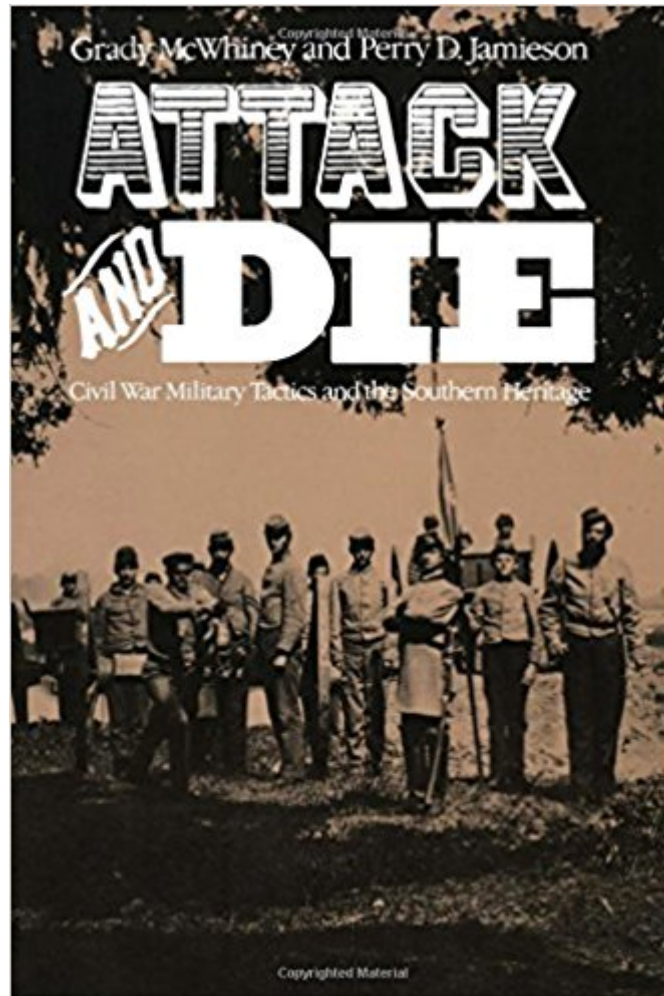




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Attack And Die: Civil War Military Tactics And The Southern Heritage



Synopsis

In the first twenty-seven months of combat 175,000 Southern soldiers died. This number was more than the entire Confederate military force in the summer of 1861, and it far exceeded the strength of any army that Lee ever commanded. More than 80,000 Southerners fell in just five battles. At Gettysburg three out of every ten Confederates present were hit; one brigade lost 65 percent of its men and 70 percent of its field officers in a single charge. A North Carolina regiment started the action with some 800 men; only 216 survived unhurt. Another unit lost two-thirds of its men as well as its commander in a brief assault.

Why did the Confederacy lose so many men? The authors contend that the Confederates bled themselves nearly to death in the first three years of the war by making costly attacks more often than the Federals. Offensive tactics, which had been used successfully by Americans in the Mexican War, were much less effective in the 1860s because an improved weapon – the rifle – had given increased strength to defenders. This book describes tactical theory in the 1850s and suggests how each related to Civil War tactics. It also considers the development of tactics in all three arms of the service during the Civil War.

In examining the Civil War the book separates Southern from Northern tactical practice and discusses Confederate military history in the context of Southern social history. Although the Southerners could have offset their numerical disadvantage by remaining on the defensive and forcing the Federals to attack, they failed to do so. The authors argue that the Southerners' consistent favoring of offensive warfare was attributable, in large measure, to their Celtic heritage: they fought with the same courageous dash and reckless abandon that had characterized their Celtic forebears since ancient times. The Southerners of the Civil War generation were prisoners of their social and cultural history: they attacked courageously and were killed – on battlefields so totally defended by the Federals that not even a chicken could get through.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a veritable kaleidoscope, showing pictures ranging from the seemingly hyperbolic to those that are clearly representative of the finest scholarship to be found anywhere.

Grady McWhiney is professor of history, and director and distinguished senior fellow, Center for the Study of Southern History and Culture, The University of Alabama. Perry D. Jamieson is historian, Strategic Air Command, United States Air Force, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

Good book

The thrust of this book can be found in its portrayal of the brave men who clashed over hill and dale, river and stream, and hallowed ground with bayonets, rifles, and artillery pieces of all descriptions, all deadly to humans, especially those infused with a Celtic Culture whose dictum was 'attack and die.' This war of 10,000 battles killed north of 600,000 soldiers and men, And in 'Attack and Die' you see just exactly who, where, how, and why. They'd line up, shoulder to shoulder and attack at the same pace while screaming remarkably like the Celts who attacked the Romans, oh those many years ago. Courage was at a premium and devil may care, the mood. The book cites attack after attack, under all different circumstances, with an overhang of an overriding sense of error, that is that the newer rifles were accurate at much greater range than they had been in the Mexican war just 15 years before. Even at this the north's advantage in men and material could have been somewhat nullified had the southern leaders changed their tactics. But old habits die hard, and Lee, even without Jane Fonda on network television, could have fought a guerilla war resulting in two countries with fewer casualties. The confederates were brave men, with great spirit, a culture of honor, and what did they get? Lynard Skynner tribute bands? After reading this you'll see this war in a different light.

This book was a requirement..I enjoyed it a lot in my Civil War Class..you will as well. Give it away

when you are done because paperbacks are worthless used.

The focus of this book is boldly stated on page xv: "How and why the Confederates lost so many men is the burden of this book. We contend that the Confederates bled themselves nearly to death in the first three years of the war by making costly attacks more often than did the Federals." One theme of the book is that warfare had been changed by the outset of the Civil War, with the development of rifled guns. Masses of troops firing at one another at close range made some sense with the inaccurate muskets of the Revolutionary War or the Napoleonic Wars. However, such formations made much less sense as rifles increased accuracy and range. Among specific arguments that the book makes is that the romance of the bayonet was pretty much done; evidence suggests that rather few casualties came from bayonet thrusts? Why not? It was difficult for attacking soldiers to get close enough to defenders because of the rifle fire and the use of defensive positioning. Fieldworks thwarted many massed charges; soldiers on the defensive were ordinarily better placed for victory than those who attacked. Just so, the value of cavalry with sabers bared, charging. The bulk of cavalry combat came with troopers fighting as infantry did, not fighting from atop their horses. Doctrine lagged behind facts-on-the-ground. Only a few officers began to redefine how to carry out an offensive against entrenchments (e.g., Emory Upton). And, according to the authors, Confederates appeared less willing to give up the tactical offensive. Why? Here comes the rather bizarre part of the book. The authors contend that southerners were more Celtic and Northern troops more English. And, the contention goes, Celtic warriors fought on the offensive (there is even an effort to tie the Rebel yell to Celtic warriors). At this point, the argument, to me, falls to pieces. Nonetheless, up to that point, the analysis makes some sense. Other books have explored this thesis, too, but--until the end--this book compares well.

"How Robert E. Lee Lost the Civil War" (by Bonekemper) - also well researched - readily concurs with this book - with an obvious focus more so on the eastern theater as epitomized by Lee's command of the ANV). This book is backed by books by other renowned historians provide both general and at times specific agreement. As to bias, I note that this author specifically indicates his belief that - properly fought - the Confederacy could have won the Civil War. With the generalship that they had, I think (in my own researched opinion) that had General Longstreet been put in command of The Army of the West and General Jackson been put in charge of the Army of the East (not just the - primary - Army of Northern Virginia) with General Lee an overall Chief of Staff (similar to Scott and then Halleck) with a War Department insulating between the CSA military and

President Davis, with Davis not insisting on his personal belief in his military leadership prowess - and interfering with incorrect strategically and operational orders way too much - and concentrating (along with the Confederate Congress) on forcing States to release more of their local militia forces into national service MAY have been the Confederacy's better chance at a victory... an early declaration emancipation slaves (with the encouragement of their enlistment into CSA forces, use as paid workers, etcetera) may have provided the extra push necessary to result in England and / or France recognizing the CSA and potentially entering the war on the Confederate side (as France did to a tremendous effect in the American Revolutionary War resulting in a likely much earlier victory). Strategically it would have also made much more sense to have established the Confederate capital more in the central or southern CSA rather than Richmond, Va. That placement forced an excessive focus on a "forward operational battle" mindset. The fact that the CSA "Army of the East" was in fact the ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA demonstrates that. IMO, a great many North Carolinians, Texans, Alabamans, and other troops from Deep South and even western regiments died to in reality protect Richmond and Lee's home state Virginia (the same Lee very much AGAINST secession and prepared to accept command of Union forces - until his home state, to his admitted sorrow, voted to secede... on my then did he resign his U.S. Army commission and offer his services to the Confederacy). Strategically, operationally, and tactically the PRIMARY asset was the military manpower of the Confederacy... especially with being outnumbered in that category at least 4-1 (more likely 6-1). And that asset was uselessly squandered. Granted in both theaters of the war, but especially so in the eastern theater of which Lee has an established responsibility for that fact. In his first 14 months of command, the ANV lost 80,000 casualties while opposing Union forces lost 73,000 casualties. On a PROPORTIONAL basis, the Union would have lost 200,000 casualties minimum and likely more like +250,000.... but with the probable exception of Fredericksburg, Lee's losses compared to his opponent's losses and force ratio were never similar, with Lee's losses proportionally much higher (and worse, like Rome, the Union could much more readily replace losses while the Confederacy could not).

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