



This Hallowed Ground: The Story of the Union Side of the Civil War

Bruce Catton, Lewis Gannett (Editor)

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This fascinating book tells the story of the Civil War as seen from the Union side. Through his brilliant and stirring narrative, Bruce Catton conveys the human aspect of history and translates meticulously researched historical fact into an absorbing chronicle of the war. *This Hallowed Ground* deals with the entire scope of the Civil War from the months of unrest and hysteria that led to Fort Sumter to the days of tragedy and hope that followed Appomattox. Along with the author, readers will relive the shock and shell and glory of the war. The true greatness of this book, however, lies in Catton's deeply moving analysis of the issues, and his search for the true meaning of the conflict.

This Hallowed Ground: The Story of the Union Side of the Civil War Details

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From Reader Review This Hallowed Ground: The Story of the Union Side of the Civil War for online ebook

Joe Banks says

Bruce Catton's 1956 work provides everything that a newcomer to the history of the American Civil War could possibly want from a single volume. It covering the major campaigns of the war from a Union perspective, its portraits of the key generals - McClellan, Grant, Jackson and, particularly, Sherman and Lee - are well-drawn and insightful; but it also does an excellent job of showing the lives and hardships of the ordinary soldiers.

At the book's heart is a moving lyricism. The author always finds and describes the scene or detail which captures the spirit and drama of an event. The bird hopping on the cotton hill which sang Lincoln's proclamation to the slaves, the burning pine forest ringing to a chorus of 'John Brown's body' and the tramp of thousands of Union soldiers, the chaotic footrace to the ridge at the climax of the Battle of Chattanooga.

At a human level the personalities of the commanders of the armies are illuminated by the things they did or said, and these small details are probably more telling of character than a full psychological exposition based on guesswork and the author's prejudices would be - Catton appreciates that we can never really know these people except through their actions and that their motives were known only to themselves. This is a sensitive and well executed decision by the the author.

The author makes the point that slavery became untenable, even with a Confederate victory, once the war came to the southern states, because an escape to freedom - guaranteed by Union soldiers, who despite their prejudices, had come to see the evil of slavery - was now possible, and runaway slaves (known as contrabands because of a legal fiction used by the north to prevent them from having to be returned to their owners) poured into Federalist camps in their thousands. This is more or less the broadest piece of analysis in the book, which otherwise invites the reader to draw their own conclusions about the wider historical forces at work, the discussion of the causes and the legacy of the war is as much psychological as it is historical - particularly in the latter case. The focus is rather on providing a poetic and engaging narrative of the war. The personalities of the commanders, the terrain, the battles; all are analysed at length, as well as the lot of the ordinary soldier on both sides - although the focus of the book is always on the Federalist side.

It does have some faults though. Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis - overall supremos of the two sides - get much less attention than might be expected, and little effort is made to explore the impact of political events on the war. McClellan, the peace candidate, was favourite to win the presidential election of 1864 until a month before polling day, making that event very probably the closest the South ever came to achieving their war goals. For a book focused on the Union cause, not to cover the election of 1864 in more detail is quite surprising.

On the whole though this is a really excellent treatment of the war. The research is excellent, although sixty years since its publication the interpretation of events has very likely been revised and re-revised by historians, but in book which focuses on telling the story of the war rather than interpreting it, perhaps this is not so much of a problem as would be in other cases. The excellent prose is a great adjunct to the author's ability to find the drama in every battle, every march, and every blunder, and this allows the book to deal reasonably thoroughly with these events without ever being dry or tedious.

Monte Lamb says

This is a single volume book on the Civil War covered from a Northern perspective. If you are looking for a detailed book on the battles with a heavy emphasis on them, then you will be better served reading Shelby Foote's books or James McPherson's *BATTLE CRY OF FREEDOM*. What this book does better than others is put the Civil War in the perspective of the entire flow of American History and presents how the war affects the future history of the country. The author does this with elegant prose that paints a picture similar to a great novel writer. It reads so beautifully and presents its ideas so clearly that I would suggest this book to anyone who wants to get a general idea of why the war, how the war, and what did the war mean. Bruce Catton is my favorite writer on the Civil War. His book *A STILLNESS AT APPOMATTOX* is the best book I have ever read on the war, but this is a close second.

Andy Todd says

Catton was esteemed by many as the 20th century's expert on the American Civil War. There is an abundance of thousands of books on this topic; if you seek a single volume overview of the conflict, this 1957 account with its broad narrative sweep, almost journalistic in tone, could suit. Bear in mind, though, that it intentionally tells the war from the Union side. For a balanced telling, the McPherson.

Jim Kelsh says

This is a reissue of a tremendous one volume history of the Civil War by the great historian, Bruce Catton. Marvelously written with drama and breadth, Catton begins with Bloody Kansas and ends, of course, with Appomattox and the death of Lincoln. It's filled with backstories of all of the players great and small. He artfully ties all of the disparate battles into a narrative that one can't put down no matter how much or how little the reader knows of these events.

Four jimmys out of five.

Austin says

"There is a rowdy strain in American life, living close to the surface but running very deep. Like an ape behind a mask, it can display itself suddenly with terrifying effect. It is slack-jawed, with leering eyes and loose wet lips, with heavy feet and ponderous cunning hands; now and then, when something tickles it, it guffaws, and when it is made angry it snarls; and it can be aroused much more easily than it can be quieted."

A succinct but dense history of the Union perspective of the Civil War, "This Hallowed Ground" is beautifully written narrative history by Bruce Catton, who won a Pulitzer for his book "A Stillness at Appomattox", which details the final year of the Civil War. This book, however, covers the entirety of the war, beginning with the caning of a Massachusetts senator on the Senate floor after a philippic speech damning a Senator of South Carolina over the issue of slavery, and ending with a candlelight celebration by the Army of the Potomac in Washington after the surrender of Robert E. Lee and Joe Johnston of the

Confederacy, and after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the imprisonment of Jefferson Davis.

All of the well-known battles are represented (both Bull Runs, Antietam, Shiloh, Hampton Roads, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, The Wilderness, Chickamauga, Petersburg, and countless other battles and skirmishes), and not a single word is wasted; Gettysburg, famous for being the major turning point of the war, is only given about 5 pages. The main focus is not on the what and the when, but the why - why were these armies here, and what were they fighting for? The brevity of the book, however, is not due to a lack of detail. A lot of detail is focused on the politics of the armies, the successes and follies, and the lives of the soldiers themselves. Primary sources are used frequently, breathing a life into the narrative.

One of my favorite anecdotes is about the Army of the Cumberland at Missionary Ridge, who are ordered to attack the center of the Confederate line but not to ascend the ridge where the opposing army is encamped. After braving artillery and musket fire, the army reaches their destination, only to be openly mocked by the Confederates, who instruct their men to take potshots at the Union general on his horse. They miss, but the offended general tells his men that although they were given orders to stay put, he would not discipline any soldier who decided to climb up the ridge and attack the enemy. The whole army cheers and marches up the ridge while a confused and angry Ulysses S. Grant observes from afar and wonders why the hell they are disobeying his orders and marching towards oblivion. However, the Confederates are so surprised by this attack that they fall back in confusion and retreat! Then there is a soldier from Indiana who, after the Union army is finished storming up Missionary Ridge against great odds, sees a Confederate general waving his saber at him and calling for his men to attack. Seeing this, the Union soldier throws down his bayonet and charges the general with his bare hands, causing the Confederate to blink, then quickly run away. A Union general sees this, and asks the soldier why he attacked with bare hands. The Union soldier confesses he saw the man was a general, and was trying to take him alive as a prisoner.

There are many other colorful characters in the story of the Civil War, such as the Naval officer David Farragut ("Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!") who does handstands every birthday to prove he isn't old. He was in his sixties.

In relation to current times, the book is most relevant regarding the attitudes of both sides towards slavery. Running low on soldiers, the Union army forms "colored regiments" made of freed men and led by white men and sends them into battle, and while originally paying them less than white soldiers, eventually concede to equal pay (!). One general in the Confederacy makes the same suggestion, offering that any slave who chooses to fight should be granted freedom and his master compensated for the loss, but this is immediately shot down. No one on either side was thinking of equality of the races when considering the abolition of slavery; in fact, one popular idea at the time was to ship all freed slaves back to Africa or to other colonies after the war, and one less popular idea was to exterminate all of them so there wouldn't even need to be a discussion. Lincoln knew this, and it was agreed by his staff that equality would be the problem of future generations. Indeed.

All in all, an extremely enlightening book on the Union perspective of the Civil War. Highly recommended.

E Sano says

The perfect introductory volume for learning about the causes of the civil war, the political and military mayhem endured throughout the war, and the major battles. Highly recommended.

Steven Peterson says

An excellent introduction to the Civil War. Bruce Catton's book focuses on the Union side, but he presents the War in even-handed terms. Exquisitely written. His character sketches are terrific, allowing the reader to get a sense of players in the war with a few paragraphs. This holds up pretty well, even though written over five decades ago.

Duncan says

Vivid account of the entire Civil War, with particular attention paid to the western portion, and writing that's both dryly sardonic in places and appropriately outraged by the general waste of life. Could have dwelled more on the the role of black soldiers--it's discussed, but not in great depth--but maintains an appropriate focus on the role of slavery in bringing about and extending the conflict.

Bob MacNeal says

This Hallowed Ground is a remarkable book. Bruce Catton's poetic account of the trials and tribulations of the United States' single most compelling historic event, The Civil War, is captivating.

If one limits oneself to reading one book about the Civil War, this is the one to read. This Hallowed Ground was first published in 1956, yet it reads like it was written in 2017 to remind us of the sociopathic and economic encumbrances limiting our progress, and to provide a foundation for the resurgence of ignorance and racism which has reared up in the ominous outcome of the 2016 US Presidential election.

Catton doesn't sugar coat, nor does he attempt to revise history. The States' Rights bullshit pedaled by historic charlatans and Antebellum South sympathizers as the primary cause of the Civil War is never considered by Catton, and rightfully so. This is an unvarnished, factually accurate, account. Catton brings to life prominent figures and common foot soldiers.

The book's subtitle, *The Story of the Union Side of the Civil War*, implies there's an alternative viewpoint or alternative lens from which we might view the Civil War. Indeed, many books of fiction and non-fiction present a soft-pedaled, romantic account of the Antebellum South, but I've no appetite for romanticizing this appalling period in our history. The Antebellum south was propped up by—and existed only because of—chattel slavery. The South's concentrated wealth and aristocratic class could not have existed without African slaves picking cotton.

Catton's analysis is deeply moving. He wastes no ink feeling his way toward the true meaning of the conflict.

Progress is the sum of small victories won by individual human beings.
? Bruce Catton

Steve says

Bruce Catton never disappoints. This book tells the entire story of the civil war from the North's perspective with just enough detail on the major battles to cover the basics and still be under 400 pages. It's the additional details he provides on the people and their circumstances that add to the story. For example from the last chapter of the book, just after Lee's surrender at the Appomattox Court House.

"Grant stayed in character. He heard a banging of guns; Union artillerists were firing salutes to celebrate the victory, and Grant sent word to have all that racket stopped - those men in gray were enemies no longer but simply fellow countrymen (which, as Grant saw it, was what the war had been all about), and nothing would be done to humiliate them."

Lee and Grant were men of character. Today's leaders do not come close to their standard.

Ebookwormy1 says

This book is a historical account of the Civil War. With pages of notes, a bibliography and an index, it is a good read with lots more to explore. Written by Bruce Catton, who has published many books on the topic, it has the feeling of a substantial work. The account is heavy on battle strategy and documentation, with some insight into politics and even less into the societal impact of the War. Historical account being the privilege of the victors, it is told from a Union perspective, but includes glimpses of the South.

Overall, i liked the book. True, it dragged in the middle. I'm sure those who lived through it also thought it dragged in the middle, so the author was successful in giving the reader a feel of the times.

I would recommend this book for those interested in non-fiction accounts of war, particularly battle details. Those interested in politics or societal impacts of the war may find other books more helpful.

Denis Mann says

Brilliantly descriptive writing and a thorough one volume history of a fascinating period. Really paints the picture and also remains entirely relevant although written 60 years ago. More reading would possibly be needed for broader context for non-US readers. Catton just may have had a time machine.

Diana says

I never been so moved by a history book. Beautiful and powerful.

David says

A great single volume book on the Civil War. It obviously can't get too bogged down in detail given the restriction on size. Bruce Catton is able to describe the major battles without delving into the minutiae of military movements but still describe the general plan. My knowledge of the geography of the area was weak so having a good atlas helped understand the different movements of the armies. I loved the author's prose style. Very readable and elegant.

Kendrick Hughes says

I love Catton but this one was a little bogged down by flowery prose. A great synopsis of the civil war from the Union side. Battles are covered briefly, the focus of this book is more towards why and how events happened.
