



## This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga

*Peter Cozzens*

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When North and South met among the desolate mountains of northwestern Georgia in 1863, they began one of the bloodiest and most decisive campaigns of the Civil War. The climactic Battle of Chickamauga lasted just two days, yet it was nearly as costly as Gettysburg, with casualties among the highest in the war. In this study of the campaign, the first to appear in over thirty years and the most comprehensive account ever written on Chickamauga, Peter Cozzens presents a vivid narrative about an engagement that was crucial to the outcome of the war in the West. Drawing upon a wealth of previously untapped sources, Cozzens offers startling new interpretations that challenge the conventional wisdom on key moments of the battle, such as Rosecrans's fateful order to General Wood and Thomas's historic defense of Horseshoe Ridge. Chickamauga was a battle of missed opportunities, stupendous tactical blunders, and savage fighting by the men in ranks. Cozzens writes movingly of both the heroism and suffering of the common soldiers and of the strengths and tragic flaws of their commanders. Enhanced by detailed battle maps and original sketches by the noted artist Keith Rocco, this book will appeal to all Civil War enthusiasts and students of military history.

## This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga Details

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### **Gavin says**

Good book that I read first in the '90's. I, like others, was disappointed by the maps, but I enjoyed Cozzen's writing and narrative of the battle. I have lived most of my life in this area and am always deeply impressed by the fighting at Chickamauga. The cycle of high points and low points as the tide of battle flows. The actions of Generals Bragg and Rosecrans also amaze me. Rosecrans lost his command after this fight. Bragg should have not even have still been in command, but he even hangs on after letting the Army of the Cumberland escape back into Chattanooga and then does not follow up his advantage.

The Army of the Tennessee proves itself to be full of intrigue and infighting. General D. H. Hill would lose his command because of the intrigue in trying to remove Bragg as commander had this to say, which Cozzens closes his book:

"There was no more splendid fighting in '61, when the flower of the Southern youth was in the field, than was displayed in those bloody days of September '63. But it seems to me that the elan of the Southern soldier was never seen after Chickamauga- that brilliant dash which had distinguished him was gone forever....He fought stoutly to the last, but, after Chickamauga, with the sullenness of despair and without the enthusiasm of hope. That 'barren victory; sealed the fate of the Southern Confederacy."

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### **Hud (Bob) Huddleston says**

So tired of battle books with poor maps. There has to be a better way. But a solid tale of idiosyncrasies and egos which lead to the death of many men.

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### **Tim says**

One of the more interesting Civil War battles and one of the genre's better writers? It seems as if you couldn't go wrong, and Cozzens doesn't. This is one of the best campaign/battle studies available.

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### **Derrick says**

A very good book, about my favorite battle of the Civil War.

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### **Joyce Lagow says**

The thunder of battle has ceased...but oh, a worse, more heartrending sound breaks the night air. The groans from thousands of wounded in our front crying in anguish and pain, some for death to relieve them, others

for water. Oh, if only I could drown this terrible sound, and yet I may also lie thus ere tomorrow s sun crosses the heavens. Who can tell? I must sleep in spite of it all. Journal of Alva Griest, Company B, 72nd Indiana.[return][return]The titles of the books in Cozzens trilogy on the battles in Tennessee are all taken from contemporary writings--journals, letters, memoirs--of soldiers from both armies. It s instructive that while *No Better Place to Die* was supposedly uttered by Union Major General George Thomas before the battle of Stone s River, and *The Shipwreck of Their Hopes* from a Confederate letter during the retreat from Lookout Mountain, the title of this book, which covers the September 19-20, 1863 battle at Chickamauga Creek, refers to what never crosses anyone s mind when the bands are playing and the flags are flying and the home folks are cheering and the soldiers themselves are whooping it up--the terrible cost. Antietam was far worse, as was Gettysburg and the Wilderness, but Chickamauga was bloody enough.[return][return]Griest was reacting to the night before the second--and worse--day s battle.

Conditions were frightful--almost as bad as would occur in the Wilderness, since much of the fighting was done in forest and underbrush, with a few cleared areas around farms. Although nowhere near so bad as in the Wilderness, brush fires started by sparks from cannon wadding and cartridge papers burned wounded men alive.[return][return]Cozzens does an outstanding job of describing the fighting, which was ferocious. He is also quite unbiased in his description of the incompetence on both sides that cost so many lives. When reading Chapter 20, Gentlemen, I Hold The Fatal Order Of The Day, Woods words when he received Rosecrans order to pull out of line and thus create a lethal gap--*which Woods knew would happen*--in the Union line as the Confederates, who were about to deliver a massive blow by Longstreet s corps, were approaching, is enough to make you want to abolish the military by law. Woods was piqued--Rosecrans hurt his feelings, poor boy--and so out of this pique, to get back at Rosecrans, Woods lost the battle of Chickamauga for the Union, causing countless casualties. But he followed orders, despite the pleas of the staff officers around him, he did do that. Male wounded ego at its finest.[return][return]I was also quite pleased to read the description of Sheridan s poor showing and retreat on the second day, instead of coming to Thomas aid as he should have. I ve always believed Sheridan was overrated and it s always nice to have one s prejudices confirmed.[return][return]Cozzens pays a good deal of attention to Thomas famous stand at Horseshoe Ridge, which justifiably earned him the nickname, The Rock of Chickamauga. The description of the fighting and the role played by the rather weird revolving carbines used by the 21st Ohio is fascinating. Only in this book have I read of what was common during the Napolionic Wars; muskets would get fouled by powder residue, and English troops used to urinate into the barrels during the fighting to clear them out. Cozzens claims that the soldiers of the 21st Ohio, given the faster rate at which they fired their carbines, suffered the same problem--and solved it the same way. Male anatomy is peculiarly well suited for this task.[return][return]Perhaps having learned from his first book, the maps for *This Terrible Sound* are excellent--up until Chapter 19, which is the afternoon of the first day s fighting and are utterly inadequate until Thomas heroic afternoon stand on September 20. Same cartographer, but much better maps when they occur! Also, Cozzens description of troop movements has improved to the point where it s really not necessary to refer to the Order of Battle (OOB) to figure out which brigade belonged to what division.[return][return]Overall, a much better book than the first in the trilogy, and well worth reading even if you do have to use the maps in the early chapters to try to figure out where the fighting on the afternoon of the 19th took place.

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## Greg says

More than I was expecting from the cover and first scan. Quite a detailed runthrough of the battle, and Rosecrans manuevers to reach the Chickamauga and Missionary Ridge valleys. Only real flaw was an obvious prejudice towards Longstreet, and Cozzens could have spent more time assessing the collapse of Rosecrans. Learned of Thomas' stand on Horseshoe Ridge, which I had not heard of before, that basically

covered the entire army's withdraw. This book would be a valued field guide when walking the battlefields, and I feel no need to find a more modern updated account of the battle.

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### **Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says**

One of the largest land battles fought on the North American continent, and second only to Gettysburg in the total number of casualties (a total of about 36,000 killed or wounded), the Battle of Chickamauga was a horrific brawl fought in the dense woods in extreme northwestern Georgia over a two-day period in mid-September 1863. I guess I can't really quite put my finger on exactly why the Battle of Chickamauga has fascinated me most of my adult life, but it sure has. I had a direct ancestor who fought on the Union side (21st Massachusetts) with the Army of the Potomac in the Virginia theater, but no one in the western theater. I guess it comes down to my assessment that a final and total victory in the Civil War ultimately favored the Union based upon the strategic and tactical results of the performances of Federal armies in the western theater. The Battle of Chickamauga is sort of anomalous as it was a resounding victory for the Confederate Army of Tennessee that had, throughout most of the Civil War, been beaten by various Federal armies, but had also been pretty badly used by its own high command.

While most battles fought during the American Civil War were generally won or lost based upon the decisions of the army and field commanders, Chickamauga was really one of the very few battles with an outcome that was largely determined by the soldiers on the ground. In spite of the leadership (or, lack thereof), this battle was a bloody testament to the tenacity of the fighting men in blue and grey as they engaged in this titanic two-day struggle.

In *This Terrible Sound*, Peter Cozzens has taken on the near-impossible task of trying to describe the completely confusing and chaotic fighting that occurred between the Union Army of the Cumberland, led by Major General William C. Rosecrans, and the Confederate Army of Tennessee, commanded by General Braxton Bragg. This two-day bloody affair was fought in a long narrow valley that was heavily vegetated with pine and oak woods, limiting visibility between the combatants, in most places, to just a few tens of yards at best. Most of the time intense combat flared up between the two armies as they blundered into each other in the dense woods up and down the valley. Brigade and Division commanders tried to respond to threats by feel and sound, and in many instances guessed wrong.

Cozzens goes into great detail describing the command structure and personalities of the leaders in the Confederate and Union armies, and while the Confederate Army eventually prevailed at the end of the day, it was not due to leadership qualities among the Confederate command structure. It was really much more the result of absolutely disastrous tactical decisions by Rosecrans and a few of his subordinates, and a hefty dose of just plain bad luck. Had it not been for the steadiness and dogged defense exhibited by Union Major General George H. Thomas at Snodgrass Hill, the entire Union army may very well have been decisively routed from the field of battle, or even completely destroyed in place. I was completely enthralled reading Cozzens' superb and detailed description about Thomas's day-long stand on the second day as he essentially bought time for the rest of the Union army to safely retreat from the Chickamauga battlefield and into defensive works in Chattanooga, Tennessee. It really was very nearly an utter and complete disaster for the Union Army of the Cumberland, and with his tenacious defense Thomas earned himself the sobriquet "The Rock of Chickamauga".

While the Battle of Chickamauga was clearly a tactical victory for Bragg and his Confederate Army of Tennessee, it ultimately turned out to be a strategic defeat for the Confederacy, as Bragg let the Union Army

safely get away and regroup in Chattanooga. Eventually, Union General U.S. Grant came to Chattanooga and, replacing Rosecrans, he and Major General Thomas attacked and routed Bragg's army. This opened up the way for Sherman's campaign on Atlanta and his later "March to the Sea".

Cozzens' writing style is personal and descriptive. He gives you a very good feeling for the conditions on the battlefield, and for the experiences of the common soldiers in both armies as the battle raged back and forth. He has drawn liberally, not only from official Confederate and Union records and reports, but also from letters and diaries and first-person accounts related by the veterans themselves. This is a very compelling story about a battle that really receives little attention when it comes to discussions about the American Civil War, as most tend to focus on the campaigns and great battles that occurred in the eastern theater of the war.

While Cozzens has included twenty-five very detailed maps, it was still difficult to fully comprehend the complicated and chaotic movements and counter-movements of the brigades and regiments as the fighting surged up and down and back and forth across the valley over the entire two days of the battle. I was so glad to have, readily available, David A. Powell's *The Maps of Chickamauga: An Atlas of the Chickamauga Campaign, Including the Tullahoma Operations, June 22 - September 23, 1863*. This is a "must-have" if you truly want to maximize your experience reading Cozzens' brilliant book. I really enjoyed them both, and if you're a Civil War or military history buff I think you will as well.

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### **Avis Black says**

Cozzens is for readers who like their battles hard-core. He wants to know what every single regiment was doing during the engagement, and he's going to make sure you learn, too. He's a difficult read for the novice, but the trek is unusually rewarding. Cozzens has a good eye for anecdotes and he likes to make clear the gory cost of battle. He's also an excellent exploder of myths--and does a reassessment of those soldiers whose efforts have been either overlooked by history, or overpraised.

By the time you're done with one of his books you will have learned the fight about as thoroughly as anyone can from a single volume. You really don't understand Civil War battle history until you are willing to delve into one of these conflicts on the level Cozzens is trying to take you, and it's well worth going on the journey with him.

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### **Josh Liller says**

Decent book. Cozzens isn't as good a writer as Stephen Sears, though he aims for the same level of detail. Some of the book gets a little dull and parts of the battle on the first day are a bit confusing in the writing; I think this is in part because the battle itself was simply a confusing fight in the woods. The battle wasn't as neat and orderly as say Antietam or Gettysburg and this impacts writing about it.

The book has quite a few maps, but many of these fall short especially for the first day of the battle: they are too focused on a small area at a particular time. The book really could have used more maps covering a larger area and with more use of arrows to indicate the movement of units rather than just their static position at a point in time; again this is predominately in regards to the coverage of the first day of the battle and isn't

much of an issue on the second day of the battle.

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### **David Howell says**

One of the best accounts of the Battle of Chickamauga. Well written and authoritative. Takes the reader into the heat, dust and deep forests of north Georgia in the early fall of 1863, as two great armies and portions of another struggle for control of the gateway to the deep south

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### **Kingpin543 says**

Full of detailed information -- too detailed, too full, to make fun reading. But it's a very complex battle. I disagree with some of his conclusions, such as who was to blame for making a hole in the Union line right where a huge Confederate attack was to strike, but it's still a good one-volume account of a much-neglected Civil War battle.

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### **Staten Rall says**

Great book for CW buffs and those who love to dig into why events happened as they did. Cozzens glues together some amazing and obscure details throughout the book to paint an active, vibrant picture of the fighting. He weaves together harrowing eye-witness accounts and battle reports to show how the landscape played a major part in the outcome, and how commanders on both sides were on their own, cut off and blinded in the thick forest, smoke and darkness.

I continually fall back on this book for research.

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### **Bap says**

Other than a die hard civil war afficiendo, I can't recommend this book which has so much details of what particular brigades are doing, that the forest is lost by the trees. Shelby Foote writing on the civil war is poetry whereas this book is a hard slog.

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### **Randy Fonner says**

Excellent book. Lots of detail.

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### **Dave says**

Excellent narrative history of the battle. So many rich details; you feel like you're there. A bit hard to keep all the actors and actions straight, but overall a very good read.

