

### Old Soldiers Never Die: Grant's Most Unrelenting Foe Was The Press

William D. Bushnell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Bushnell, William D. (2000) "Old Soldiers Never Die: Grant's Most Unrelenting Foe Was The Press," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 3 .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol2/iss3/19>

## Review

### OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE

#### Grant's most unrelenting foe was the press

Bushnell, William D.

Summer 2000

**Byrd, Max** *Grant*. Bantam Books, 2000-09-01. ISBN 553096338

Ulysses S. Grant, the soldier who won the Civil War and saved the Union, remains an enigma, a wildly popular national figure who was both a monumental success as a soldier and a dismal failure as a civilian. Much has been written about Grant the soldier, but now author Max Byrd cleverly explores the last five years of Grant's life in his new novel, **Grant**.

Byrd is the award-winning author of five detective novels, but he is perhaps best known for his exceptional historical novels, *Jefferson* (1993) and *Jackson* (1998). With **Grant**, Byrd uses the familiar *Jackson* formula, having journalists tell the story as they question, probe, pry, and dance around the periphery of the great general as he slides from prosperity to poverty in the years 1880 to 1885.

Following two disastrous terms as the 18th president of the United States (1868-1876), Grant's enduring popularity almost propels him back into the White House in 1880 for an unprecedented third term. Sylvanus B. Cadwallader, a wily newspaperman for the *Chicago Times* and the *New York Herald*, and Nicholas Trist, a cynical Civil War veteran writing for a French magazine, cover the political story of Grant, but each man has a different perspective of the general who "don't scare worth a damn."

Cadwallader, a pro-Grant biographer, has seen both sides of the general. He accompanied Grant on numerous campaigns during the Civil War as a correspondent, and now dogs the general as just another hack looking for a scoop. His admiration for Grant, however, puts him at odds with the reporter's creed - never let the facts get in the way of a good story. Trist, who lost an arm at Cold Harbor in one of Grant's worst and most unforgivable battles, has good reason to be bitter, although his view of Grant will take a surprising turn.

Through Cadwallader and Trist, Byrd tells of the presidential scandals that disgraced Grant's administration, the political expediency and duplicity of the lost third-term nomination, the shocking bankruptcy of Grant's Wall Street fortune, and Grant's agonizing death in 1885 from virulent throat cancer.

Although Grant is the subject, Cadwallader and Trist are the colorful features that move through the complex political, financial, and social circles of Washington, D.C., Chicago, and New York. Personal affairs interfere with their professional lives, and they become involved with liars and thieves, drunks and charlatans, friends and enemies of Grant, and the ever-present corruption and hypocrisy which marked that era of American life.

This is a vibrant, stunning story of Grant's last years, but, best of all, it is a gripping tale of "the reborn nation, on the other side of the war." This is a most suitable companion to the year's other outstanding novel about U.S. Grant, Richard Parry's *That Fateful Lightning*. Byrd's next historical novel will be about Mary Todd Lincoln.

*William D. Bushnell is a freelance writer, book reviewer, and instructor at the University of Southern Maine. He lives on an island on the coast of Maine.*