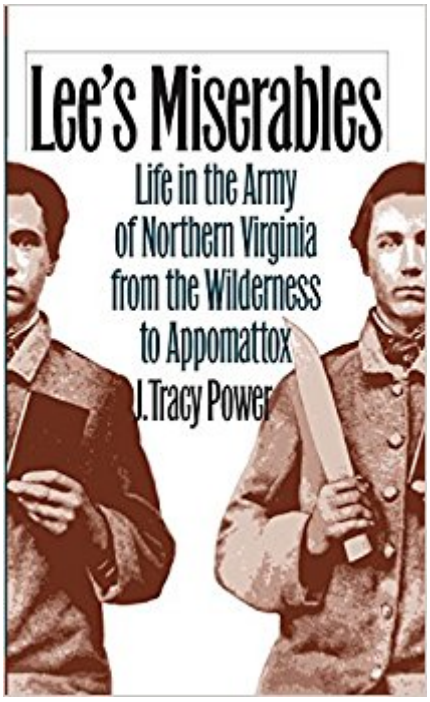
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Lee's Miserables: Life In The Army Of Northern Virginia From The Wilderness To Appomattox



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Synopsis

Never did so large a proportion of the American population leave home for an extended period and produce such a detailed record of its experiences in the form of correspondence, diaries, and other papers as during the Civil War. Based on research in more than 1,200 wartime letters and diaries by more than 400 Confederate officers and enlisted men, this book offers a compelling social history of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia during its final year, from May 1864 to April 1865. Organized in a chronological framework, the book uses the words of the soldiers themselves to provide a view of the army's experiences in camp, on the march, in combat, and under siege--from the battles in the Wilderness to the final retreat to Appomattox. It sheds new light on such questions as the state of morale in the army, the causes of desertion, ties between the army and the home front, the debate over arming black men in the Confederacy, and the causes of Confederate defeat. Remarkablyrich and detailed, Lee's Miserables offers a fresh look at one of the most-studied Civil War armies.

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Customer Reviews

A historian with the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Power has written an excellent study of life in the Army of Northern Virginia in the Civil War's final year. The result is an outstanding example of the new military history similar in type and quality to Reid Mitchell's Civil War Soldiers (LJ 9/15/88) and James McPherson's For Cause and Comrades (LJ 3/15/97).

Exhaustively researched, this revised doctoral dissertation is based on a wide variety of letters and diaries drawn from manuscript sources throughout the Confederate South. In chronological fashion, Power traces the men’s cautious optimism after the Wilderness campaign, where soldiers wrote of "high spirits," to the rampant despair of the spring of 1865. Power covers the standard topics: morale, rations, home front, and the like. His very well-written book gives readers a you-are-there experience, and the final chapter is a superb historiographical overview of recent titles in the field. A final note on the title: Victor Hugo’s classic had just been translated into English when some of Lee’s more literate soldiers adopted the title to suit their own situation.?Stephen G. Weisner, Springfield Technical Community Coll., MACopyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In an exceedingly solid volume, Power depicts the Army of Northern Virginia during its last year. His portrait is based in thorough study of the correspondence of hundreds of officers and enlisted men, far too many of whom did not survive the fighting, poor medical care, disease, and sheer starvation that together hammered Lee’s army down to the shadow of itself that surrendered at Appomattox. The letters discussed every possible aspect of the soldiers’ existence, with the usual nineteenth-century exception of their sex lives. As Power cites them, they movingly indicate the continued devotion of so many Confederates to their increasingly doomed cause, and they are frank about the extent to which declining morale, straggling, and outright desertion set in toward the end of 1864. Although casual Civil War buffs may find Power’s work somewhat daunting, serious students of the conflict will find it thoroughly compelling. Roland Green

I’m a civil war reader and the book was every thing I wanted. It goes into the life of the individual soldier better than any book about the war I’ve read. As a veteran myself I know how the individual is often overlooked to describe the battle.

Very interesting.

Tracy Power should write more!! A great read, with humor, sensitivity and awareness of the broad scope of combat, not just the movements and numbers. Cannot wait for his new effort to come to press.

Awesome book and a must read for any civil war buff

A must read for the "WBTS" history buff. Dr. Power goes in depth on Lees men and tidbits you never thought of or knew.

By ancestry and upbringing I am a Connecticut Yankee and, while for many years I have been a keen student of the American Civil War, my interests and sympathies are definitely pointed towards the Union (my relatives wore the blue). Thus, it is comparatively rare for me to enthusiastically read a book which is about a distinctly Confederate subject. I happily made an exception for J. Tracy Power's "Lee's Miserables". As it happens, a special focus of mine has long been on the Virginia campaigns of 1864-65, perhaps due to the early influence of Bruce Catton's wonderful "A Stillness at Appomattox". Mr. Power describes his book as a "hybrid of social and military history" and that is indeed an apt desciption. Although the reader can follow the course of the campaigns well enough through Power's narrative, the primary focus of the book is firmly upon how the men and officers of the Army of Northern Virginia perceived their situation and viewed the future, as told in their letters, journals, and other first-hand accounts. Although some soldiers in Lee's army remained confident to very end that they would ultimately achieve victory, "Lee's Miserables" chronicles a broad decline in morale over the winter of 1864-65. An army which could still defend its ground in September and October had become vulnerable by March and April.I strongly recommend this book for anyone interested in Civil War realities and who are ready to reject the hagiographic myths which have far too often dominated books about the Army of Northern Virginia. And I hope that someday there will be a comparable social/military history published about the Army of the Potomac during these same campaigns.

Lee's Miserables covers the period from May 1864-April 1865 in great detail. It uses voluminous private correspondence and diaries from that time to give a very personal view of the campaigns beginning with The Wilderness and ending at Appomatox. The research done by Mr. Power is impressive and the documentation quite complete. As I read this book my respect for the Army of Northern Virginia increased with each page. Many of the men who fought for Southern Independence went in to the 1864 Campaign with every expectation of ultimate victory. As Grant's Army was repelled at Wilderness, then Spotsylvania, and again at Cold Harbor it did seem the future of the Confederacy was viable. But Grant did not march away after being defeated as his predecessors had done, even to the point that after Cold Harbor he had lost more casualties than Lee had in his whole army but Grant and his army stayed on Southern soil. Grant was undeterred, and pressed on to Petersburg and began the stalemate of trench warfare. The Spring Campaign of

1865 opened on a much-depleted Army of Northern Virginia and only the strongest diehards were still in the trenches when Grant began his offensive that lead to Lee's surrender at Appomatox. Throughout it all, Lee's Miserables were prolific writers corresponding with their wives, mothers, fathers, etc., regarding the substance of their daily thoughts and trials. This book gives great insight into the motives of the patriots and what kept them going under extremely difficult conditions. Their ability to withstand the privations of low rations, inadequate clothing, scarce footwear, and sinking civilian morale in the South are a testament to the spirit and determination of many in that dedicated army. One of the somewhat surprising events the author brings out is the number of defections from both the Union army and the Army of Northern Virginia. Many soldiers on both sides simply couldn't stand the stalemated conditions and growing hopelessness any longer and preferred life in a POW camp to that in the trenches. This is fine book about the reality of the decline and death of the Confederacy and well worth reading.

Superb account of the soldiers who made up Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Tracy Power brings them to life for us as he digests their hopes, fears, and passions in this wonderful account of "Lee's Miserables" in the final year of the Civil War in Virginia. Covering a period during which Lee must continue to hold the Union armies at bay even though he has been deprived of his most talented subordinates, the author provides us with marvelous insights into what kept Lee's soldiers in uniform and willing to follow their commander despite the shadows lengthening over the Confederacy in 1864-65.I recommend this book to all of my students in a Civil War history course that I teach. Every student who has read it has thanked me for the suggestion. Well organized, highly readable, and thoroughly balanced, this is "must" reading for anyone who wishes to understand the 19th Century southerners who fought on even when hope had all but disappeared. Great work by a fine historian and talented author!

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