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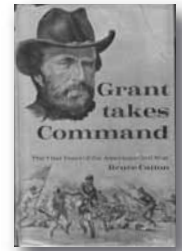
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## **BOOK REVIEW**

# ***Grant takes command: the vital years of the American Civil War***

by Bruce Catton

*J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.: London; 1970; 556 pp.; SBN 460 03945 8;  
Ursula Davidson Library call number: 564.1/30,164*



*Grant Takes Command*, by Pulitzer Prize winning historian Bruce Catton, chronicles the final two years of the American Civil War, with a focus on Ulysses S. Grant, the North's most successful general. It depicts the North's military strategy which was founded on superior logistics (military and industrial manpower; factories which manufactured war materièl; distribution via an extensive network of railroads; and reliable communications), persistence in wearing down perhaps more creative opponents, and skilled diplomacy to keep the European powers out of the war.

Catton captures the interaction of politics and military appointments. Lincoln and Grant understood each other well. Excerpts of personal letters and telegrams between Grant, Lincoln, General Halleck (General-in-Chief of the Northern armies) and Mrs. Grant are distributed through the book, providing both information and insight into their perspectives. Maps of major battles clarify strategy.

The description of the build up to Lee's surrender at Appomattox, including correspondence between Grant and Lee, is one of the most detailed I have read. Lee's starving army was then given rations recently captured by Grant's army from supplies intended for Lee!

Distressed as he was at the assassination of Lincoln, his President and strong supporter, Grant was immediately summoned to Washington and charged with "all matters pertaining to the security and defence of this national capital". Joseph Johnston's Southern army in North Carolina had not yet surrendered and Grant negotiated the surrender on terms similar to those given Lee. In his subsequent dealings with the South, Grant restored the conciliatory attitude he had learned from Lincoln, among other things avoiding a descent into guerrilla warfare.

Grant's political understanding and love of Mexico from the earlier Mexican War enabled him to explain to General Sheridan, his commander in the West, why that army needed to move immediately to Texas rather than participate in the Grand Review in Washington, D.C. With

these troops under a strong commander in Texas, neither France nor Austria was able to colonise Mexico. Thus, the United States was able to avoid having a major world power seeking colonial territory on its southern border.

Sir Linton Andrews has described Catton as being "among the most scholarly as well as the most picturesque of all historians". I endorse that assessment and recommend *Grant Takes Command* to readers with an interest in high command, military strategy and generalship.

**Priscilla Leece**