



Valley of the Shadow

Ralph Peters

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Winner of the 2015 Boyd Award for Literary Excellence in Military Fiction

In the Valley of the Shadow, they wrote their names in blood.

From a daring Confederate raid that nearly seized Washington, D.C., to a stunning reversal on the bloody fields of Cedar Creek, the summer and autumn of 1864 witnessed some of the fiercest fighting of our Civil War—in mighty battles now all but forgotten.

The desperate struggle for mastery of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, breadbasket of the Confederacy and the South's key invasion route into the North, pitted a remarkable cast of heroes in blue and gray against each other: runty, rough-hewn Phillip Sheridan, a Union general with an uncanny gift for inspiring soldiers, and Jubal Early, his Confederate counterpart, stubborn, raw-mouthed and deadly; the dashing Yankee boy-general, George Armstrong Custer, and the brilliant, courageous John Brown Gordon, a charismatic Georgian who lived one of the era's greatest love stories.

From hungry, hard-bitten Rebel privates to a pair of Union officers destined to become presidents, from a neglected hero who saved our nation's capital and went on to write one of his century's greatest novels, to doomed Confederate leaders of incomparable valor, Ralph Peters brings to life yesteryear's giants and their breathtaking battles with the same authenticity, skill and insight he offered readers in his prize-winning Civil War bestsellers, *Cain at Gettysburg* and *Hell or Richmond*.

Sharp as a bayonet and piercing as a bullet, *Valley of the Shadow* is a great novel of our grandest, most-tragic war.

Valley of the Shadow Details

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Author : Ralph Peters

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From Reader Review Valley of the Shadow for online ebook

Art says

Ralph Peters writes incredible Civil War novels that capture the feeling, strategy and movements of the battles.

This time around, he is writing about some lesser known 1864 battles as Philip Sheridan tries to wrest control of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley from Jubal Early. The scenes shift from Maryland Heights to Cedar Creek as the Union tries to remove the South's breadbasket and scene of repeated victories.

I was especially captured by the notion that two future presidents of the US (Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley) were working together to capture Winchester, Va.

But it is the strategies and the ebb and flow of the battles that make these novels stand out. That comes from Peters' career as a soldier. But his ability to capture it in an entertaining, captivating fashion makes it all the better.

I would compare his writing favorably to any of the other many Civil War novelists working today.

Dan says

This was the first book I read with the Civil War as the main subject matter. Based on the reviews from this website and my interest in military affairs, I thought this would be the ideal book for me. Unfortunately as much as I wanted to like this book I simply didn't. As I read the book I was unable to feel immersed in the story - something I am able to do with books that I enjoy. For me there were simply too many characters to follow and it was difficult to "get to know" each character more than in a superficial way. The book plodded along from one battle to the next but for me it lacked any excitement that a military novel should have.

By no means was this book bad (as I did finish it), but I can not recommend this book.

Steve Switzer says

Actually listened to this on audible and found it one of the best historical novels i have ever read(heard) . If the film gettysburg had been based on a ralph peters novel it would have been soo much better, gritty realistic with real men and real emotions , the fighting springs to life and you feel you were there . After Red Army i didnt think he could improve on it but he did .. excellent in every way.

Donna says

Overall, I liked this. I loved the era. Battles in the Civil War were well done. The research was thorough. But at times this read like nonfiction. It was very factual, but I can also say it was interesting and fascinating , but some of it felt like a regurgitation of information gleaned from internet resources. Sometimes my eyes felt

like they were glazing over like they did in Mr. Grogan's U.S. History class back in high school. (Sorry Mr. Grogan.)

I liked the detail given to the characters though. They seemed authentic. Even though this was centered on the Civil War, the characters was the draw for me. So 3 stars.

Gerald W Krueger says

A very good and interesting read.

It did not take very long to get into the feeling of this book and want to keep seeing what was coming next in the plans of the Generals. I enjoyed the book very much.

Andrew says

Another great Civil War novel from Ralph Peters, who is fast becoming a master. 'Valley of the Shadow' focuses on the brutal fight for control of the Shenandoah Valley. Jubal Early's Confederate forces square off against Phil Sheridan's Union armies. Well-written, well-researched and gripping. Only two more novels left in the series as it stands. We can only hope that Peters goes back and writes about the pre-Gettysburg battles. I'd love to read his treatment of Stonewall Jackson.

Carol Storm says

I'm really torn about this book. On the one hand, I can't honestly give it less than four stars. The battle scenes are explosive, the characters literally jump off the page, (especially feuding Confederate chieftains Jubal Early and John B. Gordon) and the fast-paced action never lets up from beginning to end.

On the other hand, when you take out the battle scenes and the tense man-to-man confrontations, what you get is a view of the Confederacy that is so sickeningly sweet it would make Melanie Wilkes gag. Every single Confederate officer is a perfect gentleman at all times. (Except General Jubal Early, who is a wonderful anti-hero. He plays Old Man Potter to John B. Gordon's Harry Bailey. It's A Wonderful War!)

As I was saying, every married officer is madly in love with his deliciously naughty wife who cannot wait for him to come home "when this cruel war is over." And here's the clincher. The one Confederate officer who is NOT happily married (his wife flies into hysterics on the wedding night and refuses to let him come near her) well, can you guess what happens? He gets wounded, shot right in the nut sack, and dies screaming in pain . . . but he's proud and at peace, you see, because he's done the "gentlemanly" thing and spared his wife further embarrassment. Because that's how Southern gentlemen are. They'd rather get themselves shot through the nut sack than cause a lady any pain. As my father used to say, who's gonna believe this?

On a related note, the author makes real-life Georgia General John B. Gordon into an absolutely irresistible scamp. And I don't mean that sarcastically. I loved this guy. He's funny, brave, witty, charming, always backs up his brother officers and adores his men, shows amazing patience with his foul-mouthed superior General Early, and (of course) is absolutely crazy about his wife Fanny. Oh, and after the war he helped found the Georgia chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. But Ralph Peters won't go there. He never goes there.

General Gordon is a great guy, and that's all there is to it. There was no darker side to the Confederacy, moral complexity doesn't exist, and there's no use in asking how the black characters in this novel feel about slavery. Because there are no black characters. Even though by the end of the Civil War the Union Army was thirty percent black. When is Ralph Peters going to write a novel about that Civil War?

I've never loved any book so much. I've never hated any book so much. Damn you, Ralph Peters!

Kelly says

I wouldn't consider myself a Civil War buff, but I did enjoy Peters' ability to bring a nearly forgotten period of history -and its soldiers - back to life. His vivid descriptions of battle scenes are on par with some of the best I've read.

Charles says

Thoroughly engrossed into the tales of the battles of the Shenandoah Valley during 1864. Ralph Peters characterizations of the individual soldiers as well as officers and his descriptions of the individual fights and hardships hit like a cannon ball. (this is the third in the Battle Hymn series). More importantly to me, I knew very little about the Valley campaign to me shame as I am from Virginia.

April Helms says

I'm using this one as my war category for the 2017 Book Riot challenge. Wasn't sure about this one at first; there are so many viewpoints this story is told from, which was a bit jarring in the beginning. But Peters is a master storyteller, and once I caught on to the various voices, I was quickly sucked into the story. Within a few chapters, I could generally identify whose point of view was being told without seeing the name. Now that is expert writing! Valley of the Shadow is a novelized take on the waning years of the Civil War, from the failed attempt of the Confederate army to seize Washington D.C. to the battles of Cedar Creek. As I mentioned, the story is told from many points of view, both Union and Confederate, and what is refreshing is that it is from historic figures that are not generally found in the history books or, if they are mentioned, are barely more than footnotes. There's the young and pious Confederate George Nichols, the foul-mouthed, foul-tempered Confederate General Jubal Early, the short but fiery Philip Sheridan, the level-headed "Rud" Hayes (who would go on to become the 19th president of the United States) and more. Many more. It's a lengthy read, but well worth it. Included are an explanation of military terms, plus several battle maps at the beginning of the chapters. Civil War and history buffs should check this one out.

Diane Moyle says

Once again Ralph Peters has written a stunning Civil War novel!! In this book, as in his other two Civil War

stories, "Cain at Gettysburg" and "Hell or Richmond", his characters are from both the North and the South. It covers the time period of 07/1864 to 03/1865 and Jubal Early's South's last gasp in the Shenandoah Valley against Philip Sheridan and his northern troops. You hear the tale from both Generals and enlisted men. This is a gritty, in the trenches account of these crucial months as both sides struggle for victory.

Mr. Peters characters are real!! You are privy to private thoughts of both leaders and their troops. He fills in their backgrounds about their wives, families and hopes and dreams for after the war which gives them depth. His characters are genuine and the reader feels as if you know them. You are engaged with these individuals and cheer them on and grieve with their pain.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Mr. Peters takes battles and people that are not normally written about and brings them to life! His writing style is fresh and real as is the language and situations. You will not be able to put this book down. If you haven't read his first two books, this is not a problem because they do not build on each other and you will definitely want to after you finish this one. I am highly anticipating his next book "The Damned of Petersburg" and have already added it to my "must" read list.

John Antal says

The Valley of the Shadow, by Ralph Peters is a superb historical fiction of the American Civil War. This is a book worth reading on multiple levels. History is a story of people, and Peter's historical novel brings both the private soldier and the key leaders to life. Peters' masterful depiction of character and leadership provide lessons that shoot of the pages to offer us a blueprint to better ourselves. Don't get me wrong, the purpose of this book is to entertain as much as it is to enlighten – and it is a very compelling read -- but it is also a shining example of how literature can become an instrument to help anyone become a better leader.

happy says

With this novel, Mr. Peters once again proves he is in the same league with the Shaaras, father and son, as far a Civil War historical fiction goes. In this novel Mr. Peters looks at the Shenandoah Valley campaign of 1864 from Jubal Earl's invasion/raid on Washington D.C. in July through the Battle of Cedar Creek in November. In telling the story his brings to life the commanders, Early and Sheridan, as well their subordinates. The confederate side of the story is mainly told through the eyes of one Early's division commanders, John Gordon and a private in one of his Georgia Regiments. The Union side of the campaign is told from the view point of Lew Wallace who was in command of troops in the Northern Shenandoah in July and later Rutherford B. Hayes, commander of one of Sheridan's brigades

The author's fondness for John Gordon, Lew Wallace and Rud Hayes really comes through in the novel. In his portrayal of the three men they come off very favorably, esp compared to both the commanders, Early and Sheridan.

Beginning with the Battle of Monocacy, where Gen Wallace had only 2300 militia facing Early's 17,000 veterans, Mr. Peters does an excellent job of putting the reader into the minds of the people who fought the battle. Gen Wallace's goal was to delay Early long enough for Grant to move troops from Petersburg to defend the capitol. As he is deciding where to make his stand he is reinforced by a division of VI Corps sans artillery. It arrives just in time to help him establish his line. The author does an excellent job of portraying Wallace's desperation as well and Early's and his troop's over confidence.

While he loses the battle, Wallace does succeed in delaying Early long enough for the rest of the VI Corps to arrive in Washington and prevent Early from occupying it. In a cameo appearance, the Union Army Chief of Staff, Henry Halleck is presented as saying in effect it doesn't matter the Wallace was able to delay a force three times his size for a day and enable forces to get to Washington, he lost so he will never have another command. Wallace didn't, but went on to much greater fame as the author of Ben Hur.

The Third Battle of Winchester is told mainly through the eyes of Rutherford Hayes, the future President. He is presented as a man with almost no ego – he doesn't care if he gets his star and struggling with the idea of returning to Congress if he wins his election as it would mean leaving his men. The scenes of his leading his brigade through the swamps to achieve a flanking attack are extremely well done.

The final battle in the novel is the Cedar Creek. This is mainly told through the eyes of John Gordon as he pleads for permission to take his division over a mountain at night in freezing cold and attack the Union Camps. He succeeds in getting permission and the joy of the successful surprise attack and again the over confidence of Early are well portrayed. During this battle the over confidence of the Union troops is also well done. The camps are poorly laid out for defense, Sheridan is in Washington explaining to Grant and Sec of War Wells that Early is no longer a threat, guards are not particularly alert etc. Hayes is instrumental in rallying the Union Troops and by the time Sheridan makes his famous ride Early is pretty much contained.

Some other famous people who make cameo appearances are George Custer and William McKinley – another future president.

In summary, I don't think anyone writing today can bring the reader in to world that was the American Civil War quite like LTC Peters. He has a way of bringing to life the struggles and joys of both high and low levels in the Civil War armies. I would rate this 4.25 stars rounded down for Good Reads.

David Schwinghammer says

I first discovered Ralph Peters when I read a fictionalized novel about the Civil War, FADED COAT OF BLUE, which was exceptional. He wrote it under the pen name Owen Parry.

Recently he's switched to his real name, but he's still writing fictionalized versions of Civil War battles. The emphasis in the Owen Parry novels was more toward characterization. In his most recent novels he's trying to bring little known Civil War heroics and the ordinary soldiers more to the forefront. VALLEY OF THE SHADOW deals with the battles occurring in the Shenandoah Valley while Grant had Lee under siege just outside Richmond at St. Petersburg. What Grant didn't know was that Lee had sent Jubal Early and his corps to try to frighten the North into negotiating an end to the war. And he would have done it if it hadn't been for Lew Wallace. Yes, that Lew Wallace, author of BEN HUR. Wallace's objective was to fight a delaying action with soldiers who had for one reason or other been deemed unfit and with willing civilians. They wouldn't have been able to hold long if Wallace hadn't stopped a train containing a division commanded by James B. Ricketts. He had orders to take his troops to another position, but once Wallace explained what was happening, he was willing to throw his troops into the fray. By the time they were forced to retreat Grant was able to send enough troops to scare Early away from Washington.

I didn't know about Lee's sly maneuver, and I was a history major. But this book is really about General Sheridan vs. Jubal Early. For those who know a little about some Civil War battles. Early was in charge of a corps at Gettysburg. On the second day, Lee sent him a message telling him to attack if the situation presents itself, or something equally ambiguous. Early chose not to attack and you know what happened on the third day during Pickett's charge. Early also replaced Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, who was accidentally killed

by his own men at Chancellorsville. Let's just say he had a bad psychological complex and was tired of losing. He was also a crude old boy Southerner who constantly chewed tobacco. In contrast, one of his division commanders was General John Brown Gordon who was more of a Southern aristocracy type with charm and ability; his men loved him, and Early was jealous. We get to see Sheridan and Early fight three battles. In one Sheridan gets the jump on Early with a death defying maneuver; in another it's Early's turn, but not for long. This is where there's a glaring problem. Peters shows us General Gordon and another general looking for a way to get the jump on Sheridan. I'm not sure if Gordon knew Sheridan was in Washington dealing with Halleck, the general of the army, and Secretary of War Stanton who wanted him to set up a defense of Washington. Of course Little Phil wanted to destroy Early's army once and for all. Anyway they climb to a mountaintop and notice that Sheridan's army is pointed in the wrong direction, expecting Early to attack what looks like a dangling flank. So . . . if Gordon can find a ford to cross the river he can sneak up behind Sheridan and drive him from the field. The problem is there's a fork in the road. Gordon puts a branch across the fork leading to the ford. But when he gets there the next morning, the branch has been moved to the other side. Gordon sends an officer to ask a farmer where the ford is; the farmer says it's the second branch that's correct, and he's right. There are also some union sympathizers in a boat on the river who see Gordon and the other general snooping around. They decide to tell the union commander, but they don't think he'll listen. To me, this was some discombobulated foreshadowing; neither incident made any difference.

We also meet some familiar people during the battles. Rutherford B. Hayes is one of the generals. Those of you who know your presidents will recognize our 19th commander in chief. William McKinley was also a young lieutenant during some of the battles. And George Armstrong Custer led a cavalry unit and later a division. Finally, Peters has confederate private George W. Nichols tell part of the story. One of Peters's sources was Nichols's memoir: *A SOLDIER'S STORY OF HIS REGIMENT* (61st Georgia).

Glenn Chapman says

Peters details the battles of the Civil War during the summer of 1864. He details as only he can the brazen attack by General Jubal Early that almost caught Washington D.C. sleeping, and capturing the city and Union Leaders including President Lincoln. His visuals on the battle at Monocacy are legendary. Col. Peters knows a thing or two about the Civil War - as much of a Civil War buff I am, and the 100 or so books I've read on the subject, I never knew until Peters book just how close the Union came to losing the war. A great read especially for Civil War fans.
