

Ulysses S. Grant: An Album: Warrior, Husband, Traveler

Jason Mann Frawley

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Review

Frawley, Jason Mann

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Perry, James M. *Touched With Fire: Five Presidents and the Civil War Battles That Made Them.* Public Affairs, \$26.00 ISBN 1586481142

Veteran politics:

Soldiers and the White House

In the relatively short history of the United States, military servicemen have managed to find their way into the White House with remarkable regularity. The nation's first executive, George Washington, set the precedent serving as President of the United States for eight years following his distinguished service in the American Revolution. In the years following Washington's presidency, the nation has had nineteen other soldier-presidents including Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, and George Herbert Walker Bush. The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II, have all generated U.S. presidents. While World War II produced more presidents than any other war with a total of seven, the American Civil War delivered the most presidents with actual combat experience. Civil War combat veterans Ulysses Simpson Grant, Rutherford Birchard Hayes, James Abram Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, and William McKinley all went on to serve in the White House during the Gilded Age. Of all the Gilded Age presidents, only two failed to serve in combat during the Civil War. James M. Perry's **Touched With Fire: Five Presidents and the Civil War Battles That Made Them** is the story of the five extraordinary veterans—Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Harrison, and McKinley—who did endure combat and their exceptional military experiences.

The military and political exploits of the only professional soldier in Perry's group, U. S. Grant, are covered briefly at the beginning and end of the book, but the treatment of the most recognizable of the Civil War presidents is not extensive. Attention is given to Grant's maneuvering in Missouri, his grand victories at Forts Henry and Donelson, and the roles those victories played in

establishing his popularity, but one would certainly be better served to read an individual biography like Brooks D. Simpson's *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865* as Perry's examination of Grant offers little that is new. Despite the terse treatment of Grant, Perry examines the experiences of the other four men in far greater detail in the heart of the book and provides readers with a refreshing glimpse of the war's forgotten soldier-presidents.

Unlike Grant, who was a West Point graduate with combat experience in the Mexican War, Hayes, Garfield, Harrison, and McKinley were volunteers, and Perry gives due attention to these men who are often lost in Grant's shadow. Hayes and McKinley are treated together, and their stories are the most gripping. During the war, Hayes fought bravely in a dozen major engagements and was wounded four times, while McKinley, who served under Hayes, received a brevet promotion to the rank of Major after heroically helping to get supplies to the front during the bloody battle of Antietam. Benjamin Harrison, the grandson of another soldier-president, William Henry Harrison, accompanied General William Tecumseh Sherman as an officer during the March to the Sea. Of all the Civil War veterans in Perry's work, Garfield receives the most attention and analysis, and it is not unwarranted. A political general who held West Point graduates in contempt, Garfield received an independent command in Kentucky, where he sought to prove that he could do it better than the professionals. Following a victory at the battle of Middle Creek, Garfield received a promotion to Brigadier General. He eventually served as General William Starke Rosecrans's chief of staff, played a role in framing the Tullahoma Campaign that pushed Confederate General Braxton Bragg out of Tennessee, and fought alongside General George Henry Thomas at the battle of Chickamauga despite his own commander's inability to aid the Rock of Chickamauga. Despite such accolades, Perry does not sanctify Garfield, and he deals not only with Garfield's womanizing but also with his elusive political maneuvering. In 1862, Garfield was elected to the House of Representatives, and although he did not resign his military commission until 6 December 1863, Perry assures readers that as a soldier he was touched with fire. But what burned brightest was his passion for success as a politician.

While Perry devotes the majority of his book to the military experiences of his five subjects, he regretfully neglects to examine their presidencies in anything approaching sufficient detail. He does not explain how the war molded the character of these men, and he fails to examine how their wartime experiences influenced their presidencies as the subtitle of the book suggests he

will be doing. He does discuss the role of the Grand Army of the Republic, a faction of Union veterans strongly allied with the Republican Party, in getting these men elected, but aside from that, little is noted regarding how these men's battlefield experiences affected their time in office.

Touched With Fire is a work of popular history that will certainly appeal to Civil War buffs and those with a passing interest in post-Civil War politics. Perry's journalistic style makes for good reading, and he successfully recreates vivid battle scenes while illustrating the merits of individual acts of heroism almost to the point of hagiography. Perry also includes seven maps that help readers keep up with the story and 16 wartime photographs that capture the spirit of the war and allow readers to put faces with names. Scholastically, however, the book is inadequate. Although Perry draws on diaries, letters, and other primary documents while illustrating a propensity for good research, he fails to include footnotes or endnotes in his text. He also cites the biographers of his subjects far too often, neglecting to develop fully his own analysis of the soldier-presidents, an analysis that may have reconciled his subjects' wartime successes with the stigmas that tarnished their post-war presidencies. **Touched With Fire** is a good narrative and little more. Adequate for casual reading, this book cannot be recommended to professional academics as a viable source of new information.

Jason Mann Frawley is a Ph.D. student at Texas Christian University, where he studies under the tutelage of Professor Steven E. Woodworth. He is currently co-editing and co-writing two books with his major professor and working on completing his coursework before writing his dissertation.