

Book Review: *The American Civil War: A Military History* by John Keegan, Alford A. Knopf, New York, NY, 2009, 396 pages, Hard cover \$35.00.

Reviewed by Thomas L. Breiner

When I first heard of the work by noted historian John Keegan, I was looking forward to a new assessment and a quality analysis of the Civil War. I was greatly disappointed. *The American Civil War: A Military History* by John Keegan has proven to be a comedy of errors. Here is a book that should never have been written. The author has done nothing but damage his reputation. From my point of reference, the author failed to adequately research his subject. He starts off by getting the calibers of the Springfield and Enfield rifles wrong. This may have been a typo, but he made the same mistake more than once. The number of errors was so great that I stopped counting at two dozen. I was ready to stop reading but the book became a page turner just looking for the next error. Some examples of the errors from the author are as follows: at the First Battle of Manassas, Union officers William T. Sherman and Ambrose Burnside and Confederate officer "Shanks" Evans were colonels not generals as the author states; Hagerstown is not on the Potomac River; Joe Johnston was senior to Beauregard at Bull Run; and Grant was from Ohio. He missed these small but significant facts.

The one area of the work that I did find interesting were the chapters at the end of the book where the author discussed such topics as black soldiers, the home front, Civil War generalship and if the South could have survived. Here he adds some insights that are both thought provoking and relevant.

My assessment of this book is that any Civil War novice should avoid it with a passion and a knowledgeable student of the war should not waste their time. There is for the most part nothing in this work that deserves to be presented. This work shows clearly that the author does not know the subject sufficiently to discuss the war in any aspect. Even if he had something worth saying, his inability to get the details correct makes any comment he adds unreliable.