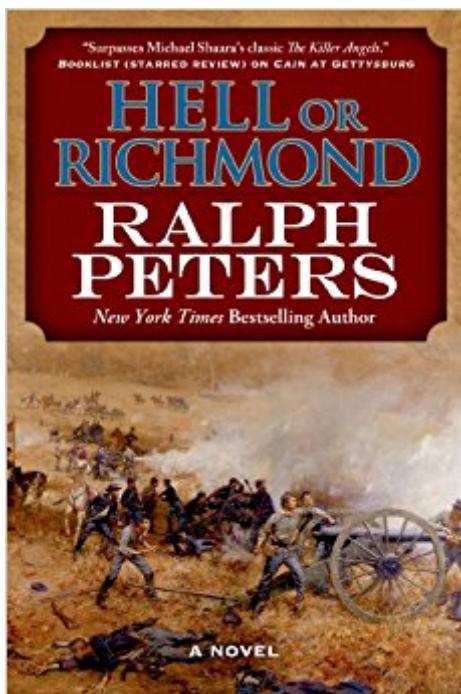


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Hell Or Richmond: A Novel (The Battle Hymn Cycle)



Synopsis

Winner of the American Library Association's 2014 Boyd Award for Literary Excellence in Military Fiction. Between May 5 and June 3, 1864, the Union and Confederate armies suffered 88,000 casualties. Twenty-nine thousand were killed, wounded or captured in the first two days of combat. The savagery shocked a young, divided nation. Against this backdrop of the birth of modern warfare and the painful rebirth of the United States, New York Times bestselling novelist Ralph Peters has created a breathtaking narrative that surpasses the drama and intensity of his recent critically acclaimed novel, *Cain at Gettysburg*. In Hell or Richmond, thirty days of ceaseless carnage are seen through the eyes of a compelling cast, from the Union's Harvard-valedictorian "boy general," Francis Channing Barlow, to the brawling "dirty boots" Rebel colonel, William C. Oates. From Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee to a simple laborer destined to win the Medal of Honor, Peters brings to life an enthralling array of leaders and simple soldiers from both North and South, fleshing out history with stunning, knowledgeable realism. From the horrific collision of armies in the Wilderness, where neither side wanted to fight, to the shocking slaughter of the grand charge at Cold Harbor, this epic novel delivers a compelling, authentic, and suspenseful portrait of Civil War combat. Commemorating the approaching 150th anniversary of this grim encounter between valiant Americans, Ralph Peters brings to bear the lessons of his own military career, his lifelong study of this war and the men who fought it, and his skills as a bestselling, prize-winning novelist to portray horrific battles and sublime heroism as no other author has done.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review The author of *Cain at Gettysburg* (2012) now offers what is intended to be the first of a trilogy taking the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia through their last and worst year of fighting. The setting, superbly researched and brought to life, supports three masterful battle pieces: the Wilderness, the Bloody Angle at Spotsylvania, and the doomed Union assault at Cold Harbor. The real strength of the book is the way the characters, all of them historical, are given life, even if some of them have to be reconstructed. We have a dysentery-ridden Robert E. Lee and an authentically laid-back Ulysses S. Grant. We meet Francis Barlow, a New England aristocrat; Stephen Oates, an Alabama brawler; and John B. Gordon, a Georgian with a natural gift for both combat leadership and inspiring speeches. We meet the Fiftieth Pennsylvania, a motley array of veteran canal men seen through the eyes of Sergeant (and later reluctant Lieutenant) Charles Brown. This is not a book for the squeamishâ "the effects of canister against massed troops and the uncensored language of Stephen Oates and Generals Charles Griffin and Philip Sheridan come to mind. But none of this should daunt readers who want to pick up one of the great Civil War novels of our timeâ "and are prepared to risk not being able to put it down until they are done. --Roland Green
--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

â œFirmly grounded in the historical record, *Hell or Richmond* recounts the horrific bloodbaths of The Wilderness, Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor with the skill of an accomplished novelist...gripping you-are-there urgency...enthralling historical fiction of the highest order.â • â •Gordon C. Rhea, author of *The Battle of the Wilderness* and *Cold Harbor*â œOne of the great Civil War novels of our time...superbly researched and brought to life...[be] prepared to risk not being able to put it down.â •
â •Booklist (starred review)

For the record, I don't read all that fast. But I got an advance copy of "Hell or Richmond" a few weeks back and read it, so I can offer a review on the same day the book hits the shelves here and elsewhere. I said a lot of good things about Peters' earlier "Cain at Gettysburg," and for "Hell or Richmond" I can do the same, only more so. For while this book equals its predecessor in several ways--the rich cast of complex characters straight out of history, the meticulous delineation of complex military movements, the battle pieces that thrill and compel you--it also improves on it. For one thing, it is a bigger canvas. The Overland Campaign was more complex and covered much more ground and time than the Battle of Gettysburg. It is a huge story and Peters' thorough explanation of it will be a revelation to those, like me, who come to the book knowing something, but

not much, about it. For another, he shows the physical and psychological dimensions of warfare in even greater and more convincing detail. Many writers will point out that "the men had had to march all night, so they arrived at the battlefield tired," but this book gives you a full sense of how trying and miserable the conditions were, and how the men up and down the chain of command were affected by them. For still another, he even more artfully balances and integrates the personal and the universal, the military and the political, the social and the individual. In sum, in my long stint of reading military history and fiction, I have never so convincingly felt the environment of war--its tedium and terrors, its chaotically overlapping actions and demands, its rawness. Read this if you want to know in minute detail how a month of brutal fighting took place over miles of Virginia countryside. Read it if you want to understand much of what is worth knowing about one particular military campaign. Or read it if you want to feel what pretty much any battle, down through the contentious history of our species, would have been like had you been there.

This is the third book of Peters' that I have read, more or less in reverse historical order. It covered probably the greatest span of events of any of Peters' books, from Wilderness to Cold Harbor. Consequently it felt to me to be a bit spotty. But I don't think this could have been helped, being that it was already a good-sized volume. Once again I am so impressed by this man's ability to provide psychosocial insight into the minds of the participants. I only wish he'd stop repeating Lee's expression "those people" so often when he has him speak, or when Burnside repeats phrases. I would contend that, in 50 years of reading about this War, Peters is the best in this genre of historical fiction. And to those that don't like his representation of Grant, let me remind you that that's how he was seen by his subordinates at the time. Indeed, Grant did not win any of the battles that are depicted in the book. If "the rules" dictated that in order to win you were supposed to pick a field of your choosing to fight on, then remain in possession of that field after the battle, then Grant did not play by those rules, unlike Lee. As Lincoln said, Grant "understood the arithmetic" of attrition. Lee could never stand up to the killing for long, and Grant could, due to the North's vastly greater manpower reserves. Moreover, tactical "rules" were of minimal importance if one had the strategic vision of maneuvering Lee into a siege (of Richmond and Petersburg) from which Lee could never escape. It is not Peters' style to spell this out. The reader needs to draw his or her own conclusions from the narrative. Still, Peters does have Grant speak to his vision within pages 456 to 458. And that's what Grant ended up doing, after all.

Author Ralph Peters is a retired military author and a keen student of the American Civil War. Peters

has ascended to fame with the publication of "Cain at Gettysburg" his fictionalized account of the battle of Gettysburg July 1,3, 1863. Peters is adept at weaving the threads of combat to tell a compellingly real tale which will remain in the memories of his readers. His second book "Hell or Richmond" recounts the long and bloody struggle between Generals Grant and Meade of the Union against Robert E. Lee's tattered but fierce Army of Northern Virginia in the spring of 1864. The novel begins in May when the battle begins. Such bloody affairs as the Wilderness, Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor are covered in gory detail. Peters range is wide as he covers everyone from the top brass generals to the grunts in the trenches and burning woods of the dense Wilderness of Northern Virginia in the Chancellorsville area. Peters work has been compared to that of the late Michael Shaara's "Killer Angels" a fictional account of Gettysburg. However Peters work:a. Is much more realistic than Shaara in its depiction of the horrors of close combat. We see the war through the eyes of such confederates as William Oates of the 15th Alabama and Union boy general "Francis Barlow" a Harvard trained Yankee officer. I learned more about General George Gordon Meade and James Longstreet in this long 542 page novel than I did in any previous fictional or nonfictional tome I have selected from my teaming shelf of Civil War material.b. Peters use of scatological and profane language is realistic, This is the way men in combat talk! The book is not for younger readers and others who are offended by cursing.c. Hell or Richmond ends in early June with the Confederates in retreat back to Richmond. Lee knew the war would end in defeat for the Confederate nation. One looks forward to the rest of the story as told by Peters. For those who love to read and study the Civil War this novelist deserves a good read. Excellent and well recommended.

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