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Bull Run : Its Strategy And Tactics



Synopsis

PREFACE Half a century after the event, the campaigns of the Civil War may well pass out of the domain of reminiscence to enter that of military history. As that term is now understood in other countries, it means the dispassionate, minute, and technical investigation of every form of military activity, from the organization of a mule train to the psychology of a general-in-chief; it cares little for eloquence, the picturesque, and the glorification or depreciation of individual heroes. From the point of view of the military art one can mark off, in the history of the Civil War, three periods. In the first, we find little but crudeness; in the second, crudeness is flanked by great daring and brilliancy; in the third, brilliancy sobers down to a ripe and masterly exposition of military science; first was Bull Run, then came the Second Manassas, and last of all the terrific struggle from the Wilderness to Appomattox. That is why one is tempted to begin at the beginning, to examine the conditions under which was fought the first conflict of the Civil War. By investigating its crudities, we shall understand better the brilliancy and the maturity that followed. Bull Run was a lamentable illustration of the awful calamities invariably attending nations that lack or neglect an army. Fortunate it was for us that our brother, not our enemy, smote us. Yet Bull Run was just as inevitable in 1861 as something similar would be to-day had we to face a military power in the field. With our form and traditions of government, it is futile to lay at the door of those who for the moment held office, the fact that the United States had no army, that there were no means for repressing sedition before it could be organized into revolt, that no armed force could be raised after the crisis had arisen save by the devious and wasteful arts of political persuasion. Had President Lincoln at the outset known so much of military affairs and so little of public opinion as to demand not 75,000 three months' volunteers but 300,000 regulars, he would instantly have lost all his hold on the country; and it is disheartening to reflect that no other politician could have acted very differently in his place. Some will answer that, this is the price that this country has paid and will continue to pay willingly to escape from the burden of such military establishments as those under which European countries groan. It is really the price of ignorance, — ignorance of our national needs, of what constitutes an efficient army, of what stability an army insures; ignorance of our long record of inefficiency, disaster, and disgrace; ignorance of the state of the world, of where it is moving, of how our interests are involved; ignorance of how we might suffer attack and of how we might repel it. What we need above all is to get away from glittering generalities, from empty and ignorant sentimentalism, to become businesslike, to add up profit and loss, to estimate what the lack of an army cost us in 1861, to take enough pains to investigate the facts that surround us at the present day. In narrating the events of the Bull Run campaign I have said little of the political conditions that

underlay the struggle of the contending armies. Yet in one sense the foundations of strategy are always to be sought for in such conditions; von Clausewitz is perhaps sounder on this point than some more modern theorists. I have not thought it worth while to demonstrate at length that the advance of McDowell's army on Manassas might be a mistake as a purely military step, but inevitable as a political one; and that war is a phase of politics. And had McDowell won, which, in view of the composition of the Confederate army, was always possible, Lincoln and the political argument would have appeared justified. It seemed better to indicate in a few brief references only the salient facts of the political situation that led Scott, McDowell, and their Southern opponents to take measures

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Customer Reviews

I probably expected too much from this. I'm going through my old Battle and Leaders, Lee's Lieutenants, and Shelby Foote's three volume set of the Civil War. I'd hoped this one might provide new information but it covers much of the same ground with more a telling than showing style. Still,

if you're unfamiliar with the battle, it might help. I'm not a big romance reader but I also enjoyed A Stranger On My Land and Everlasting Light (Civil War Romance Series). Less about the war and more about the relationships between soldiers and their women, but sometimes that puts you in the moment.

A must have if the battle of bun run is important to you. My grandfather and his brother were there in the sixth ninth new York. I learned a lot.

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