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From Manassas To Appomattox [Illustrated]



From Manassas
to Appomattox
by General James Longstreet

Lost Packet Planet Publishing



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Customer Reviews

Before reading his book I knew a lot about Longstreet, but he remained a rather amorphous figure. Now I feel I know the man somewhat better. It should be understood that Longstreet wrote these memoirs in defense of his reputation, which was under attack by Jubal Early, FitzHugh Lee, and others in an attempt to shift blame from the deceased Robert E. Lee. As a result Longstreet is argumentative and abrupt in his rebuttals. (And the way he writes, one gets the feeling that he

ALWAYS was that way!) Longstreet gives a lot of details about battle strategy and various campaigns; and he is not shy about revealing his ideas about what was done well and what was done poorly - even when it involves Gen. Lee or himself. He is brutally honest, regardless of whom it offends. But he also spread numerous anecdotes throughout the book, giving it a more human feel. After many years of study I developed the opinion that Longstreet was one of the most pragmatic generals of the Civil War. This book confirms that opinion. Longstreet, somewhat like Grant, seemed to always think along the lines of "what is the best way to get it done", blocking out all else. His criticism of others is usually based upon their inability to think and act in a similar manner. I finished the book realizing that Longstreet was a fascinating person and the ultimate soldier...someone I would have liked to have met. This is NOT a book for beginners: unless you know of various campaigns and battles in some detail, you will probably feel bored and lost at various times. But for readers with some Civil War knowledge, this will prove to be a most enjoyable read!

General Lee often called James Longstreet his Old War Horse so the reader can get the story straight from the horses's mouth. Before reading this I had assumed that Jubal Early and others who attacked Longstreet after the war decided he would be a good scapegoat for their and Lee's failures due to his not being from Virginia and because he became a Republican after the war. After reading Old Pete's book it became obvious that personality conflicts may have been involved also. Longstreet called things like he saw them in his book and probably in person. It is easy to see how Early, Ewell, and others may have been offended by Longstreet during the war. For the student of the Civil War there could be no better overview from someone who was there. With Longstreet's service in all of the major Virginia campaigns and his service at Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Knoxville in the west the reader can glimpse both major Confederate armies and gain a deep insight into Lee's army. The writing is a little dry at times but is as clear and well written as can be expected. After all Longstreet was a general not a scholar. This book is a must in any complete Civil War library.

Longstreet's memoirs are very good. They are well written, informative, and candid. When Longstreet disagreed with someone, he states it. If he disagreed with a strategy, such as at Gettysburg, he states it and gives his view of what should have happened. Although this looks like a case of Longstreet trying to say his way would have won, I personally believe he was simply being honest. While Longstreet's memoirs can be dry when he talks of strategies and tactics, it is still a

informative, entertaining book. I would rank Longstreet's memoirs only behind Grant's, Sherman's, E.P. Alexander's, and Richard Taylor's underrated *Destruction and Reconstruction*.

If Longstreet had died of his wounds at The Wilderness, he would be in the Pantheon with Lee and Jackson. If he'd never uttered a public word about The War, he might well be in that Pantheon. But after Lee's death, and in the humiliating pain of Reconstruction, Longstreet was the only surviving icon of the Army of Northern Virginia. Longstreet saw The War over and went on with his life. In doing so, he committed the unpardonable sin of renewing his old acquaintances, doing homage to the ruling party, and putting food on his family's table. As the lesser lights among the general officers began to seek a profit from their war, someone had to be blamed for the Army of Northern Virginia's failure. The Virginians wrote the history; the Georgian, Longstreet, got the blame. Longstreet was an imperfect man and an imperfect commander, but neither Longstreet nor Lee lost the Battle of Gettysburg. Gallant Virginians get that honor. If Virginians Ewell, Early, and A. P. Hill had done anything useful on 2 July 63, American history might well be written with a different accent. By the time of this memoir, Longstreet was a wounded and defensive man under sustained and violent attack by the "Lost Cause" crowd in Virginia. Read his memoir in that context.

I've recently caught the Civil War bug and wanted to know more about one of the few greats who survived to write his memoirs. It seemed best to read his own account before tackling the biographies out there. I'm glad I decided to do it that way. Reading the accounts of battle in Longstreet's own words has given me a much better understanding of his intellect and character. Although certainly flawed, he hardly seems the cause of all ills as some wish to portray him. I thought his explanations surrounding Gettysburg were compelling. Also, his written communications showed a keen mind and a leader who wanted no chance of his directives being misunderstood or ignored. (No verbiage such as "if practicable.") If Robert E. Lee had communicated a tad more like Longstreet, who knows whether it might have helped avoid some of the failures of those who may have known his follow-up would be weak. There is no mention whatsoever of his wife...Longstreet does not focus at all on any family or personal matters. Yet much of his personality is revealed through the reading. I wouldn't have missed it for the world...highly recommended.

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