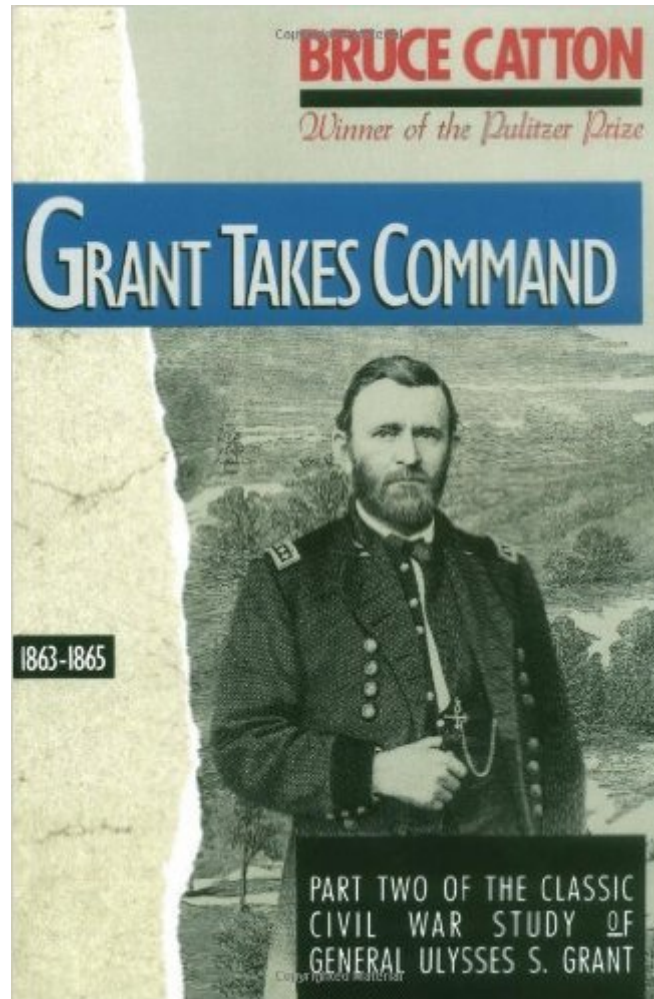


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Grant Takes Command: 1863 - 1865



Synopsis

A classic work of military history, follows the enigmatic commander in chief of the Union forces through the last year and a half of the Civil War. It is both a revelatory portrait of Ulysses S. Grant and the dramatic story of how the war was won.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the weeks before General David Petraeus - widely regarded as the most operationally and strategically brilliant of today's ground generals -- took command of Multi-National Forces - Iraq, a friend told me he was reading Bruce Catton's classic "Grant Takes Command: 1863-1865" about that earlier US general who took charge of a war at its most critical point. I and several others piled on and eagerly devoured this book. Two weeks later, we met to discuss our observations. Mine are below. I would bet you a paycheck that General Petraeus -- himself a formidable scholar as well as distinguished soldier -- has read this book more than once and probably even perused it before assuming his new post. "Grant Takes Command" offers timeless insights into the art of command and remains relevant for several reasons that should resonate today. I found that several myths about General Grant were just that: myths. The first that Catton debunks is that Grant was not a political general. In one of his first chapters titled "Political Innocent", Catton lays out clearly that Grant understood that the Civil War was an extension of politics, and that certain personnel decisions in his Army would inevitably be affected by this. Thus, Grant's handling of Generals McClelland, Sigel, Butler, and Banks - all of them troublesome, of dubious competence, but

politically useful at different times throughout the war -- was at once skillful, politically deft, and necessary. When they had each imploded after their political usefulness had been expended, they were thus easily discarded. To fire them when they were politically useful would have strained civil-military relations. Grant also believed in the mission completely.

"Grant Takes Command" is the second of two volumes by Bruce Catton on Grant's Civil War service and the third volume of a trilogy on Grant's military career (beginning with Lloyd Lewis's "Captain Sam Grant"). However, this volume can easily be read by itself. Catton picks up the story in the fall of 1863 with Grant's successful raising of the siege of Chattanooga, following which President Lincoln picks him for a third star and command of all the Union armies. Grant is the latest in a long series of Union commanders, most of whom have been badly beaten by General Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia, and none of whom have been able to bring superior Northern resources effectively to bear on a slowly weakening Confederacy. In fact, as Grant takes command, the war has not yet been won and could still be lost. Grant will be the commander that Lincoln has long sought. Lincoln's telling exchange with an aide, repeated by Catton, lays out why. Grant is the first general to take the supreme command who will work in harness with Lincoln and in full acceptance of Lincoln's constraints as President of a democracy in the midst of a civil war. Grant is prepared to take full responsibility for the conduct of the missions of the armies, and without setting up an alibi in advance for possible failure. And as it becomes apparent in the course of Catton's absolutely superb narrative, Grant understands the terrible math. Lee and his army are too proficient to be easily beaten; great persistence will be called for. Grant grasps the essential truth that Lee's army is the Confederate center of gravity, and the corollary that Lee's requirement to protect Richmond ultimately limits his ability to maneuver.

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