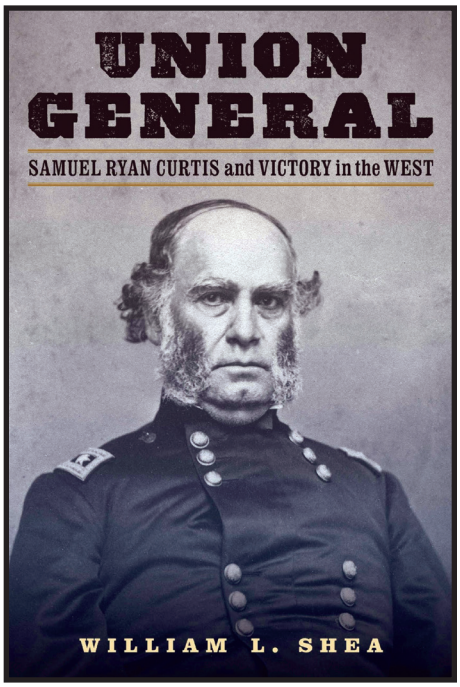
Local draft boards, once considered the bedrock of the system, became a weakness when they applied standards unevenly. A loose network of thousands of draft counselors sprang up to advise young men who chose not to fight. The system for enforcing the draft laws eventually broke down under the sheer number of offenders. "At the height of the war, . . . one-sixth of the prison population was composed of violators of Selective Service law" (325) and the Department of Justice resorted to "highly selective prosecutions" (327). Millions of others found creative ways to evade service with few consequences. Selective Service ended in 1973, only to be revived in 1980 on a stand-by status.

My greatest criticism is that Elmer does not suggest how the United States ought to balance the rights and obligations of citizenship. He meticulously identifies all the reasons why men have objected to, resisted, or simply evaded conscription, but not the circumstances in which conscription might be necessary and legitimate. If, in a future conflict for America's vital interests, voluntary enlistments fall short of requirements, how should the country fill its ranks, while making allowances for conscientious objectors? That is something every military historian ought to consider.

Dr. James C. McNaughton, former chief of the Histories Directorate, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), served in the Army Historical Program for thirty years, including with the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center; U.S. Army, Pacific; U.S. European Command; and U.S. Army, Europe. He holds graduate degrees from the Johns Hopkins University and the U.S. Army War College and is the author of *Nisei Linguists: Japanese Americans in the Military Intelligence Service during World War II* (CMH, 2006).

Note

1. "Militia Act of 1792." George Washington's Mount Vernon. https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-source-collections/primary-source-collections/article/militia-act-of-1792.



UNION GENERAL: SAMUEL RYAN CURTIS AND VICTORY IN THE WEST

By William L. Shea

Potomac Books, 2023
Pp. xii, 346. $34.95

Review by Michael P. Gabriel

William L. Shea, the coauthor of *Pea Ridge: Civil War Campaign in the West* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997), has directed his considerable talents to writing the first biography of the victor of Pea Ridge, Samuel Ryan Curtis. According to Shea, Curtis undoubtedly was the most important figure in the Trans-Mississippi Theater during the Civil War and arguably one of the conflict's most successful generals. However, he largely is overlooked today. This fine biography goes a long way toward demonstrating Curtis's importance and explaining why he does not hold a larger place in Civil War historiography.

The younger son of an industrious Ohio family, Curtis learned early the value of hard work. He obtained an appointment to West Point, graduated twenty-seventh of thirty-three in 1831, and after a brief stint in the Army, resigned his commission to seek his fortune in business. Shea fully documents Curtis's numerous ventures, most of which involved civil engineering. He was an early proponent of a transcontinental railroad, later served on the commission which

oversaw its construction, and worked on various canal and western river projects. These activities ultimately brought Curtis to Iowa where, as an opponent to the expansion of slavery, he joined the new Republican Party and was elected to the United States House of Representatives three times.

Shea rightly focuses most of his attention on Curtis's military career and notes how early experiences shaped his later actions. Curtis served in the Mexican-American War, and although he did not see combat, he learned the importance of logistics while on garrison duty in the Rio Grande Valley. He reentered the military at the outbreak of war in 1861 and became convinced of the importance of thorough training after witnessing the rout of U.S. Army soldiers at Bull Run. Curtis applied these lessons when he led Northern troops in Missouri and Arkansas.

In March 1862 at Pea Ridge—the first time he experienced a major battle—Curtis reoriented his army 180 degrees when attacked from behind and defeated General Earl Van Dorn's numerically superior force. Over the next five months, he drove Confederate forces from southern Missouri and much of northern Arkansas. During this grueling campaign, Curtis—the oldest Union general commanding a field army—became the first Civil War commander to have his soldiers live off the land, predating General Ulysses S. Grant by eleven months. Shea, quoting an Arkansas resident, notes that this was also the first time Southern civilians felt the harsh effects of economic war: "No country ever was, or ever can be, worse devastated or laid waste than that which has been occupied, and marched over by the Federal army. Everything which could be eaten by hungry horses or men has been devoured, and . . . almost everything which could not be eaten was destroyed" (148–49). Having occupied Helena, Arkansas, on the Mississippi River in August 1862, Curtis proposed a quick waterborne assault on Vicksburg, Mississippi, in conjunction with Grant's forces, months before the city was heavily defended. U.S. Army Commanding General Henry W. Halleck, diverted by Union reverses in Virginia and eastern Tennessee, rejected this proposal that potentially could have changed the war. Still, Shea credits Curtis's success with materially aiding Union operations east of the Mississippi and in central and western Tennessee earlier that year. Curtis performed similarly well at Westport in October 1864 when he repelled General Sterling Price's raid on Missouri. Curtis's subsequent pursuit through Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, and the Indian Territory devastated what remained of organized Confederate forces in the region and effectively ended the war in the theater.

Shea also examines Curtis's noncombat endeavors to reestablish federal authority in Arkansas. He started the state's first Unionist newspaper and enlisted hundreds into the Unionist First Arkansas Regiment. Even more importantly, he "sounded the death knell for slavery" in large parts of Arkansas (149). Although he lacked authority to do so, Curtis distributed thousands of emancipation forms to slaves in spring 1862, and Helena later became the main training center for U.S. Colored Troops in the Mississippi Valley. Curtis set up refugee camps; employed hundreds of freed slaves as laborers, servants, and launderers for the Army; and in at least one case, provided a group of African Americans with money. Shea notes that Curtis enacted these policies more to punish Southern planters rather than from any great sympathy for enslaved people, and in fact, would not rent a farm to an African American family after the war. Still, he grew more concerned about formerly enslaved people over time, favored Black suffrage, and feared that "insolent revengeful masters" would regain control over them "if chicken hearted officials administer the affairs of the rebel states" (272). Curtis similarly came to sympathize with the Great Plains Indians after unsuccessfully trying to negotiate a long-term peace with them late in the war and immediately after. He believed that most Native Americans wanted peace but thought that this was unlikely as settlers continued to migrate west.

Shea closes his work by examining why Curtis faded into obscurity, despite his many achievements. He argues that the general never promoted himself, did not write a memoir, and died shortly after the war in December 1866. Additionally, he spent the entire Civil War in the often-overlooked Trans-Mississippi Theater and clashed with other Union military and political leaders. These included Halleck; Generals Franz Sigel, John M. Schofield, and Frederick Steele; and Hamilton R. Gamble, the governor of Missouri. Several of them opposed Curtis's abolitionist tendencies and sought to ruin his reputation. These machinations resulted in a court of inquiry investigating Curtis for unsubstantiated allegations of corruption. Although acquitted, Curtis was relieved from command and sidelined for part of 1863 because of these charges. Shea identifies General Grant's dislike of Curtis as a final reason for his lack of recognition. Although the two officers had little direct interactions, Grant never acknowledged Curtis's contributions, shunted him to backwater commands after he became general of the armies, and only mentions him once in his famous *Memoirs* (Charles Webster, 1886). Shea cannot explain the source of Grant's animosity, but it played a role in how quickly Curtis was forgotten after the war. Although several statues of Curtis stand in Iowa today, the author argues that Pea Ridge National Military Park is the general's most fitting and lasting tribute. This well-written and thoroughly researched biography, based largely on the general's writings and the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, represents another acknowledgment of Samuel Ryan Curtis's importance, and it is a worthwhile read for those interested in the American Civil War.

Dr. Michael P. Gabriel is chair of the Department of History at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches courses on United States history through 1865 and public history. He is the author or editor of five books on the American War for Independence and the Second World War.