

The Leadership of Ulysses S. Grant: A General Who Will Fight

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Review

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Laver, Harry *The Leadership of Ulysses S. Grant: A General Who Will Fight.*
University Press of Kentucky, \$32.50 ISBN 978-0-8131-3677-6

A Look at the General Who Won the War

Without a doubt he was the man who single handily won the war for the Union on the battlefield through his "uncommon drive" and tenacity to not back down from a fight. General Ulysses S. Grant has been the study of hundreds of volumes in the past, but now in a small volume, Harry Laver, a professor at Southern Louisiana University studies Grant's rise from West Point Cadet to the commander of the Union Army.

According to Laver, "Grant's professional competence and unshakable resolve enabled him to analyze his environment, adapt to changing circumstances, and focus on his objective." Unlike many other Union commanders, he argues that Grant always saw the Confederate army as the objective, rather than a town on a map. By conducting his campaigns against strategic targets such as Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, and in the East, he was able to capture large areas that were strategically important for the Union, while in a large part destroying the Confederate armies in the way. When Grant went to Virginia in the spring of 1864, unlike every other commander, he did not see Richmond as the main Union objective. Rather, by destroying Lee's Army, Richmond would fall, and the war would be over. Grant made use of the resources devoted to him and although graduating near the bottom of his West Point class, was able to learn on the job and carry his plan through.

Laver devotes the several chapters of the book to the study of Grant's rise from West Point cadet, Mexican War veteran, finally through to his Civil War battles. Grant learned early on that the only way to end a fight was to keep on going into it. Laver writes, "Fear, anxiety, and indecision afflict everyone confronted by a challenge, but an effective leader overcomes these mental

obstacles to drive forward." Grant also knew how to build strategies, working with other officers, especially the Navy to use their troops to support his campaigns; the result being the opening of the West within two years.

At Shiloh, Laver argues that Grant truly began to shine as a commander. When many other commanders would have retreated on the night of the first day, Grant decided to hold his ground and the resulting engagement the next day turned into a Union victory. At Vicksburg, Grant was able to again make use of his relationship with trusted subordinates, allowing them to conduct actions in the rear to conduct the campaign. Leaving his two trusted subordinates, George Thomas and William Sherman in the West in 1864, Grant traveled to Virginia to tackle his largest objective, Lee's Army. The same drive that carried him through to victory in the West, again proved itself in the East, where despite losing 60,000 men in the course of six weeks, Grant was able to use his overwhelming numbers to put Lee into a vice. Even today, his words "I intend to fight it out along this line if it takes all summer," continue to resonate as a testament to persist no matter what the cost. This persistence finally paid off when the Army of Northern Virginia surrendered.

In conclusion, this book is a readable, moving, and inspiring story of one of America's greatest generals. Although primarily researched from published books, the *O.R.*, and the collected papers of General Grant, this book is designed to highlight certain instances of Grant's life, rather than being a collective biography. This book would be of interest not just to the Civil War community, but to professionals as well, as many can learn the principals of leadership, initiative, teamwork, planning, and most importantly persistence that Grant exhibited in his career as a soldier.

Robert Grandchamp earned his M.A. in American History from Rhode Island College. The author of nine books on American military history, he resides in northern Vermont where he is an analyst for the government.