

War Stories: Gettysburg And Chickamauga Anchor A Collection Of Graceful Summaries

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Review

WAR STORIES

Gettysburg and Chickamauga anchor a collection of graceful summaries

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Morelock, J.D. and Boyne, Walter J.. *The Army Times' Book of Great Land Battles from the Civil War to the Gulf War.* Berkley Books, ISBN 425165310

Great Land Battles features the tautest imaginable encapsulation of great events. The complex, horrific six months of Stalingrad unfold in 22 closely man-aged and adroitly written pages. Such reduction of a mighty conflict to encyclopedia-entry size requires a special kind of aptitude -- skill of an entirely different order than the production of an encyclopedic monograph. Morelock manages the task admirably. His Gettysburg chapter, for example, bounds energetically across wide gaps in the story, but in a sensible manner and without notable error.

Almost every auditor will find reason to fume about some campaign excluded from the necessarily short list of topics. For instance, a compendium of this sort probably ought not to omit all the storm landings (Tarawa, Saipan, Peleliu, Iowa Jima, and the rest) that comprised one of the most striking innovations of World War II.

As the greatest battle of the Pacific War, Okinawa makes an obvious subject; but that vast campaign did not include a violently contested amphibious beachhead of the sort that erupted during the 1940s in a manner never seen before nor since. Even in the Okinawa segment, Morelock ignores the amphibious tenor of the Pacific War as reflected in General Buckner's dreadfully costly decision against a mid-campaign landing on the southeastern coast.

The book's design is marred by a bizarre choice of cover illustration. The photograph is among the most familiar Civil War images: U.S. Grant and his subordinates lounging on pews in front of Massaponax Church in Spotsylvania County, Virginia, on May 21, 1864. **Great Land Battles** includes no subjects

from 1864, nor any sites within many, many miles of Spotsylvania County. Colonel Morelock doubtless is the latest victim of the fantastic insistence of publishers that authors have no business worrying about the aptness of graphic layout.

A reader especially interested in one of the 13 campaigns covered by Morelock will not find much satisfaction in this book. On the other hand, anyone keen on all of them, or in the broad sweep of military matters across the past century and a quarter, will appreciate this graceful summary. **Great Land Battles** is intended to be synoptic and accessible to the general reader, and it readily succeeds in meeting those goals.

Robert K. Krick writes from Fredericksburg, Virginia, and is author of 11 books and more than 100 published articles about the American Civil War.