Dr Michał Krzysztof Mydłowski, Lessons (un)learned – US Army tactics and weapons from Winfield Scott to Emory Upton

The long shadow of Napoleon Bonaparte extended not only to every major European nation but also to the United States. The U.S. Army, following a rather shameful display during the War of 1812, sought a new system of military tactics. Concurring with the spirit of the post-Napoleonic age, new rules and regulations, written by General Winfield Scott, drew heavily from the French system. While they were not always suitable for the challenges faced by the U.S. Army, their adaptability and solid basic ideas proved sufficient to overcome various Indigenous enemies, as well as Mexico. But the reality of combat changed. Improvements in military technology enabled the development of rifled firearms and cannons, significantly enhancing their effective range, power, and accuracy. Breech-loading and repeating weaponry improved the rate of fire. The U.S. Army, while beginning to adapt, was too slow, and when the Civil War broke out in 1861, it was still employing quasi-Napoleonic tactics in post-Napoleonic combat. However, the war forced commanders to change the way they fought – increased reliance on skirmishers, non-linear formations, trenches, and fast-firing firearms resulted in modernised regulations and tactics. After the war, the U.S. Army faced different opponents – prairie Native Americans – and was once again forced to change its way of conducting military operations and fighting. Irregular and asymmetrical clashes replaced regular Civil War warfare. The goal of the paper is to demonstrate how the U.S. Army's tactics, organisation, and weaponry changed throughout the 19th century and how many lessons from previous wars were forgotten or discarded when faced with new types of enemies.