



Stars in Their Courses: The Gettysburg Campaign, June-July 1863

Shelby Foote

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Historian/novelist Foote's masterly work has been culled from his critically acclaimed three-volume narrative of the Civil War.

Stars in Their Courses: The Gettysburg Campaign, June-July 1863 Details

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Author : Shelby Foote

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Vince says

Taken at face value, this would be a fine (perhaps even a great) book. However, this book is merely a chapter out of The Civil War Vol. II. Perhaps it says that somewhere on the title discription, but I didn't see it when I bought it, and felt a little gipped.

Sarah says

Watching Ken Burns' Civil War documentary left me with some curiosity about Shelby Foote's writing, so I decided on a quick into with this one.

I have to admit to some disappointment. I didn't find his writing style as engaging as his oratory and I found the occasional casual racism fairly off putting.

Pattie says

I re-read this book every year on the July 4 holiday, to remember what happened in Gettysburg during the first three days of July not that long ago.

I don't like war and get bored with scholarly histories, and yet Foote lays it all out with such beauty and economy of language that you can't help but be swept along.

Paul says

By total chance, I happened to finish this the morning of the 4th of July. I very much enjoy Shelby Foote's prose; which is why, despite my amateur historian's disdain for a lack of citations, I decided to give this account of Gettysburg a whirl. It certainly lived up to my expectations, although I found myself going back over some passages because of his use of metaphors and other Southern story-telling ways. I anticipated the need after a long break from "literature" while reading works of social science by economists and the like.

Foote gives life to the personalities of the Civil War. In this case, almost exclusively to the major players in Gray: Lee, Longstreet and Pickett. Foote estimates the emotions of these three characters, more than any others, throughout the book. This makes a lot of sense given the controversy that has surrounded Longstreet's performance at G-burg since the 19th century and the fame of Pickett's Charge. However, Joshua Chamberlain only garners a single mention and almost no vivid descriptions of his heroic leadership at Little Round Top. Such an absence is, in my mind, glaring and speaks to Foote's potential biases. I have to say, I was pretty floored that Chamberlain got passed over for greater detail, but this might be because of the esteem in which I hold "The Killer Angels."

All in all, this is a fine book and a joy to read. As serious history, I think it wise to keep a professional historian's work nearby. (I recommend James M. McPherson). Another volume on G-burg is especially useful to account for the difficult and unfortunately messy maps in this slim volume.

Paul says

While this book is a single chapter from the 3 volume Civil War narrative, it reads as a complete story of the great battle. Next year is the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the War. I read the book on the days (July 1-3) of the conflict. Foote tells the story from the South's perspective but does not hold back in judging Lee's tactics as imperfect. This was Meade's first battle as General of the Army of the Potomac and most of his defensive tactics went right. His major failure was to not follow Lee's retreating forces as Lincoln had ordered. This may have ended the war 2 years before the surrender.

Mmars says

Shelby's focus is on the Confederates in this well-written account of the battle of Gettysburg, and Lee comes off as the root of many of their failures in the battle. Until the end, when the surviving grays cross the Potomac in the middle of the night, thereby embarrassing the Feds in what should have become a decisive victory, the Federals are given less attention. Meade's actions are portrayed, but Buford's defensive actions on the first day of battle are given inproportionate print.

There are lots of tactics and many, many numbers in this book. Stupyfying numbers. Numbers of casualties, comparison of participating units and ammunition, numbers of miles marched, and on and on. I personally found these very helpful in putting Gettysburg into perspective. It is widely known how deadly this battle was, but this book brings it home.

Foote does an excellent job of describing the human physicalities of the war. Enough detail is given to portray its gruesomeness and the psychological toll it takes upon the participants without weighing the reader down. He is a very distinct and precise writer.

Though picturing battle maneuvers in my head is not my forte, Foote provided excellent logistical information. I needed to reread sections from time to time and the beginning of the book which summarized the lead-up to Gettysburg was a bit mind-boggling for one not that well briefed on the Civil War, but all in all the book held my interest and presented the war in a factual, but not dry, manner.

This is the first I have read by Foote and it will undoubtedly not be the last. His knowledge seems impeccable and anyone interested in nonfiction American History would do well to check him out.

Deducting a star for lack of documentation/footnotes.

Jessika says

I have been going to Gettysburg with my family since I was a very little girl. In fact, I was just there on Labor Day a couple days ago. I have always loved it there. The history of the place, the battlefield and even

just the town itself make it my favorite place to visit. I've always known tidbits about the battle here and there from the countless tours my dad has given us throughout the years, but I decided that since I suppose I AM old enough to really understand what happened and since I'm out of college now and can study what I want, I wanted to study the battle in earnest. So, I went over to the library and picked a few books from the shelf, but this one in particular caught my eye. Shelby Foote is a huge name in Civil War literature, so when I saw that this was a segment from his ginormous Civil War trilogy only touching on Gettysburg, I thought I would try out Foote while learning about the battle that has always held my interest.

Needless to say, I really enjoyed this. This wasn't as detailed as some other books that are out there, but at the same time, this is not for the leisurely history student. I took notes while I was reading and having familiarity with the area, I was able to envision everything that was taking place. (Seriously, if you enjoy history at all, you NEED to make it to Gettysburg). That all being said, I was definitely surprised by how readable this book was. Even though it was a short book, I thought it would take me forever to get through it. It did take me a while, but only because I was taking intense notes. The pages flew by for me, which was unexpected but always nice.

I was a little worried going into it, knowing that Foote himself hails from Mississippi and having heard from someone that he was a Southern enthusiast, that this would be a one-sided book. After having read it, I'm not really sure what that person was talking about. Foote bounces back and forth, telling the story of the battle from both sides and painting sympathetic pictures for both the Union and the Confederates. In this day and age of left versus right and liberal versus conservative, it was refreshing to read something that flips the table for readers while presenting each side evenly.

As I alluded to earlier, this is not the most detail-oriented account of the battle, but it gives a nice overview for someone such as myself who is trying to get a basic handle on the battle before jumping into all of the details. This little segment of a book is by no means dry--he provides interesting insight into the generals and the soldiers who were the players on this battlefield. Foote spends time not only describing battlefield maneuvers, but also delves into the feelings, hopes and ambitions of the men during these three days.

My biggest complaint, honestly, is the lack of maps. I admit, I am quite familiar with the layout of Gettysburg and its battlefield, but even I had a little bit of a rough time figuring out the positions of the lines of soldiers, so for someone who has never been there or who might not be that familiar with the layout, this could be a bit of difficult reading. I used one of my dad's book of Gettysburg battle maps while I was reading it, which definitely helped. I also recommend the Civil War Trust's website for Gettysburg maps--they are excellent maps.

Overall, I thought this was a great way to introduce myself to an overview of the battle. To those well-versed in the battle, this even provides interesting insight into the players on the field. I don't know that I'm quite up to reading Foote's massive trilogy just yet, but this gave me a good taste for his style, and I highly enjoyed it.

Ms. Widule says

SPOILER ALERT! The Yanks won at Gettysburg . . .

But this book kept me on the edge of my seat anyway. This is my first selection from Shelby Foote. His prose is beautiful. I want to read his whole three volumes this summer. The only reason I did not give this nice little book 5 stars is because it does suffer from being an excerpt from a larger work.

John says

I picked this up at Goodwill even though I am currently reading Foote's trilogy. This is beautifully written. Despite the massive amount of detail presented, it is a joy to read. I want to go to the battlefield and take this with me as a guide.

Bruce Thomas says

Very good & readable; should read before visiting Gettysburg. Audio is narrated in awesome deep southern accent by the author.

Frank Priest says

Better than Faulkner

Brian says

Every bit as fantastic as the first time I read it when working my way through the full three volumes of Foote's masterpiece. More thoughts when I can do more than type on my phone.

Garry says

8/8/2018

Steven Peterson says

First, this is not the best rendering of the battle at Gettysburg. For that, see Coddington or Trudeau or Sears or. . . . On the other hand, for those who want a literate, relatively brief introduction with the ability to understand something of the leading players at the battle, this is a good work.

Foote was a novelist, and his sensibility from that experience comes through. The way he turns phrases is exquisite. For instance, read the pages featuring Heth's advance toward Gettysburg and Buford's determination to hold the Confederate troops in check until Union forces began to arrive. The way Foote writes this episode typifies the elegant prose of this work. On the other hand, there are also some errors (e.g., the weaponry of Buford's cavalry).

Characters come alive--the burly James Longstreet comes to mind as an example. Just so, John Buford. And others as well.

Shelby covers the campaign leading to Gettysburg, the three days of the battle itself, and Lee's retreat. The action at Gettysburg is described in enough detail to give a sense of the fierce combat; however, it is not encyclopedic in its coverage (as works like Coddington). In a sense, it is a compromise between an extensive history of the battle and a quick and readable version for the reader who does not want to get overwhelmed by detail. And, of course, we need to remember that this is, in essence, excerpted from his three volume history of the Civil War.

All in all, a finely written depiction of the critical battle at Gettysburg.

Mike says

Reading Stars in Their Courses: The Gettysburg Campaign, June-July 1963, I could almost hear him speaking the words on the always mesmerizing PBS series "*The Civil War*" by Ken Burns. The language is so beautiful and evocative, bringing you almost into the hot, humid summer afternoon, listening to the cannonade as Pickett's charge is about to form up and march to destruction and into history. I have put off reading his massive 3 part history of the Civil War, so daunting in size. After this little extract from the series on the most important battle of the war, I will wait no longer. Time to dive into the entire history from start to finish. 5 Battle Stars for this book.

Mark Vinet says

Narrative perfection!

Jan-Maat says

This is an excerpt from Foote's three-volume history of the American Civil War. Since the complete three volume book is one which I haven't read I can attest that this little volume that just deals with the battle of Gettysburg is free standing.

It is a good modern example of history as drama. The leading figures (naturally tending to be the officers) come across as heroes with moral virtues clearly on display. Livy would have approved. It's just the kind of thing to give to a child who is interested in history and enjoys stories or perhaps to an adult who isn't a confident reader. It is easy reading, the narrative and characterisation will lead them on.

As a history of the American Civil War what strikes me from this excerpt is that there is no sense of their being any villains, the emphasis is rather on noble and heroic struggle. Everybody in this account who fights nobly and doggedly is virtuous and heroic. It is civil war as a national celebration of heroism and reconciliation.

Still I was amusing reading that some of the soldiers returning from Pickett's charge took off their hats and cheered General Lee. Personally if I had advanced across a cornfield, been repulsed by the enemy and then had to march back while being shot at I wouldn't have been cheering anybody. Again I am reminded that I am obviously not cut out to be a soldier, so it's lucky for all involved that I've remained a civilian.

Duane says

If any of you have watched Ken Burns mini-series "The Civil War", then you will be familiar with Shelby Foote as one of the contributors. He is remembered for his slow southern accent and his depth of knowledge of the Civil War. This book focuses on The Battle of Gettysburg, probably the best known and most studied of all Civil War battles. I, along with my two younger brothers, had the honor of spending three days touring the Gettysburg Battlefield site a few years back. We walked on Little Round Top, stood next to the stone wall, visited the cemetery, and much more. It was very humbling, and I recommend it to anyone who has a chance to go. Shelby Foote was a wonderful writer and this book is a must read for anyone interested in what happened in this small Pennsylvania town in July 1863.

Ben says

Foote is the Godfather when it comes to Civil War History. His narrative style puts you in the midst of the conflict and really helps bring the personalities that have become legends and heroes of American History back to life. From lovers of hardcore military history to those with just a passing interest, this is the definitive volume covering the "High-Water Mark."

Mitchell says

This is a great account of the Battle of Gettysburg. It is written in a narrative style, that is at once educational and moving. I also found it easy to follow the 3 day battle, and while it is written in a narrative style, it was filled with rich detail and quotes that really bring the period to life. One really cannot go wrong with anything Shelby Foote has written. Highly recommended.
