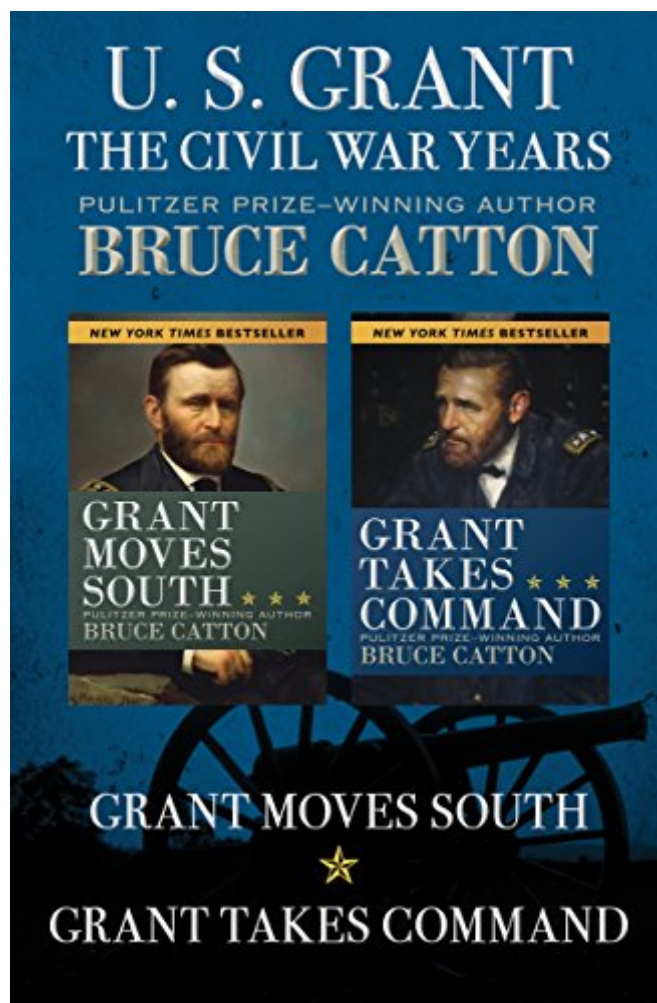




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U. S. Grant: The Civil War Years: Grant Moves South And Grant Takes Command



Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Bruce Catton's acclaimed two-book biography of complex and controversial Union commander Ulysses S. Grant. In these two comprehensive and engaging volumes, preeminent Civil War historian Bruce Catton follows the wartime movements of Ulysses S. Grant, detailing the Union commander's bold tactics and his relentless dedication to achieving the North's victory in the nation's bloodiest conflict. While a succession of Union generals were losing battles and sacrificing troops due to ego, egregious errors, and incompetence in the early years of the war, an unassuming Federal army colonel was excelling in the Western theater of operations. *Grant Moves South* details how Grant, as commander of the Twenty-First Illinois Volunteer Infantry, though unskilled in military power politics and disregarded by his peers, was proving to be an unstoppable force. He won victory after victory at Belmont, Fort Henry, and Fort Donelson, while sagaciously avoiding near-catastrophe and ultimately triumphing at Shiloh. His decisive victory at Vicksburg would cost the Confederacy its invaluable lifeline: the Mississippi River. *Grant Takes Command* picks up in the summer of 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln promoted Grant to the head of the Army of the Potomac, placing nothing less than the future of an entire nation in the hands of the military leader. Grant's acute strategic thinking and unshakeable tenacity led to the crushing defeat of the Confederacy in the Overland Campaign in Virginia and the Siege of Petersburg. In the spring of 1865, Grant finally forced Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, ending the brutal conflict. Although tragedy struck only days later when Lincoln was assassinated, Grant's triumphs on the battlefield ensured that the president's principles of unity and freedom would endure. Based in large part on military communiqués, personal eyewitness accounts, and Grant's own writings, this engrossing two-part biography offers readers an in-depth portrait of the extraordinary warrior and unparalleled strategist whose battlefield brilliance clinched the downfall of the Confederacy in the Civil War.

Book Information

File Size: 6872 KB

Publisher: Open Road Media (June 28, 2016)

Publication Date: June 28, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01GUO7CI2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #336,879 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #21

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Regimental Histories #29 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Regimental Histories #37 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Military & Wars > American Civil War

Customer Reviews

The great benefit of this section of Grant's biography lies in the tremendous detail the author gives of the realities of commanding an army in wartime. Battle tactics may matter, grand strategy may lead to eventual victory, but the great matters include a) logistics, or the logic of supply, b) getting past the political generals to the ones that can win battles, and c) keeping the politicians and reporters out of the way. Reading more than these two volumes (in one package!), my conclusion is that Lee, more than anything else, enjoyed an advantage in all three areas throughout the war, which in turn led to the great resilience of the Army of Northern Virginia. Great ground-level view of combat leadership, military strategy, and behind-the-scenes maneuvering.

Bruce Catton is well admired, for some very good reasons. He is a fine writer, humane and introspective. I have read many thousands of pages on Grant, and have always thought myself to be on his side, but Catton's take on the general gives me dimensions of the man I hadn't known I needed. Particularly insightful is Catton's exhaustive study of the hyper-political milieu this consummate soldier had to endure. He leaves no stone unturned on this count. The insights, the detail, are all top notch, but these are dwarfed by the masterful writing. As a Civil War and American history addict, the books left me (greedily) wanting more, at least some comparison not to Lee, but to George Washington. Washington and Grant both had to deal with political back-stabbing, and dealt with it in radically different ways, Washington by adroit action, Grant by slogging endurance. Militarily, they were also opposites -- Grant had to grab hold of the enemy, Washington had to weave around it. Just saying.

Love the civil war, not a better understanding of Grant as a person. Grant love of his family, his horses, his country, and of President Lincoln. Grant was not a drunk, he is a great man that helped win the civil war for the North and keep this country as one. Grant is now on a pedestal with Patton, MacArthur as the greatest general's of all time. I love Bruce Catton books for anyone that wants to know more about US Grant and the civil war.

Catton's prose is always delightful, and his unashamed advocacy of Grant's character and ability is refreshing. I first read these books when they were published and I am glad to find that they hold up well to the social changes brought by fifty years.

This is an excellent book. I am an amateur Civil War historian and have read a number of books about Grant, including his memoir of the war which is essential reading in my opinion. Catton's book (really two books together) is an excellent read and provides real insight into the thinking and the personality of one of America's great soldiers. Highly recommended

I was fortunate to receive a DRC of this two volume biography of America's greatest general, US Grant. Thanks go to Open Road Media and Net Galley for providing it in exchange for this honest review. This is the sixth Grant biography I've read, and aside possibly from Grant's own memoirs, which are valuable in a different way than this set, I have to say this is hands-down the best I have seen. Catton won the Pulitzer for one of his civil war trilogies, and this outstanding biography is in the same league. Those with a serious interest in the American Civil War or military history in general should get it. It's available for purchase now. When I had read a couple of US Grant biographies, I told myself that enough was enough, and that I should push away from this one subject in favor of others. I am glad I ignored my own advice, because I have come away from this prodigious, in-depth study with a deeper understanding than anything else has provided. It's over 1100 pages long, and over 800 pages once one discounts the end notes and index, but it is as great a pleasure to read at the end as at the start, if not more so. Is this a good choice for someone new to the American Civil War? Generally speaking (if you'll pardon the pun) I'd say no, but for someone otherwise well versed in military history or with a tremendous interest level, time, and stamina, it could be. Because Catton is known as an expert in this field, I especially enjoy not having to review his citations. I know his sources will be strong, and one brief overview convinces me this is true. The first volume starts with his less than glorious entry into the war. As

many know, he had been a member of the regular US army during the conflict with Mexico, and had fallen apart and had to go home. Now he is back, but only after a string or two has been pulled by a family friend, and even then, his task is a daunting one. Volunteer soldiers don't take orders or submit to discipline as a West Point soldiers do, and when he arrives, it seems the lunatics are running the asylum. One of the things that I am impressed with anew every time I read about Grant is his unerring judgment, the social radar that is an indisputable part of his talent. By knowing where to go easy on his men and how to bring them into conformity where it's most important, he creates a solid force to move South with. The battles of Belmont, Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and the tragic but technically successful battle of Shiloh open up the Mississippi River for the Union and divide the South. Catton uses a number of anecdotes that are new to me, and his congenial tone, occasionally caustic wit, and spot-on analysis leave me both energized and contented at the same time. The second volume, however, is where I learn the most. Until I read this biography, I haven't understood exactly how great a risk Lincoln takes when he orders that the US military forces should be given the ballot, an unprecedented move, as he himself runs once more for the highest office. His opponent, McClellan, is a former Union general that at the war's outset, was at the top of the chain of command. He didn't go home a happy man, and now he is running as a Copperhead, the moniker given those in the North that want to end the war and let the South leave the Union, slaves and all. And though I know it is often the case that soldiers and sailors choose to support their Commander in Chief at the ballot box, I haven't fully recognized how badly this may go for Lincoln. Doesn't every soldier want to go home? This is the Democratic ticket's promise; end it now and send them home. On top of all that, Lincoln and Grant, who think a lot alike, clamp their teeth together and endure the white knuckled ride that they know they'll be facing when they decide against further prisoner exchanges with the South. There are two strong reasons for this decision: first, the South refuses to recognize Black men in uniform as soldiers, and won't exchange them, assuming that all of them must be escaped slaves, including those with Northern accents. Grant declares that no prisoners will be swapped until the South is willing to parole every Northern soldier, and he means it. In addition, both Lincoln and Grant realize that the South is running low on manpower. There are thousands of their soldiers sitting in military prisons; to trade them out and risk seeing them back in uniform is to turn a military contest into a war of annihilation. With prisoner exchanges, the war will last longer, and there will be more death. In a peculiar way, refusing to exchange prisoners is the more humane policy. In an election year, this is a tough sell. There are families up North that have

been notified that their son, brother, father, is a prisoner of the enemy, and word has by now been spread as to what kind of conditions those poor men face. How much harder is it to vote for Lincoln and the fight for the reunification of the republic when to do so is to prolong the time their loved one sits behind bars, slowly starving? Lincoln and Grant could temporarily resume prisoner exchanges until after the election, but they stand on principle, and it pays off. Another thing that I don't really grasp until I read the second volume is Grant's relationship with the Army of the Potomac, a collection of men that to some extent have been poisoned with McClellanism. It's a real tightrope walk, and he is deft in his dealing with it. I can't tell you everything he does here; that's the point of the book, after all. But I came away with a renewed respect for General Sheridan, and an interest in reading biographies of that general also. How much of Sherman's march through Georgia and then to the sea is Grant's idea, and how much of it is Sherman's? I come away understanding this better than before as well, although I have read both Grant's and Sherman's memoirs. Catton has a way of crystallizing events without oversimplifying them. And I nod with solemn satisfaction at the cold fury Grant experiences when he learns of the assassination of President Lincoln and the attempts on the lives of others, including himself. I still shiver with pleasure when I reread the denouement, in which Grant sends General Weitzel and his troops, some of whom are Black, into Richmond when the Confederate capitol falls. I want to cheer as the throngs form for the military review in Washington DC after the war has been won; all those thousands of soldiers, all those citizens and international visitors in the stands and on the sidewalks, singing "John Brown's Body". Think of it! I promised myself to be brief, and I haven't really done that, but this is the least I can bring myself to say about this excellent biography. If my review is too long to hold your attention, then this two book series •even while allowing for the fact that Catton is a far better writer than I• will also be more of a meal than you are prepared for. But for those with a sufficiently great interest level and stamina, I cannot imagine a better memoir of Grant for you to buy and enjoy. Enthusiastically recommended!

Bruce Catton does a great job in telling the story of U.S. Grant.

This book offered background and the decisions that Lincoln and Grant made which led to the ultimate victory. It kept, my interest throughout.

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