

QUITTERS AND OTHER SUCH REVOLTING RIFF-RAFF

**“Winners never quit and quitters never win!”
The advice of a caring Father to his son.**

“Today’s Defeatists”, by Donald Kagan is a must read for those who value the lesson of history as instructions for the present.

In his article, Kagan recites the nature and actions of the Copperheads during the American Civil War. He compares that history to today’s debate over the future of the World War on civilizations enemies that, for the moment, is centered in the Middle East. Kagan concentrates on the Copperheads role in the war but he fails to mention the concomitant role of Southern military strategy.

Most Americans with a high school graduation date prior to 1980 know there was a pivotal Civil War battle fought at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Some even know that there were other attempts by Robert E. Lee, Gen’l, CSA, to enter Pennsylvania by the same route at other times during the war. Few know why.

Lee is well known for his battlefield strategy and tactics. He was daring, aggressive and energetic. He knew the nature of the Generals Lincoln called upon and he knew how to exploit their respective natures. Lee is less known for his abilities as a war strategist. From the time he was given command of the Army of Northern Virginia he had a plan to win the war. His plan, which he shared with and was endorsed by Jefferson Davis, relied heavily on the defeatist personality of elements of the northern community. Lee’s war plan, much like his battle plans, was the product of necessity born of desperation.

From the moment he rejected command of the forces of the North, Lee was painfully aware of the dire comparative conditions in pitting the forces of the North against the South. The resources in the North, man-power, equipment, industry and economic were infinite. Similar resources in the South were finite, comparatively miniscule and unreliable. What he and his men had were determination and a will to prevail. Lincoln acknowledged this in his comment, after trying several unsuccessful Generals, that he had to find a commander who understood the math. The North could sustain 10 to 1 loss ratios and still prevail. Anything, most particularly men, the South lost could not be replaced.

Facing these realities, Lee recognized there was a political element in the North that wanted political humiliation and would be useful to him in their pursuit. His war plan involved invading the North in hopes that the virus of defeatism would spread. He invaded by way of the Shenandoah in 1862, 1863 and 1864. The ’62 and ’64 invasions were limited in scope, but were for the same purpose.

The Copperheads obliged General Lee. The press wrote articles and the DC politicians wailed that Lincoln was incompetent; he was usurping the Constitution, (which he did quite directly and often) that he was a dullard and stupid and, most importantly, the only answer was a political one, not a military one. There were even articles and politicians who publicly hoped for Lincoln's violent death.

By the late spring of 1864 most historians agree that Lincoln had little chance of re-election that fall. Then, in late summer, three Union Generals set a course on "total war". U. S. Grant tied Lee's forces in a series of fights. W. T. Sherman took his troops to Atlanta and burned a 60 mile path to the Atlantic. His stated goal was to "make Georgia howl" and to create conditions where a crow desiring to fly across Georgia would need to pack a lunch. During his march to the sea, Sherman's forces killed only about 600 Confederate soldiers, while 10,000 were killed by Union forces in Virginia. Yet, in the South, for 100 years after the Civil War Sherman was the most reviled of the Union Generals. Such is the effect of making a general populace feel the sting of defeat in the exercise of total war.

General Phillip Sheridan mirrored Sherman as he marched up the Shenandoah Valley.

In the summer of 1864 the effect these generals would have on the South was yet in the future. The Copperheads took control of the Democrat national Convention and nominated General George B. McClellan, Lincoln's first commander of the Northern forces, for President with a platform of negotiating a peace with the South. Lincoln expected to lose the election.

As the election approached and the three Generals did their work, Admiral David Farragut took Mobile Harbor, giving the command "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!"

Lincoln won the 1864 election by about the same percentage of the popular vote as President Bush did the 2004 election. Still, no one south of the Mason-Dixon Line, strong-hold of the Democrat Party, voted in the 1864 election. As Kagan notes in his article, the Democrat Party paid politically for their embracement of defeatism for a generation after the Civil War.

While General Lee was not an enemy of our country, he did recognize there were those within the country who would stop at little to demean and humiliate the country, especially if there was a sort of political advantage to be gained. As a good and able General he took advantage of the tools and weaknesses available.

While Kagan's article does not mention it, there has been an element within American society from colonial times that have followed the idea of American humiliation. They were called Tories at the time and various other things since. They are ever present and functioning and seem to rear their head especially in time of war. While Kagan asserts they were not present in the World Wars, he apparently discounts the efforts of Henry Wallace and those who worked on the Manhattan Project that gave the secrets to the Soviet Union during and after WWII because they did not "trust" the United States with such power.

Still, the most maddening portion of Kagan's article is his reference to the "defeat" of America in the Vietnam War. North Vietnamese General Giap notes that the American Military Forces in

Vietnam defeated his forces on the battlefield. He further notes, that just as General Lee realized a century before, the defeatist element of the American community could be counted on to change the math. They did, and for the same reasons, humiliation and political advantage.

As historians Schweikart and Allen note, the most dangerous time for America during the Cold War was between 1976 and 1980. By that time it was apparent to the Russians that sheer economics and technology put them in the same position as the South during the American Civil War. On the other hand, America had shown a willingness to embrace humiliation. It had abandoned allies on the field. It had elected a President that babbled about “malaise” and wore sweaters in the White House to “conserve” energy. When a small group of low grade thugs seized an American Embassy, the American people tolerated a President who wrung his hands. Why wouldn’t the Kremlin, in full appreciation of their Southern-like circumstance, consider launching a nuclear first strike on U. S. Military targets and immediately call a hand-wringer with an offer to do nothing further in exchange for any retaliation?

In this current World War, bin Laden shows more knowledge of American history than our high school and college graduates since 1980. He operates as an American history professor every time he sends a message to the people of the U. S. His history lessons are meant less to inform the American audience than to embolden others like Russia and China along with dozens of other small time despots and Europeans who smugly tell themselves their pandering posture has benefit. He wagers there are no more Grants, Sherman’s, Sheridan’s, Perishing, or Patton’s, and if there are, they will be leashed by the Copperheads and their progeny.

We are on the eve of September 11th. Lt. General Petraeus sits in front of Congress making his report on one of the fronts in this World War as this is written. Time will tell us if the American people will again embrace the humiliation promulgated by those whose father’s cared for them so little that they failed to teach them about winners and quitters.

Whatever the decision, the future will follow the path of history attached to those decisions. Lincoln, as well as Lee, knew his history. When he was harangued about the need for a “political” settlement in stead of a military victory he pointed out that such a decision would merely set aside the issue for a future date and the cost would be greater amounts of blood and treasure than finishing the job extant.

The same will be true of us, here and now. We will be winners or quitters as we choose.