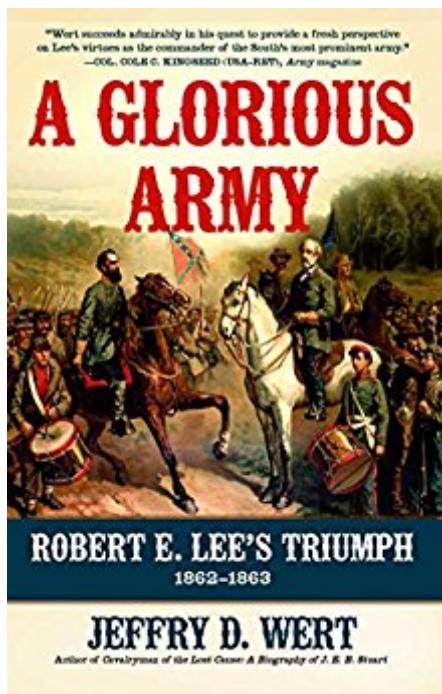


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A Glorious Army: Robert E. Lee's Triumph, 1862-1863



Synopsis

From the time Robert E. Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia on June 1, 1862, until the Battle of Gettysburg thirteen months later, the Confederate army compiled a record of military achievement almost unparalleled in our nation's history. How it happened—the relative contributions of Lee, his top command, opposing Union generals, and of course the rebel army itself—is the subject of Civil War historian Jeffry D. Wert's fascinating and riveting new history. In the year following Lee's appointment, his army won four major battles or campaigns and fought Union forces to a draw at the bloody Battle of Antietam. Washington itself was threatened, as a succession of Union commanders failed to stop Lee's offensive. Until Gettysburg, it looked as if Lee might force the Union to negotiate a peace rather than risk surrendering the capital or even losing the war. Lee's victories fired southern ambition and emboldened Confederate soldiers everywhere. Wert shows how the same audacity and aggression that fueled these victories proved disastrous at Gettysburg. But, as Wert explains, Lee had little choice: outnumbered by an opponent with superior resources, he had to take the fight to the enemy in order to win. For a year his superior generalship prevailed against his opponents, but eventually what Lee's trusted lieutenant General James Longstreet called "headlong combativeness" caused Lee to miscalculate. When an equally combative Union general—Ulysses S. Grant—took command of northern forces in 1864, Lee was defeated. A Glorious Army draws on the latest scholarship, including letters and diaries, to provide a brilliant analysis of Lee's triumphs. It offers fresh assessments of Lee; his top commanders Longstreet, Jackson, and Stuart; and a shrewd battle strategy that still offers lessons to military commanders today. A Glorious Army is a dramatic account of major battles from Seven Days to Gettysburg that is as gripping as it is convincing, a must-read for anyone interested in the Civil War.

Book Information

File Size: 3945 KB

Print Length: 402 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition (April 5, 2011)

Publication Date: April 5, 2011

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0043RSJNQ

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #480,749 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #27

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellent in-depth description of a year in the life of the Army of Northern Virginia, beginning with General Lee's assumption of command in June 1862 and the Seven Days' battles, through Gettysburg (with a brief overview in the last chapter of subsequent major developments leading to Appomattox). Although anyone will enjoy it, this book is not the best choice for a reader with no background knowledge of the War in the East. Rather, it offers for those who have already learned some or much about the events of the Civil War, a layering of abundant insight and delicious detail. Copious quotes (many previously unknown to me) of private soldiers through high-level staff officers, give the reader a poignant sense of the ground-level sensations of those who marched and fought in the Army. Wert's beautiful writing, so enjoyed in his biographies of Longstreet and Stuart, is even better here. (For example, on the morning before Antietam: "A drizzling rain fell, followed by fog, which settled into the hollows and among the trees, as if white-clad specters had gathered for the coming harvest of souls.") His inclusion of small details, such as a rooster's crowing at Fredericksburg's stone wall and Stuart's singing as he led Jackson's troops after the latter's wounding at Chancellorsville, add much to the reader's appreciation of the book's momentous events. This work's shining greatness is in its depiction of the force of the commanders' personalities. For example, I always thought of Lee's famous statement to Longstreet at Fredericksburg ("It is well that war is so terrible or we would grow too fond of it") in a rather abstract, academic light. However, Wert so vibrantly conveys Lee's inherent bellicosity that I now understand the statement as a visceral revelation of his very core which emanated and sought the archetypal force of battle. Not only Lee, but all of the Eastern generals, as well as their relationships with each other, are explored in their complexity. I especially appreciated his treatment of D.H. Hill

who often gets shortchanged; for example, we read a soldier's quote regarding Hill, "The clash of battle was not a confusing din to him, but an exciting scene that awakened his spirit and his genius." This is a great book in every respect. I recommend it wholeheartedly and guarantee that you will enjoy it!

If you are interested in the Civil War, and especially, the exploits of Robert E. Lee, this is a wonderful resource. Jeffery Wert remarkably details the campaigns of 1862 and 1863.

Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia occupy a special place in both our history and mythology. For many, this is the American Civil War. Either glorify or demonize, the man and his army are the subject of a library full of books. Jeffery Wert is no stranger as he steps fearlessly into this arena. Books on this subject can draw fire from both sides, placing an author in the middle of an ongoing battle. Wert has an almost lyrical style that is equally informative and fun to read. While not terse, he tells the story without unnecessary words. Add an ability to use respected historians, original sources with his intelligent observations make for an excellent book. This history covers the time from Lee assuming command outside of Richmond to Gettysburg, an oft-told tale that Wert tells in a fresh vigorous way. This is not a detailed slog through battles, army politics and supply problems. This is not a detailed tactical study of the battles. This is a very solid overview of the months when Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia became the embodiment of the Confederacy. The book maintains a real balance between detail and story. The level of detail adjusts to the needs of the story and never slows the story. This is very necessary, as these are busy months with multiple stories. We focus on the relationship between Lee, his officers and the men. On how they grow together and how they learn the limits of the other. This is not the mythic story but a hard honest look full of truth. The author maintains a balance between admiration and history. The myth is not allowed to take control but this is the foundation of the myth. Presentation of the battles is from the army perspective. Decisions and discussions are equal to the fighting and more important to our story. The result is a unique look at Lee, Longstreet & Jackson at work. We get a chance to see how Rhodes, Gordon, Early were able to prosper and how others failed. Physically this is an attractive book with usable maps and good illustrations. The book has a full set of endnotes, index and bibliography as expect in a serious history. Jeffery Wert is one of our best authors and this is one of his best books.

Jeffry Wert has produced a masterful history of the Army of Northern Virginia under Robert E. Lee.

This book offers deep and well researched insights on the effectiveness and limitations of the Confederate war effort in its most important theater. Using an admirable array of primary sources, memoirs and historical analysis, Wert probes deeply into the two years that led to a Confederate high tide, examining the outstanding controversies of Gettysburg, to produce this complex, informative and essential book.

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