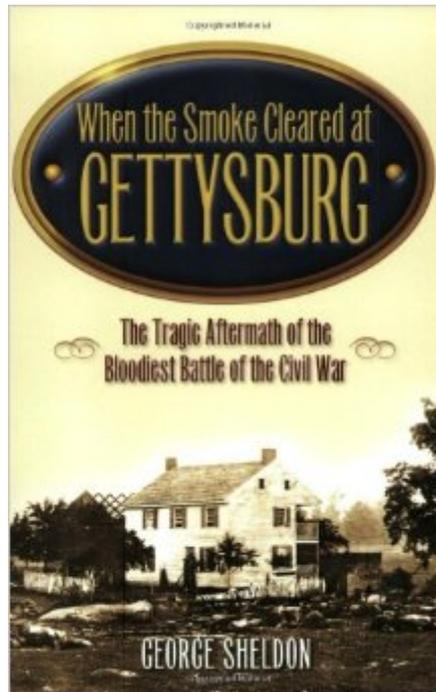


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When The Smoke Cleared At Gettysburg



Synopsis

In July 1863 the bloodiest and most decisive battle of the Civil War was fought near the sleepy town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. While many books have been written about the landmark battle, *When the Smoke Cleared at Gettysburg* differs from the rest by detailing the horrific aftermath of the battle, detailing what it takes to put a town back together after two armies have fought through its streets and across the surrounding countryside. The small town of 2,400 inhabitants was faced with the enormous problem of burying more than 7,000 dead soldiers and caring for 20,000 wounded men who had been left behind by both armies. Fields that just days earlier maintained crops and livestock were now littered with firearms, munitions, and swords, and nearly every building still standing was turned into a field hospital with mounds of amputated limbs left behind after the surgeons had completed their grizzly work. *When the Smoke Cleared at Gettysburg* provides firsthand accounts of life in the town and on the battlefield in the days and months following the brutal fighting. Included are stories and vivid descriptions from soldiers, reporters, civilians, doctors, and nurses. Good Samaritans came to help the wounded and the dying, and profiteers and souvenir hunters were not far behind. Then came the politicians, followed by legions of families seeking the remains of their fallen sons. *When the Smoke Cleared at Gettysburg* presents the heart-breaking human misery resulting from this battle and by the ongoing war wherever it went. From the backbreaking chore of clearing the battlefield of the wounded and dead to nursing the amputees, one can learn much of the battle by seeing what ordinary people who were pulled into the war did to survive and rebuild their lives.

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Customer Reviews

The Battle of Gettysburg (July 1--3, 1863) was the bloodiest battle of the Civil War, resulting in over 51,000 casualties. The Battle itself was only the climax of Robert E. Lee's Pennsylvania campaign which also included a raid on Gettysburg by Confederate General Jubal Early on June 26, and a long difficult retreat back to Virginia by Lee's defeated army following the battle. The story of this great battle has been told many times. Although there are also good accounts of the aftermath of the battle and of the effects of the battle on the town, they are not as numerous as the books devoted to the combat and, frequently, tend to be devoted to specific issues (such as the care of the wounded following the battle.) I found George Sheldon's book "When the Smoke Cleared at Gettysburg" (2003) performed a real service. It presents a good overview of the aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg in a simple clear way. The book is intended for nonspecialists with an interest in the battle and in the Civil War. On the whole, it is ably written and well researched. I learned a great deal from it. The book begins with a good and appropriate overview of the history of the town of Gettysburg before the Civil War, including its demographics (about eight percent of the residents of Gettysburg were African American) and politics. There is a discussion of the effect on the town of the pending Confederate invasion during June, 1863 and of the effect of Early's raid late in June. This is followed by a brief treatment of the Battle itself. There is an excellent picture of the Confederate Army's retreat through the mud and the rain beginning on July 4 and of the hardships the retreat imposed on many wounded soldiers.

I really do not understand some of the very negative reviews written by some here. I have read most of the 'After Battle' books that are out there along with a great many books of all types about Gettysburg. I began reading them in 1957. The author has written for the Gettysburg novice and very well read alike. For the novice he starts briefly with Native American times, the founding of the town by Gettys son and brings it rapidly up to the time of the Civil War, then he very briefly describes the battle. If one's interest is stirred the reader can get into battle details by the plethora of books on the 3 day battle available. The author then takes us to the immediate aftermath of the battle on July 4 and continues it on until the founding of the National Cemetery and Lincoln's Address. He then again briefly takes us through the founding of the Park and up to modern times. He does all this through documentation written by eyewitness, both townspeople and military. For the well read, even ones like myself who have read most every book regarding the battle aftermath,

I found much new material of great interest. From the early history of the town, to the founding of the National Cemetery and in-between I expanded my knowledge greatly. The only way for me to go now is to read some of the townsfolk diaries published or collected at various locations from which the author quotes. I suspect that some of the negative reviewers were nit-pickers, like arguing about the shoes as the MO for Heath, yet I learned from this book that no shoe factory - in the modern sense - existed at Gettysburg , but I was surprised at the very large number of cottage industry shoemakers that worked in the town.

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