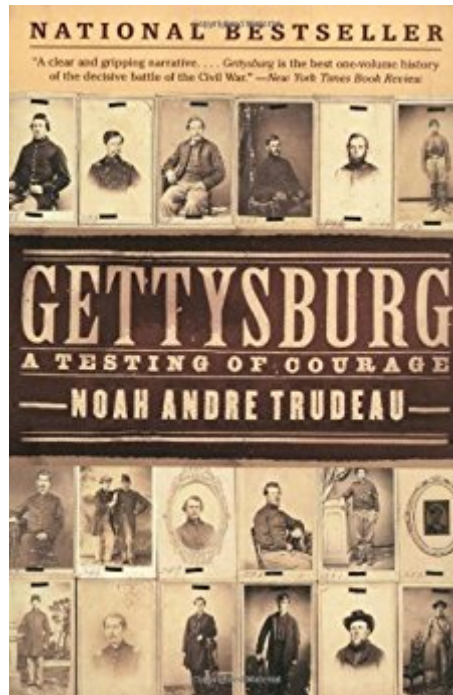


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Gettysburg: A Testing Of Courage



Synopsis

America's Civil War raged for more than four years, but it is the three days of fighting in the Pennsylvania countryside in July 1863 that continues to fascinate, appall, and inspire new generations with its unparalleled saga of sacrifice and courage. From Chancellorsville, where General Robert E. Lee launched his high-risk campaign into the North, to the Confederates' last daring and ultimately-doomed act, forever known as Pickett's Charge, the battle of Gettysburg gave the Union army a victory that turned back the boldest and perhaps greatest chance for a Southern nation. Now acclaimed historian Noah Andre Trudeau brings the most up-to-date research available to a brilliant, sweeping, and comprehensive history of the battle of Gettysburg that sheds fresh light on virtually every aspect of it. Deftly balancing his own narrative style with revealing firsthand accounts, Trudeau brings this engrossing human tale to life as never before.

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Customer Reviews

An excellent book on the battle. Having read a number of other books on the battle I really enjoyed the different way of presenting story. Rather than taking one event and going through it to the end and then jumping back in time to cover another event, Trudeau shows how they were all happening

at the same time. If you are not familiar with the battle it might be easy to lose track. But for me, and possibly even those who are barely familiar with what happened it is an exciting and fast paced way to experience the story. I really appreciated his detailing the story of some of the participants after the battle was over. This is not written by a professional historian nor should it be held to the academic standards of history departments. But there are very few errors and those are not of great consequence. Few readers will consult the extensive notes or bibliography, but they will satisfy most who do.

My most recent read was Noah Andre Trudeau's *Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage*. Many books have been written about the battle at Gettysburg, so you're easily forgiven if you ask - why bother reading another one? The answer is that I previously read Trudeau's book *Southern Storm: Sherman's March to the Sea* and enjoyed it tremendously. *Southern Storm* was compelling and detailed, including the perspectives of not only the northern invaders and southern defenders but the population they were fighting among as well. Trudeau also took the time to explore the generals' decisions and thought processes. If *Gettysburg* was written like *Southern Storm* was, I thought that it too would be a great read. The book is divided into sections. Trudeau begins with a section on the prelude to the battle, examining Lee's reasoning for the invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania as well as the Army of Northern Virginia's move northward and the Army of the Potomac's response to it. As the armies gather around Gettysburg and the battle begins, each day becomes a section of the book. Finally, as the Army of Northern Virginia begins to fall back southward a section covers their retreat and the fallout of the battle. Trudeau's account of Gettysburg is very detailed. He doesn't stop at the Corps or Division level when examining the fighting; instead he gets right down to the regiment and company level. Using individual officers' and soldiers' accounts of the battle, the story is at times told from their perspective. When writing about an entire war or a theater of a war, this much detail is problematic, but when narrowing the focus down to a single battle, it sheds light on not just how things happened, but why things happened the way they did. Furthermore, he doesn't focus on just specific parts of the battle, he focuses on it as a whole. Day by day, hour by hour, his account demonstrates how successes and failures on one part of the field influenced what happened on other parts of the field. He also looks at how Lee and Meade managed their armies, why decisions and orders were made, and how those orders were interpreted. He considers how the personalities of the commanders and their interpersonal relationships effected the battle. Furthermore, he includes not only the accounts of the military participants, but accounts from newspaper reporters and citizens of Gettysburg. The citizen's perspectives are particularly useful;

you not only get an understanding about how they were effected by the battle, you get a non-military look at how the battle unfolded. One of Trudeau's missions in writing Gettysburg was to dispel some myths about the battle. Overall, one of the myths Trudeau examines is the one that lays a great deal of fault for the Confederate loss at Stuart's absence; instead of blaming Stuart, he shows how Stuart was delayed and why he as late as well as showing that Lee did in fact have some cavalry available to him. On the first day, he looks at whether it was Heth's decisions that brought about the battle, coming to the conclusion that it was not Heth's but Ewell's actions that brought about the battle. On the third day after, he holds that Lee had nothing to apologize for; instead that he considered what had happened on the previous days and made a "well-considered plan." You may or may not agree with his conclusions, but Trudeau does make solid arguments for all but the last. He argues that "If all the parts had worked as they were designed to do, the grand attack might very well have succeeded" yet throughout the book there are criticisms of his command style, exposures of fissures in the command structure, and evidence that Lee overestimated the damage done to the Army of the Potomac that weakens his argument that Lee didn't have anything to apologize for. I only have one other complaint about the book, the final section on the Army of Northern Virginia's withdrawal and the battle's fallout. The first four sections of the book are incredibly detailed accounts of movement and fighting but the last section lacks that same detail. It would have made the book longer than its already considerable length but I still felt somewhat shortchanged at the end. Despite that reservation, I thoroughly enjoyed reading Gettysburg, finding that it indeed was written similarly to Southern Storm. It's easily the best book I've read about the battle and one that I'd easily recommend to anyone who wants to learn about the battle. It could be easy to get lost in the details of the command structure, but Trudeau's writing style generally prevents it and there is an order of battle for both armies at the back of the book if you forget which brigade, division, or corps a unit belongs to. He also makes frequent use of maps which allow the reader to visualize the relationships of units on the field and their movements. As usual I read the Kindle version of the book and unusually, these maps were of excellent quality and placed with the relevant text. Rating this book took a lot of consideration; I really wanted to give it 5 stars but the lack of detail in that last section compared to the previous four just nagged on me. The result is a four star rating, but don't let that deter you from reading this book; it truly is a must read on one of our nation's most famous battles.

Having read numerous chronicals of Gettysburg -- from Coddington's and Sear's comprehensive treatise to various brigade histories -- it was with some reservation that I picked up Mr. Trudeau's

effort. Once open, however, it was impossible to put it down. The strength's of this new installment on Gettysburg are numerous. The book's flow is sharp, punctuated by numerous, detailed maps (albeit not for the weak of sight, as text is small). The organization is episodic and chronological. The syntax is crisp and clear. The analysis well documented (the bibliography exhaustive), balanced between contemporary testimony and the author's own summations. The detail of individual units' operations is sufficient without being tediously burdensome. What captured my imagination was Trudeau's interesting spin on a number of common interpretations concerning certain aspects of the battle. Some examples: Trudeau gives careful attention to both army's intelligence gathering, placing the commanders' strategy and actions in the context of what they understood were the dispositions of their adversary. Unlike Sears, who perpetuates a low opinion of Oliver Howard, Trudeau at least credits Howard's early recognition of the strategic importance of Cemetery Hill and being the first to place Federal troops there -- status usually reserved for Generals Buford or Reynolds. Trudeau also gives credit to Ewell for his role in seizing the advantage once Heth's Division was stalled. He takes a somewhat contrarian view recognizing that Ewell did understand (as Lee did) the value of occupying Cemetery and Culp's Hill but was unable to comply given the terrain and inability to quickly reorganize his command after its engagements in and north of the town. Trudeau gives balanced treatment to the second day's fighting on Little Round Top. Debunking the popular interpretation begun in Michael Shaara's "The Killer Angels," (and perpetuated in the "Gettysburg" motion picture, Trudeau acknowledges Oates' long held contention that the 15th Alabama was in the process of breaking off its assault just as Chamberlain's 20th Maine swung down the hill. The author suggests that Major Ellis Spear had a key role in the 20th's success but attributes the now famous "swinging gate" maneuver as inspired more by the Maine Color Guard's act of charity (going out to treat the wounded) than by it's commander's celebrated design. Finally, Trudeau makes it clear that Lee had every reason to believe the assault on the Union center would be successful but failed largely due his command style; e.g., lack of full command and control over the implementing units. For the beginning Civil War reader or casual historian Noah Trudeau's treatment of Gettysburg is eminently readable and informative. I highly recommend it.

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