

CIVIL WAR BOOKS: A BRIEF LIST

It is virtually impossible to create a list of all important books on the great Civil War. What follows is a subjective and selective list focused mainly on military aspects of the conflict. Titles were also selected for readability. Highly focused battle treatises, specialized studies and overly-scholarly works are not included.

Battle Cry of Freedom: The Era of the American Civil War, by James Alan McPherson (1988). Considered by many to be the best one-volume summary of the era, the book covers military, political and other aspects of the conflict.

The Civil War, by Sheby Foote (3 vols. 1958-1974). Foote is an eminent prose stylist, and his “narrative” is breezy and insightful.

This Hallowed Ground (1956), by Bruce Catton. One of the best one-volume histories of the war. Catton is brilliant at characterization and telling detail. The book was accorded the Fletcher Pratt Award.

Mr. Lincoln’s Army (1951), ***Glory Road*** (1952), and ***A Stillness at Appomattox*** (1953), by Bruce Catton. The so-called Army of the Potomac trilogy. A newspaperman by profession, Catton wrote with flair and passion. He won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1954 for the final volume of the trilogy.

The Coming Fury (1961), ***Terrible Swift Sword*** (1963), and ***Never Call Retreat*** (1965), by Bruce Catton. The author’s so-called Centennial history of the Civil War, covers the entire spectrum of the era.

Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life, by John D. Billings (1887). A former soldier in the Army of the Potomac captures the pulse of the daily life in the ranks; augmented with expressive pen and ink sketches.

The Life of Billy Yank (1952), and ***The Life of Johnny Reb*** (1943), by Bell I. Wiley. These studies of common soldier life in both Union and Confederate armies still stand after more than a half century.

FICTION

Shiloh, by Shelby Foote (1952). Foote’s small but telling novel of the battle told from various points of view.

The History of Rome Hanks and Kindred Matters, by Joseph Stanley Pennell (1944). Now largely forgotten, Pennell's dense and brilliantly rendered story of two families caught in the war.

The Red Badge of Courage, by Stephen Crane (1895). A classic that has stood the test of time.

By Antietam Creek (1960), ***The Three Days*** (1959) and ***The River and the Wilderness*** (1962), by Don Robertson. Better-known for his mid-20th century picaresque novels about Morris Bird III, Robertson's Civil War novels are splendid depictions of, respectively, the battles of Antietam, Gettysburg and The Wilderness.

The March, by E. L. Doctorow (2005). A novel of Sherman's great 1864 march from Atlanta to the sea. Won the PEN/Faulkner award.

This list would not be complete without mentioning several Western Region authors, among them the dean of Iron Brigade scholarship, Lance J. Herdegen whose works include:

Those Damned Black Hats! The Iron Brigade in the Gettysburg Campaign (2008).

The Men Stood Like Iron: How the Iron Brigade Won Its Name (2005).

Four Years with the Iron Brigade: The Civil War Journal of William Ray, Seventh Wisconsin Volunteers, editor (2001).

In the Bloody Railroad Cut at Gettysburg, co-author with Wm. J. K. Beaudot (1990).

An Irishman in the Iron Brigade, co-author with Wm. J. K. Beaudot (1993).

The 24th Wisconsin Infantry in the Civil War, by Wm. J. K. Beaudot (2003).

Cadet Gray and Butternut Brown, by Tom Arliskas (2007). An excellent study on Confederate uniforms.