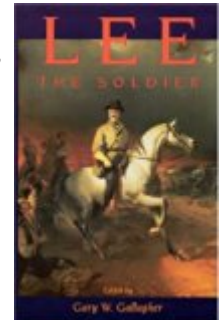


Gary Gallagher, ed.. *Lee the Soldier*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. xxxv + 620 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8032-2153-6.



Reviewed by Craig L. Symonds

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Gary W. Gallagher assembled this collection of essays--some reprinted from previously published sources, some newly written for this volume--in order to provide professional historians and general readers with a single-source introduction to the breadth and variety of historical argument over the generalship of Robert E. Lee. Gallagher's own introduction sets the parameters of the argument: he explains its roots in the years immediately following the war, its role in the Lost Cause mentality of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and its present manifestation in the pages of current historians. The obvious players are represented here--Jubal Early vs. James Longstreet; Douglas Southall Freeman vs. Thomas Connelly; Albert Castel and Alan Nolan--and they are supplemented by a variety of others. Though some will object to the omission of a particular commentator (I miss the views of Emory Thomas and Steven Woodworth, for example), on the whole, the choices are excellent, and this volume provides a fair introduction to the historiography of the generalship of Robert E. Lee.

Gallagher leads off the collection with a section entitled "Testimony of R. E. Lee" that offers three short articles (only 17 pages altogether) by individuals who interviewed Lee in 1868. Although these three pieces are summaries of what interviewers remember rather than Lee's direct "testimony," they are as close to the horse's mouth (so to speak) as we are likely to get.

The next section contains eleven overall assessments of Lee's generalship. After four articles by 19th-century commentators (including Jubal Early and the British Field Marshall, Viscount Wolseley), the reader is introduced to the 20th-century argument between Freeman's view of Lee-as-saint and Tom Connelly's far more critical assessment of the "marble man." Charles Roland, Albert Castel, Alan Nolan, and Gary Gallagher each offers insights concerning this issue, with all save Nolan landing fairly firmly on the pro-Lee side of the dispute. The only new piece in this section is by William C. Davis who also praises Lee as an army commander, but does so in part by contrasting Lee's record with what he calls "the sad cast of characters" (p. 292) who made up the rest

of the Confederacy's high command. Davis argues that Lee's success in the field was due in large part to his ability and willingness to pander to the president's almost-obsessive need to be made a full partner in the development of campaign strategy. The essay concludes that "Lee was better equipped than any other man in the Confederacy to manage both the army and the president" (p. 296).

In a third section, entitled "The Great Campaigns," the book offers case studies of Lee's generalship. Here Gallagher reprises the controversy about Lee's management of the battle of Gettysburg by offering three contemporary accounts (James Longstreet, Early, E. Porter Alexander), and three essays by historians (Freeman, Nolan, and Gallagher himself). Read collectively, these six essays constitute a fine case study in Civil War historiography. In addition, this section contains new essays on the Seven Days (by Carol Reardon), the Maryland campaign (by D. Scott Hartwig), Chancellorsville (by Robert K. Krick), and the 1864 Virginia campaign (by Noah Andre Trudeau).

Reardon's essay is largely historiographical. She summarizes and comments upon contemporary and historical evaluations of Lee's conduct of the Seven Days' battles and notes that even those contemporaries who were inclined to criticize Lee's management of these--the first battles he ever directed as army commander--later changed their minds as the Lee myth grew in the years after his death. By 1870 the dominant view was that any southern disappointments in this campaign were due to factors beyond Lee's control, particularly errors by his untested subordinates. Freeman codified these conclusions in his biography in the 1930s, and since then, Reardon writes, "little has changed on the historiographical front" (p. 325). This includes, Reardon says, Stephen W. Sears who "offers little new about Lee's first campaign" (p. 326).

Scott Hartwig's essay is more a history of the Maryland campaign than an historiographical

survey. He asks and answers three key questions: Why did Lee invade the north? Why did he accept battle at Sharpsburg? And why did he delay his retreat beyond the night of September 17th? Hartwig contradicts those biographers who claim that Lee decided to turn and face George B. McClellan because Thomas J. Jackson sent him news that Harpers Ferry was about to fall. Instead, he says that Lee was merely trying to give Lafayette McLaws a chance to extricate himself, that he still planned to fall back south of the Potomac. Not until the 15th did he decide to fight. But was it a good decision? Hartwig admits that "Lee's decision, considered in hindsight from a strictly military standpoint, was probably an error" (p. 349). Yet he notes that Lee's decision was *not* a "strictly military" one. Hartwig's principal contribution is to emphasize the importance of Lee's September 8th manifesto assuring Marylanders that he had come not to oppress them, but to protect them. How could Lee run away from McClellan, Hartwig asks rhetorically, after promising Marylanders that he would protect them? Once the armies were engaged, Hartwig has nothing but praise for Lee's management of the battle, and on the whole, his view is more positive than negative.

Not surprisingly from a scholar who named his son Robert E. Lee Krick, Robert K. Krick is fully in the Freeman-Castel camp of Lee admirers. His opinion of Longstreet, on the other hand, is another story. In his essay on Chancellorsville, Krick argues that Lee was able to win such a magnificent victory partly because the lugubrious Longstreet was absent. Krick spends several pages assessing responsibility for the design of Jackson's famous flank march and concludes that despite efforts by several Jackson biographers to credit Stonewall with the plan, it was Lee who designed it. Even so, Krick agrees with the conventional (especially southern) wisdom that the loss of Jackson was so devastating as nearly to over-shadow the Confederate victory.

Noah Andre Trudeau, who wrote on the 1864 campaign, is less adulatory of Lee. He asserts that Lee's tendency to issue verbal orders, often giving discretion to his subordinates, did not serve him well in this campaign. Trudeau is dismissive of claims by others that Lee was able to intuit Grant's move to Spotsylvania after the fight in the Wilderness. Trudeau says Lee's orders to Richard H. Anderson "suggested no urgency," and Trudeau gives most of the credit to Anderson for the timely arrival of his corps at the crossroads. Moreover, Trudeau points out that Lee's battlefield intuition deserted him altogether when he ordered Richard Ewell to pull his guns out of the line just prior to a major Federal assault on the salient known as the muleshoe. On that occasion, at least, Lee "terribly misjudged the enemy's intentions" (p. 531). Trudeau claims that part of the reason for Lee's disappointing performance in this campaign was his poor health and his diminished faith in his own corps commanders. At the North Anna crossing, he could not trust any of his subordinates to execute the trap he had laid for Grant. Even Lee's one unquestioned victory during this campaign--the slaughter at Cold Harbor--"owed more to the almost innate ability of the Southern soldiers to dig and defend than to any alignment or positioning Lee had determined" (p. 536). As for the attack at Fort Stedman, Trudeau argues that "There is something irrational about this whole enterprise that smacks of desperation and delusion" (p. 548). Indeed, despite a generally admiring tone, Trudeau concludes that "it is hard not to conclude that the terrible stresses of the period seriously undermined both his [Lee's] self-confidence and his military judgement" (p. 538).

Finally, the volume ends with an annotated 200-entry bibliography, compiled by T. Michael Parrish, of the most important works on Lee's generalship. This list should serve as a good starting point for any serious student.

On the whole, this collection provides a valuable overview of the hundred and thirty years of

Lee historiography and offers much new grist for the mill. Despite its intimidating price, it is a valuable tool for Civil War scholars and students.

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