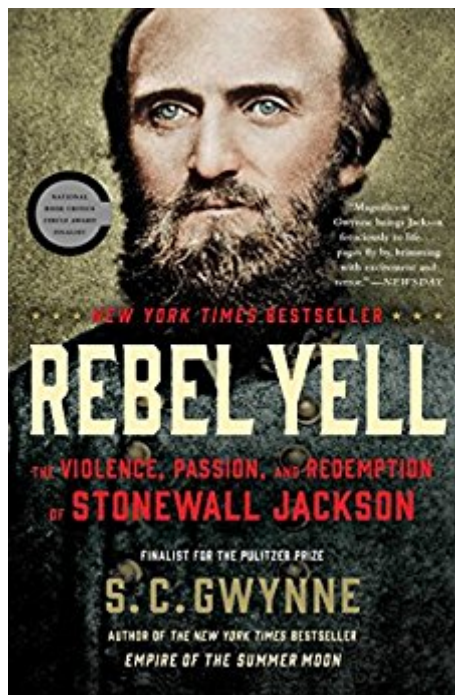




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Rebel Yell: The Violence, Passion, And Redemption Of Stonewall Jackson



Synopsis

Finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the epic New York Times bestselling account of how Civil War general Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson became a great and tragic national hero. Stonewall Jackson has long been a figure of legend and romance. As much as any person in the Confederate pantheon—even Robert E. Lee—he embodies the romantic Southern notion of the virtuous lost cause. Jackson is also considered, without argument, one of our country’s greatest military figures. In April 1862, however, he was merely another Confederate general in an army fighting what seemed to be a losing cause. But by June he had engineered perhaps the greatest military campaign in American history and was one of the most famous men in the Western world. Jackson’s strategic innovations shattered the conventional wisdom of how war was waged; he was so far ahead of his time that his techniques would be studied generations into the future. In his “magnificent Rebel Yell” S.C. Gwynne brings Jackson ferociously to life (New York Newsday) in a swiftly vivid narrative that is rich with battle lore, biographical detail, and intense conflict among historical figures. Gwynne delves deep into Jackson’s private life and traces Jackson’s brilliant twenty-four-month career in the Civil War, the period that encompasses his rise from obscurity to fame and legend; his stunning effect on the course of the war itself; and his tragic death, which caused both North and South to grieve the loss of a remarkable American hero.

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Customer Reviews

I'll start with my usual disclaimer that I can't speak to the accuracy of the history in this book. In fact, my prior knowledge of Stonewall Jackson, and indeed the whole Civil War, could fairly be described as non-existent. But Gwynne has clearly done a huge amount of research and, assuming the accuracy, the only word that I can find to describe the book is superb. In terms of the quality of the descriptive writing, the structure and skilful use of language, and the depth Gwynne brings to the characters of Jackson and his comrades and friends, the book stands not just as an outstanding biography but as a very fine piece of literary writing. As Jackson and his force of cadets set out to war, Gwynne tells us of his pre-war life as a rather strange and awkward man, deeply religious, suffering from poor health and perhaps a degree of hypochondria. Having overcome his early lack of education to scrape into West Point, he took full advantage of the opportunities on offer there, dragging himself up from the bottom of the class to graduate in a fairly high position. The first signs of his heroism were seen in the Mexican war when his courageous - some might say reckless - actions against a much greater enemy force were crucial to the success of the assault on Mexico City. But after this war, Jackson had taken a position as professor at the Virginia Military Institute, a job for which he seemed remarkably unsuited. Unable to control his unruly classes and an uninspiring teacher, he was seen as something of an oddity by his pupils. Gwynne shows how that all changed as he became one of the Confederacy's finest leaders, with many of these same pupils ending up willing to follow him anywhere and die for him if necessary. This is very much a biography of Jackson and a history of his military campaigns, rather than a history of the Civil War itself. Therefore Gwynne doesn't go too deeply into the politics of why the war came about, nor does he make any overt judgements about the rights or wrongs of it. Although in the course of the campaigns, we find out a lot about some of the commanders and politicians on the Unionist side, the book is rooted within the Confederacy and the reader sees the war very much from their side. As we follow Jackson through his campaigns, Gwynne, with the assistance of clear and well-placed maps, brings the terrain to life, vividly contrasting the beauty of the country with the brutality and horrors of the battlefields. He gives such clear detail of the strategies and battle-plans, of troop numbers and movements, of weaponry and equipment, that each battle is brought dramatically to

life. In fact, my lack of knowledge was something of an unexpected benefit since I genuinely didn't know the outcome of the battles and so was in a constant state of suspense. And found that I very soon had given myself over completely to willing Jackson onto victory. The image of this heroic man mounted on his favourite horse in the midst of mayhem, the light of battle in his eyes, one hand held high as he prayed for God's help while the bullets and artillery thudded all around him, is not one I shall soon forget. From the beginnings of the creation of the Jackson legend in the Shenandoah Valley campaign, then on through the series of battles where he snatched victory from what should have been certain defeat, till his final stunning achievements as the right-hand man of General Robert E Lee, Gwynne shows the growing admiration and even love of his troops for this man whose total belief in the rightness of his cause and God's protection led him to take extraordinary risks. He drove his men brutally hard, marching them at unheard-of speeds, on half rations or worse, and he threw them into battle even when they were exhausted and weak and hugely outnumbered. But his personal courage and strategic brilliance turned him into a figurehead - a symbol for the South, whose very name could make the Unionist commanders tremble. Cheered and adulated by soldiers and citizenry everywhere he went, he consistently insisted that all praise for his victories was God's due, not his, and remained awkward in the face of his growing celebrity to the end. But amidst all the warfare, Gwynne doesn't forget to tell us about the man. We see the other side of Jackson - the family man, grieving for the death of his first young wife and then finding happiness with his second, Anna. Through extracts from his letters, we see the softer, loving side of Jackson and also learn more about his deeply held conviction of God's presence in every aspect of his life. We learn how the war divided him from his much loved sister who took the Unionist side. And we're told of the efforts he made to nurture religion amongst his troops. A silent and somewhat socially awkward man to outward appearance, we see how he opened up to the people closest to him, taking special pleasure in the company of young children. A man of contradictions, truly, who could hurl his men to their almost certain deaths one day and weep for the death of a friend's child the next. A biography that balances the history and the personal perfectly, what really made this book stand out for me so much is the sheer quality of the writing and storytelling. Gwynne's brilliant use of language and truly elegant grammar bring both clarity and richness to the complexities of the campaigns, while the extensive quotes from contemporaneous sources, particularly Jackson's own men, help to give the reader a real understanding of the trust and loyalty that he inspired. As Gwynne recounted the final scenes of Jackson's death and funereal journey, I freely admit I wept along with the crowds of people who lined the streets in wait for a last chance to see their great hero. And I wondered with them whether the outcome might have been different had Jackson lived.

If only all history were written like this...NB This book was provided for review by the publisher, Scribner.

I have read several other books about Stonewall Jackson, including the historical masterpiece on him by James I. Robertson. No other account of Jackson, whether biography or historical fiction, has brought the man to life in the colorful and emotional way S.C. Gwynne has. The author defends Jackson's character while also pulling no punches on the flaws of the man. He highlights the defining baptism by fire Jackson had in Mexico, an early glimpse into the courage and fortitude of Thomas Jackson. He delves into Jackson's human relationships, personal oddities, and religious convictions in gripping detail. The author convinces you of the merit of Jackson's aggressive spirit, spiritual grounding, unfaltering decisiveness, and his compassion as a commander and gentleman. Jackson embodies the chivalry and gallantry of the brave men who fought and died for both sides in our nation's greatest calamity. The author brought to life the contradiction of a man so strange compared to his contemporaries, yet held as a symbol of Southern character and military genius. His final chapter about the immortality of Thomas Jackson was particularly moving. As S.C. Gwynne described Jackson's funeral procession in Richmond, witnessed by thousands of Virginians and Confederate soldiers revering their hero once more, I listened to the song played during that march - Handel's Death March from "Saul" - and wept for a man whose statues and memory are now being desecrated by a generation of Americans who don't understand him and what he stood for. As a soldier and officer myself, I recognized the truth of Jackson's legacy and character as I read this book. The man stood for what he believed God willed him to do - defend his beloved Virginia. He was a hardened warrior and doting father. He was a symbol of endurance and an indomitable will in the face of impossible odds and mortal danger. How much more American can Jackson be? S.C. Gwynne has illustrated the picture of Stonewall Jackson in such a manner that his legacy as a rock of the American spirit and American military tradition is in keeping with his battle-earned moniker. May you forever "rest in the shade of the trees", General.

A masterpiece! Reads like suspense novel. The author, S. C. Gwynne, history professor at U. of Texas in Austin, uses original historical sources like letters, notes, newspaper accounts and other original sources. This Civil War non-fiction work has a feel of reading something topical and relevant--accurate and detailed history at its finest. And, about a man, General Stonewall Jackson, who was more myth than reality. REBEL YELL details every aspect of his short and noble life, accidentally shot by his own men during a late night reconnaissance. It is a graphically-told history of

life before and during of the Civil War in Virginia, and a factual story of one of U.S. greatest Generals.

Great book. It has provided an excellent background mood and tone of the times in the 1861-63 Civil War campaigns. Many things that were not evident to the casual observer about the events that led to the breakout of the Civil War are fleshed out in just the first few chapters. Fascinating to see Andrew Jackson's personal growth and development into a true war tactician as history thrust that mantle upon him. Great insights into the causes of the war and how both sides viewed the same circumstances. Diego Suarez

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