

Unflinching Personal Bravery: Bryan Grimes Was At Lee's Side From Manassas To Appomattox

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Recommended Citation

Wert, Jeffry D. (1999) "Unflinching Personal Bravery: Bryan Grimes Was At Lee's Side From Manassas To Appomattox," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 .

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol1/iss1/29>

Review

UNFLINCHING PERSONAL BRAVERY

Bryan Grimes was at Lee's side from Manassas to Appomattox

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Summer 1999

Allen, T. Harrell *Lee's Last Major General: Bryan Grimes of North Carolina.* Savas, ISBN 1882810236

Bryan Grimes was a successful planter in Pitt County, North Carolina, when the Civil War began. An avowed secessionist, Grimes voted in the convention for his state's withdrawal from the Union and then resigned his political position to serve in its and the Confederacy's defense. Unschooled in military matters, he would by war's end rank as a major general with a fine record as a combat officer in the Army of Northern Virginia.

T. Harrell Allen, head of the Department of Communications at East Carolina University, offers the first biographical study of one of the Confederacy's finest examples of a citizen-soldier. Utilizing the correspondence of the Grimes family and numerous other manuscript collections and published works, Allen has written a solid biography of both the man and the soldier. The book is detailed, judicious, and reads well.

Although a widower with two young children, Grimes never hesitated to embrace North Carolina's call for volunteers.

Appointed major of the 4th North Carolina Infantry, he learned the elements of soldiering, emerging rapidly as a no-nonsense officer. He believed in discipline and passionately supported the cause. When his time came to lead men into combat, he displayed a remarkable skill for handling troops on a battlefield and an unflinching personal bravery.

Grimes fought with his men on nearly all of the major battlefields in the East. Throughout the four years, he earned praise from superiors, endorsements from his men, and promotion to higher rank. Promoted to major general on

February 15, 1865, Grimes was the last officer accorded that rank in the renowned army. He commanded a division until the end at Appomattox.

At war's end, Grimes returned home, and like thousands of his comrades, had to begin again amid the ashes of a lost cause. He had remarried during the war, and he, his wife, and children eventually returned to Grimesand, the family plantation. He farmed, perhaps joined the Ku Klux Klan, and on August 14, 1880, with a son by his side, was killed by an unknown assassin. He died within minutes.

Lee's Last Major General fills a gap in the historiography of Lee's lieutenants. The author quotes extensively from Grimes's letters and renders a balanced portrait of the subject. It is a good book, but one which could have benefitted from the services of a proofreader or editor. Dozens of grammatical and spelling mistakes mar an otherwise fine narrative.

Jeffry D. Wert is author of five books on the Civil War, including A Brotherhood of Valor: The Common Soldiers of the Stonewall Brigade, C.S.A., and the Iron Brigade, U.S.A., which is reviewed in this issue.