

retary of defense. Yet his tragedy illuminates more about modern American history than do the successes of his talented peers.

Forrestal's resume was, on the surface, typical of the era's elite: an Ivy League education (Princeton), followed by a brilliant career in finance (Forrestal's was at Dillon, Read, now a preeminent blue-chip banking firm, then something of an ambitious Wall Street upstart). In the 1940s, his formidable capacity was harnessed to a national purpose when, like so many of his Wall Street brethren, he moved to Washington to run the war bureaucracy. Eventually, as secretary of the navy, he directed what was possibly the largest navy in history. Known to all who mattered, Forrestal impressed everyone with his commanding presence and political savvy.

Whence came the wound? Like McCloy, Forrestal was from the wrong side of the tracks. But McCloy was at least a Protestant, while Forrestal was Irish Catholic, born in Beacon, N.Y., in 1892, the son of an immigrant. He believed it necessary to abandon both family and religion in order to succeed. (At Forrestal's funeral, the 29-year-old Michael met his father's relatives for the first time.) Forrestal used his power and renown to build not a network of social alliances but rather a wall of privacy around himself. He confided in no one, not in his wife (even before her alcoholism) nor in any of the succession of women he saw outside his marriage. Driving himself, he refused to take a badly needed respite from government work after the war (as many of his peers did). His triumph, his appointment as secretary of defense, was followed so closely by his tragedy that Washington and the nation were stunned.

Hoopes, who had a long career in government service, came to know Forrestal while working under him at the Defense Department. He and coauthor Brinkley, an historian at Hofstra, have produced a sympathetic yet unblinking portrait of the man. Beyond Forrestal's life story, they tell how government grew too large to be controlled by even the most towering of individuals. Before World War II, Washington was so small and informal that it resembled an 18th-century clique—far from the outsized bureaucratic maze that it started to become during the war. Effective infighter that he was, Forrestal nonetheless sidestepped the

growing complexities by adhering to overly simplistic loyalties. He took the Navy's side against military unification so effectively that he sabotaged the newly created Department of Defense. Then, when he was appointed its first secretary, he faced the herculean task of undoing his own damage. Men more at peace with themselves, with friends and family to comfort them, overcame worse blunders. Forrestal had no such resources. Late one evening in 1949, a Defense Department aide suggested to Forrestal that he go home. "Go home?" Forrestal replied. "Home to what?"

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL WRITINGS.

By Carl von Clausewitz. Edited and trans. by Peter Paret and Daniel Moran. Princeton. 397 pp. \$29.95

UNDERSTANDING WAR: Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power. *By Peter Paret. Princeton. 229 pp. \$24.95*

The strategic analyst Bernard Brodie has declared that Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* is "not simply the greatest, but the only great book about war." On the face of it, this is slightly puzzling. The book—if that is the right word for the work-in-progress, unfinished when Clausewitz died at age 51 in the cholera epidemic of 1831—is really a set of essays riddled with gaps and inconsistencies. Given that *On War* also reflects the personal experience of a unique time and place—Clausewitz's familiarity with war was limited to fighting the Republican and then the Napoleonic French—the book might well have failed to live up to his hope that it "would not be forgotten after two or three years."

Yet anyone who reads Clausewitz will immediately see why he has endured. Both in *On War* and in the essays collected in *Historical and Political Writings*, Clausewitz reveals an endlessly invigorating capacity to transcend the limitations of his sprawling material in his attempt to study war systematically. Where other writers have tried to construct a science of war, Clausewitz does not disguise the recalcitrance of the subject. He announces his idea about "friction" (the tendency of things to go slightly wrong at every stage): "Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is very diffi-

cult." Throughout Clausewitz's writing runs the tension between war's inherent tendency to "absolute" violence and its social function as an instrument of politics. His celebrated statement that war is a continuation of politics by "other means" entailed the view—uncongenial to his fellow soldiers—that a purely military plan is an absurdity. Unlike his predecessors with their mechanistic prescriptions and rigid strategies, Clausewitz wanted to develop the capacity for flexible military judgment that would reckon not only with the enemy's forces but also with its resources and will to fight.

Paret, an historian at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, argues that Clausewitz's method was essentially humane, which is not to say humanitarian. Clausewitz was a Prussian officer who took pride in the profession of arms, and he saw war as more than just a regrettable necessity. Clausewitz's exact attitude toward war is indeed complex, at once realistic and romantic. He could assert the primacy of the psychological over the physical struggle but then, contradicting himself, insist on the centrality of battle to all military operations. Unfortunately, most of Clausewitz's successors have been anything but complex, concentrating almost exclusively on his *leitmotif* of battle and destruction. (In the once-standard German edition of *On War*, the passage advising ministerial control of military strategy was altered to prescribe exactly the reverse.) By demonstrating that Clausewitz's "respect for action" was balanced by skepticism and his deep awareness of the past, Paret presents a truer picture of the early 19th-century author who has become the most respected military theorist in the late 20th century.

THE RADICALISM OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: How a Revolution Transformed a Monarchical Society into a Democratic One Unlike Any That Had Ever Existed. By Gordon S. Wood. Knopf. 447 pp. \$27.50

Who were the true revolutionaries of the modern world? "We think of Robespierre, Lenin, and Mao Zedong," writes Brown historian Wood, "but not George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams." One of history's



larger ironies is that the revolutions that failed, the ones that ended in bloodbaths and reigns of terrors, with dictators and purges, are today considered the real revolutions, while the American revolution, which established a stable new form of government and society, is dismissed as hardly revolutionary at all.

Historians usually argue that America's was, at most, a conservative revolution—in reality, a constitutional defense of rights ("no taxation without representation")—fought not to change the existing society but to preserve it. Wood announces his counter-thesis in his subtitle: The American Revolution created a society for which there was no historical precedent.

The radicalism Wood describes is, however, quite different from that which Charles Beard and J. Franklin Jameson once argued for. Those Progressive historians, viewing the American conflict through the lens of the French Revolution, claimed that our Revolution was not only about "home rule" but also about "who was to rule at home" (in Carl Becker's famous phrase). Yet economic malaise or class unrest could hardly have incited the Revolution because, as Wood points out, 18th-century America lacked the poverty or economic deprivation that supposedly lie behind all social revolutions.

Unlike Beard and Jameson, who dealt with intentions, Wood locates the radicalism of the Revolution in its consequences, most of them unintentional and unanticipated. He presents a before-and-after picture. In 1760, less than two million Americans lived along the Atlantic seaboard, in a society governed by monarchical assumptions, patronage, and hierarchical dependencies. By 1810, nearly eight million Americans spanned an almost continent-wide nation, democracy had replaced aristocracy, and bustling, enterprising individuals had bro-