



# General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse

*Joseph Glatthaar*

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"You would be surprised to see what men we have in the ranks," Virginia cavalryman Thomas Rowland informed his mother in May 1861, just after joining the Army of Northern Virginia. His army -- General Robert E. Lee's army -- was a surprise to almost everyone: With daring early victories and an invasion into the North, they nearly managed to convince the North to give up the fight. Even in 1865, facing certain defeat after the loss of 30,000 men, a Louisiana private fighting in Lee's army still had hope. "I must not despair," he scribbled in his diary. "Lee will bring order out of chaos, and with the help of our Heavenly Father, all will be well."

Astonishingly, after 150 years of scholarship, there are still some major surprises about the Army of Northern Virginia. In *General Lee's Army*, renowned historian Joseph T. Glatthaar draws on an impressive range of sources assembled over two decades -- from letters and diaries, to official war records, to a new, definitive database of statistics -- to rewrite the history of the Civil War's most important army and, indeed, of the war itself. Glatthaar takes readers from the home front to the heart of the most famous battles of the war: Manassas, the Peninsula campaign, Antietam, Gettysburg, all the way to the final surrender at Appomattox. *General Lee's Army* penetrates headquarters tents and winter shanties, eliciting the officers' plans, wishes, and prayers; it portrays a world of life, death, healing, and hardship; it investigates the South's commitment to the war and its gradual erosion; and it depicts and analyzes Lee's men in triumph and defeat.

The history of Lee's army is a powerful lens on the entire war. The fate of Lee's army explains why the South almost won -- and why it lost. The story of his men -- their reasons for fighting, their cohesion, mounting casualties, diseases, supply problems, and discipline problems -- tells it all.

Glatthaar's definitive account settles many historical arguments. The Rebels were fighting above all to defend slavery. More than half of Lee's men were killed, wounded, or captured -- a staggering statistic. Their leader, Robert E. Lee, though far from perfect, held an exalted place in his men's eyes despite a number of mistakes and despite a range of problems among some of his key lieutenants.

*General Lee's Army* is a masterpiece of scholarship and vivid storytelling, narrated as much as possible in the words of the enlisted men and their officers.

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