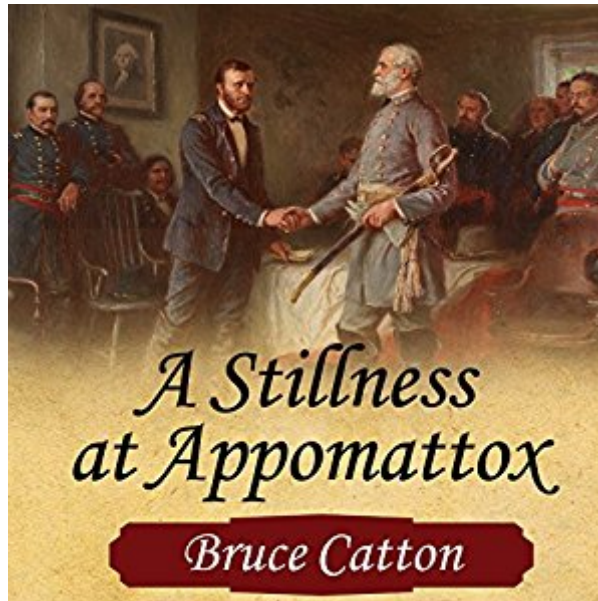




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A Stillness At Appomattox: The Army Of The Potomac, Volume 3



Synopsis

Undoubtedly Bruce Catton's most brilliant book, *A Stillness at Appomattox* won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for excellence in nonfiction. Catton, our foremost Civil War historian, recounts the most spectacular conflicts between Grant and Lee and details the end of hope for the Confederacy. Utilizing various collections of unpublished letters written by soldiers, personal diaries of spouses and relatives, memoirs of soldiers and their families, and official war records, Catton follows Grant's campaigns from early 1864 to the end of the war, detailing many crucial battles along the way.

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Customer Reviews

I am rereading this wonderful series and after having read many, many other books on aspects of the Civil War I am convinced this is still the best of all! There may be an error or two--65 years of further research would guarantee that--but the story, oh, the story Catton tells. I love the way he works participants' personal observations into the military record, how he relates personal information and day-by-day soldier life amid his detailing of battles and strategies. The other two books in the series will get my rereading presently (*Glory Road* is, to me, the most effective of all his many books at explaining the politics and the change in the political structures and relationships resultant from the war). Any Civil War student must read this series as a benchmark against which to measure all others.

A Stillness at Appomattox by Bruce Catton is a work of non-fiction by one of the premier historians of the 20th century. This narrative retraces the steps of the Army of the Potomac in the final year of the Civil War and begins with the story of General Judson Kilpatrick's daring raid in the Spring of 1864 through the capitulation of Robert E. Lee's, Army of Northern Virginia, at Appomattox Courthouse April 1865. Catton examines the lives of the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac and its leaders, especially that of its lifeblood, General Ulysses S. Grant. The author tells the story of the final year of the Civil War through the eyes of the Union Army, and is very pragmatic as to its strength and weaknesses, especially in matters of race and recruiting, placing great detail on the complexities of such a force cobbled together from many different worlds and cultures. Even though he tells the story from the vantage point of the Union Army, he is very forgiving of Lee and his hard scrabble veterans, fighting tooth and nail for every inch of Virginia soil blocking the Union efforts every step of the way. A Stillness at Appomattox, tells the story of the battles of The Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, the Crater, Siege of Petersburg, Five Forks, capture of Petersburg and Richmond and the chase to Danville with Grant trapping his quarry at Appomattox Courthouse, where at the McLean House, General Robert E. Lee signed the surrender of the illustrious Army of Northern Virginia and the guns went silent. Catton goes into great detail in describing the battles, bringing them to life and painting vivid portraits of struggles, suffering, triumph and heroism. Catton painfully paints a true and blemished picture of the true costs of the final year of the war, uncovering each stone to show the true face of war. This author details manpower and political issues, supply issues and paints pictures of camp life, revealing the soldiers in their true form. In A Stillness at Appomattox, Catton points out some very important changes, marking turning points in the way war is fought, such as the beginning of total war, with the depredations in the Shenandoah Valley. He also describes in great detail the switch from close quarter Napoleonic style shoulder to shoulder assaults to a more realistic spread out approach insisted upon by war weary veterans who understood that close quarters made for easy targets. Catton details the change from standard upright warfare to an entrenched style developed by the undermanned and outgunned Confederates. Catton describes the situation brilliantly by relaying the old saying that if the Confederates had half a day they could build works so well that they could never be pushed out. Bruce Catton's brilliant work, A Stillness at Appomattox, the third published in a trilogy about the Army of the Potomac won a Pulitzer Prize and was published in 1953 and became an instant authority and reference for the casual reader to the serious researcher. He used first hand accounts and secondary sources to weave his tale of an army's struggle to overcome politics, cronyism and an entrenched sense and attitude of failure in marching against the great General Robert E. Lee

and the storied Army of Northern Virginia. Catton paints a wonderful picture of the stubborn Grant bullishly forcing his will upon the southern forces with the ultimate outcome of bloodying the enemy so badly that they could not possibly rise again to fight another day. Bruce Catton (1899-1978) won a Pulitzer Prize in 1954 for *A Stillness at Appomattox* and awarded the Medal of Freedom in 1977 by President Gerald Ford, "Ford noted that the historian "made us hear the sounds of battle and cherish peace"

This is a very engaging, thorough description of a small slice of the Civil War, especially Fredericksburg and Antietam. It is told from the Union perspective, which is fine with me, but it really doesn't tell much about what was going on on the other side. Also, Catton makes his personal opinions obvious, which is ok, but sometimes gets a little annoying. If you have already read more recent works on the subject, Catton's approach can seem dated and lacking breadth. He clearly chose not to get too involved with the political background or the situation of African Americans, but sometimes discussion of these issues is too conspicuously absent. Overall, this is one of those books that is perfect for military history buffs who aren't terribly concerned with sociological analysis. You can read this book and never question the idea that "both sides were brave, the war wasn't really about ideology, and we shouldn't judge either side's motives." That approach is too dated for me, and not sufficiently critical of the social system that underpinned the entire conflict. Without that, I can't give five stars to this otherwise excellent book.

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