

# **Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant Study Guide**

**Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant by Ulysses S. Grant**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1 through 14.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 15 through 26.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 27 through 39.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 40 through 49.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 50 through.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 59 through Appendix.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>



# Plot Summary

Ulysses S. Grant was born in Pennsylvania in 1822. His father was strict and had definite ideas about many things, including Grant's education. When Grant was a teenager, his father announced that he'd applied to West Point on Grant's behalf and that Grant would be attending college there. Grant didn't want to go, fearing that he might fail, but admitted that he easily passed the entrance examination. He didn't often apply himself to his studies but did complete his education. At the end of his term at West Point, Grant expected to work with the military for a year or two before looking for a position as a teacher. The Mexican War commenced and Grant found himself caught up in it. Grant described aspects of the war, including the political wrangling involved.

As the war came to an end, Grant returned home where his young wife and family had lived without him for most of his married life. Grant tried his hand at farming and worked daily to make a living for his family. He eventually gave up the endeavor and went briefly into the real estate business before moving to become a clerk in his father's general store. Grant was working there when the call came out for volunteers to serve in the Union Army. Based on his previous military experience, Grant was put in charge of a group of volunteers.

Grant believed himself capable of commanding and was soon entrusted with that duty. Grant was promoted twice more over coming months. Though he sometimes struggled with his duties and worried occasionally about being in charge, he took the leadership role seriously. Grant described in details many of the major battles, including the Battle of the Wilderness and the attacks at Shiloh, Vicksburg and Atlanta. Grant spent a great deal of time planning tactics and deciding how to make the best use of the Confederate troops available. The Union Army faced the incredible task of keeping the army fed. Grant issued orders to forage as much as possible from the land and the local farmers. He also established supply lines as the first order of business in every situation.

With the end of the war seemingly inevitable, Grant sent a letter to Lee, urging that the Confederates surrender. Lee responded that he wasn't certain the Southern cause was hopeless, but that he was willing to talk about terms of surrender in order to avoid further bloodshed. When the two military leaders met at Appomattox, Lee was dressed in a new uniform and was carrying an elaborate sword. Grant compared that to his own worn uniform and his unkempt appearance. Lee kept his emotions completely hidden but Grant admitted that he felt depressed.



# Chapters 1 through 14

## Chapters 1 through 14 Summary and Analysis

In chapter one, Ulysses S. Grant detailed his parentage. His mother was Hannah Simpson and her family was from Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, and he knew little about her parentage. Grant's father, Jesse R. Grant, was the third son of his family. Grant's parents, Jesse and Hannah, married in 1822 and lived at Point Pleasant, Ohio, when Grant was born. A year later the family moved to Georgetown and lived there until Grant left to attend West Point. Jesse was insistent when it came to Grant's education. In chapter two, Grant discovered that he was to attend West Point. Grant objected, but only because he feared he couldn't pass. He took a leisurely trip to the school in May and easily passed the admission test but still didn't expect to graduate. He wasn't happy with the military lifestyle and had no intention of remaining in the army but planned to teach. Grant admitted that he didn't apply himself and spent a great deal of time reading novels, though he said they weren't "the trashy sort". Grant was impressed with General Scott at West Point. He planned to do a short stint in the military before teaching. He asked for cavalry but was assigned to the infantry.

In chapter three, Grant reported in September at the Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. He was with the Fourth United States Infantry and was to participate in the Mexican War. Grant had a promising conversation with a West Point professor but knew that he'd have to serve in the Mexican War first. In chapter four, Grant's regiment left for Corpus Christi. Grant noted that the presence of U.S. soldiers was supposed to provoke an attack but didn't. While the United States wanted a war with Mexico over disputed territory, Grant said it was important that Mexico made the first hostile move.

In chapter five, the military regiment left Corpus Christi and Grant was promoted to second Lieutenant. He described breaking mules for working with the military. Grant had several horses of his own at this time. In chapter six, Grant talked about a particular horse he had that was unbroken to the saddle. The first day, the rider and horse had "frequent disagreements between us as to which way we should go, and sometimes whether we should go at all". In chapter seven, the Mexican War began. Grant said he regretted his involvement. He continued to talk about the mules and said that he would excuse anyone who cussed at a mule, though he was personally not one to cuss at all. In chapter eight, there was a battle at Monterey and the soldier wintered there. Grant said most civilians who were still in the area were friendly with the United States soldiers.

In chapter nine, Grant went into the political aspects of the Mexican War. The military moved to Vera Cruz where the Americans beat at the city's walls until General Morales, the commander of the city, surrendered and General Scott's forces moved into the city. In chapter ten, the military moved quickly from Vera Cruz to avoid the potential for yellow fever outbreaks among the men. They headed toward the capital city. Grant contrasted General Scott with General Taylor. Scott was very conscious of his



appearance while Taylor dressed casually with a focus on comfort. He went on to say that both were good leaders and Taylor the better writer. Scott was more likely to have fully-prepared and planned orders for a situation while Taylor was more likely to issue orders to meet a demanding situation.

Chapter eleven began with Grant's note that the army moved from Puebla to the City of Mexico over Rio Frio mountain. General Scott was joined by Nicholas P. Trist, a U.S. representative charged with negotiating a peace treaty. The details as presented by Trist were that Mexico would gain Texas but give up all rights to California and New Mexico. Grant described battles that soon followed, including a fight at Molino del Rey, and said that battle in particular could have been avoided completely. In chapter twelve, Grant was promoted to first lieutenant. Grant said that he looked back on the taking of "the City of Mexico" and could see that the troops should have moved in from a different direction than the one taken. He followed that comment with the observation that any situation is cleared when one looked back and that he didn't know everything there was to know about the war being waged. Grant said that once the city fell, it seemed that long-term occupation would be necessary.

In chapter thirteen, Grant attended a bullfight and said he didn't understand why people enjoyed the sport. He described an incident in which a bull fighter was apparently killed but was later seen watching another fight. The troops move on to Popocatepetl and then to the Caves of Mexico. In chapter fourteen, Grant married Julia Dent. As Grant's leave came to an end, he was ordered by the military to Detroit, Michigan, where the couple spent the next two years "with but few important incidents". Eventually, Grant was ordered to San Francisco.

When Grant's uniform first arrived, he put it on and went out in public, apparently seeking acclaim for his military service. He said that in his imagination, everyone was in awe of him. Grant recalled his first sighting of General Scott and said that he believed everyone would be looking at him in the same way. However, he was taunted by a ragged child. His was greatly disappointed and more so when a man from his town sewed a stripe down a pair of pants in obvious imitation of Grant's uniform.

Grant talked about seeing a duel and said that two men had settled "a difference of opinion with rifles, at twenty paces". He didn't dwell on the duel itself and said he didn't even recall whether either of the two men involved was injured. Instead, he talked about the impact of the duel on his own thoughts. Grant said that he would never have been brave enough to fight a duel but it was not raw courage he was referring to. Instead, Grant talked about the fact that he would be willing to make amends for anything he'd done to wrong another, and that he would never allow someone who had wronged him to choose the method with which Grant would "execute" the man.



# Chapters 15 through 26

## Chapters 15 through 26 Summary and Analysis

In chapter fifteen, Grant arrived in San Francisco and said there were many there seeking their fortunes in gold. He talked about the Indians, saying that the trades between Indians and whites had originally been done in pelts, but business had moved to silver half-dollars. Grant said that Indians didn't trust store owners to add up multiple purchases but would pay for each separately. If an Indian received a fifty-dollar gold piece, he immediately traded it for silver half-dollars so he could more easily keep up with how much he had. Grant noted that the fifty-dollar gold pieces were not government issue but were common in the area and were called "slugs".

In chapter sixteen, Grant resigned from the military. He and Julia had two children by this time and Grant moved the family to land she owned near St. Louis. Grant built a house and sought to make a living from the land. He said he worked hard, but in 1858, he became ill with a recurring fever and that fall sold out everything but the land. He went into the real estate business with Julia's cousin, Harry Boggs. The following May, Grant moved to Galena, Illinois, where he began working as a clerk in his father's store. Grant's younger brother died of consumption in 1861. In chapter seventeen, states continue to secede from the Union and the Civil War breaks out in April of 1861. Lincoln called for volunteers and Grant joined, taking control of the other volunteers until they arrived at their assignments. During a brief leave to go home, Grant wrote a letter to Adjutant-General Colonel L. Thomas, saying that he'd been educated at the government's expense and now wanted to serve, and that he believed himself capable of commanding a regiment.

In chapter eighteen, Grant left Galena as commander of the 21st Regiment. In chapter nineteen, Grant was named Brigadier-General and said he was surprised by the promotion. He was sent to Ironton, Missouri, with the 21st Illinois, and eventually on to Jefferson City. While there, he met Colonel Jefferson B. Davis for the first time. Davis had orders that Grant would return to St. Louis where Grant discovered that he was to take command of the large district in Missouri and Illinois. In chapter twenty, Grant's troops came under fire for the first time at Belmont and he said they reacted like veteran fighters. At one point, Grant was inside a building and took a moment's rest on a couch. He got up and seconds later a musket ball struck the couch, exactly where he'd been moments earlier. Grant said he lost 485 men in the battle and that the Confederates lost 642.

In chapter twenty-one, Grant described the assault and capture of Fort Henry. In chapter twenty-two, Grant planned to attack Fort Donelson but was hampered by heavy rains. Grant cited the nature of the fort's commander and predicted little opposition. Grant said he knew they'd have to attack quickly because, as a Confederate stronghold, reinforcements would be inevitable. Grant took the fort, demanding unconditional surrender. In chapter twenty-three, Grant received another promotion, this time to



Major-General of the volunteers. In this role, he ordered a march on Nashville. There was some wrangling over the command and Grant was briefly relieved of the command then returned to the position. In chapter twenty-four, Grant arrived with the army at Pittsburg Landing. With forces split between Crump's Landing and Pittsburg, Grant feared most for Crump's but believed that neither could be lost. On a Friday, Grant took a fall with his horse and was injured, though not as seriously as he might have been because of the softness of the rain-soaked ground. Grant said the Confederate troops were driven steadily back and eventually retreated. Grant said the victory was cinched by the arrival of General W.H.L. Wallace, though Buell's arrival was also timed well.

In chapter twenty-five, Grant said Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston was wounded at Shiloh and, refusing to give up his command because the wound was not severe, remained on his horse until loss of blood until he was so weak that he died. Grant described the battle, saying that some have said they should have been entrenched and that there were heavy losses on both sides. In chapter twenty-six, the Union troops advanced on Corinth, Mississippi, and soon reported that the city had been captured. Grant believed that "a bloodless advance to Atlanta, to Vicksburg, or to any other desired point south of Corinth" would have been possible, but the advantage was not pressed.

Grant described the unrest of the nation in the winter of 1860-1861. He talked about the fact that an American elected president should be free to take the office amid fanfare but that Lincoln had been forced to travel in secret. Grant said that Lincoln would certainly have been assassinated if he'd tried to travel openly across the country that was suddenly facing such turmoil.

After Grant enlisted in the army at the beginning of the Civil War, the women of Galena asked him to describe in detail the army uniform. They then formed a coalition to provide good quality uniforms for all the volunteers. This was bound to be a boost to Grant's self-esteem after the teasing he'd taken when he'd first enlisted all those years earlier.

Grant's time at West Point and in the military meant that he knew many of the other long-term military men from both sides of the Civil War. At one point, he'd been dressed as a common soldier and watching as the Rebels passed by. A Confederate officer later said that he'd pointed Grant out to his men, saying that they were welcome to shoot him, but that no one did.



# Chapter 27 through 39

## Chapter 27 through 39 Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-seven, Grant moved to Memphis, where he set up headquarters. The move was prompted, in part, by his "nominal command" situation caused by the proximity of so many other experienced commanders. As Grant made the journey, he encountered a Union loyalist, Mr. De Loche, who said there were Confederates in the area and that a neighbor, a Southern sympathizer, was certain to report Grant's presence. Grant's situation changed yet again and he assumed the role of district commander in West Tennessee. He returned to Corinth where he was faced with the daunting task of arranging accommodations for a large number of forces. That August, Grant received orders to support the army, as much as possible, with the possessions of those favoring the Southern cause.

In chapter twenty-eight, Grant described the battle of Luka. Grant said that he wasn't pleased with the results. In chapter twenty-nine, troops supporting Grant at Corinth were moved out and Grant said it put him in the unenviable position of being on the defensive. Grant said General Rosecrans, who had not been successful at Corinth, took the wrong road in his advance again upon Corinth. Rosecrans wanted to pursue farther than Jonesboro but Grant, believing Confederate forces waiting in a good position, would wipe out Rosecrans and ordered him back.

In chapter thirty, Grant described the battle at Vicksburg and Sherman's advance along the Mississippi River. Grant said that he continued to order the taking of supplies from any Southern sympathizer. Former slaves join up with the army and Grant's orders were to allow them to remain within the protection of the military, as long as the slaves arrive of their free will. Grant said that he had no orders to feed them, but couldn't allow them to starve. Grant said that he and Sherman coordinated their movements. The Confederates destroyed Union supplies intended for Grant's army and he sent troops out in widening circles to gather everything they could find to each from the Southern sympathizers. In chapter thirty-one, Grant's headquarters were moved to Holly Springs. He assumed command at Young's Point and described in detail the attempts to fortify the area around Vicksburg.

In chapter thirty-two, Grant described the pressure of public opinion and said that no matter what criticism occurred, President Lincoln stood behind him, providing support. On April 20, 1863, Grant issued a series of orders, including an order sending John A. McClernand to the right wing, Sherman to the left, and James B. McPherson at the middle. In chapter thirty-three, Grant set up a supply depot at Perkins' plantation and described a sense of relief. In chapter thirty-four, the Union troops captured Port Gibson. Grant was accompanied by his thirteen-year-old son. In chapter thirty-five, Grant learned that McPherson's campaign was successful and Grant, who was with Sherman's men, pressed the advantage in order to capture Jackson. The fighting





continued and Grant described in detail the movements of the men and the four-hour battle at Champion's Hill.

In chapter thirty-six, Grant said the campaign had been successful in physically splitting two important Confederate troops. That day, he received orders from General Halleck to change his position, but Grant told the message bearer that Halleck's orders would be different if he knew the army's current situation, and based on that assumption, he refused to obey. A few days later, Grant joined Sherman on his march into Vicksburg. A few days later Grant was riding among the troops when he heard complaints that they had had no bread for several days. Grant reassured them that roads were being constructed and said that the rations of coffee and bread were "greatly appreciated". The assault on Vicksburg resulted in tremendous losses. Grant said he heard reports of advance but could see for himself that it wasn't true. In chapter thirty-six, Grant continued the siege on Vicksburg knowing that they would eventually run out of food, ammunition and men to fight. Grant said that trying to create a fortified position as near as possible to the Confederate position was difficult. In chapter thirty-eight, the siege on Vicksburg continued until the Confederates called for a truce.

In chapter thirty-nine, Grant looked back on the battle at Vicksburg and outlined a plan to assault Mobile that was eventually vetoed. A horse fell on Grant and left him painfully bruised and swollen. Sherman declined to take command in Grant's place but did "assist" while Grant recovered. Grant was next ordered to report to Cairo and left before he was completely healed.

Grant described the use of the trenches at Vicksburg. He said that they were very near the Confederate positions along these trenches and that they were built deep so that the men could walk around without fear of being shot by the enemy. Grant talked about the men he commanded and other commanders, as well as his relationships with these groups. He seemed to care what the men thought and to be interested in an honorable showing. He mentioned the use of an exploding shell used by the Confederates in an apparent attempt to keep the Union men on their guard, though Grant said he couldn't remember a single death from that tactic. Grant also talked about Sherman questioning an advance Grant had planned after the siege at Vicksburg. Sherman apparently wrote to Grant's superior, seeking to force Grant to heed the advice of other commanders. Grant said that he didn't see any reason to change his plans, even after having heard of Sherman's concern. It's a statement of Grant's personality that he noted that he never mentioned it to Sherman. A less confident leader might have sought to gain Sherman's trust by discussing the issue.

Grant noted after the surrender of Vicksburg that the men taken prisoner talked and mingled with the Union Army "as if they had been fighting for the same cause". Grant said that he placed no restrictions on the prisoners but depended on the Confederate commanders to keep the men in check.



# Chapters 40 through 49

## Chapters 40 through 49 Summary and Analysis

In chapter forty, Grant arrived in Cairo and was sent on to Louisville, where he met Secretary of War Stanton. Grant said he'd never before met Stanton, though they'd conversed on several occasions. Grant was assigned to command the Military Division of Mississippi. Grant traveled to Alabama where he met with Rosecrans, another commander who had troops in serious distress at Chattanooga. Grant said that Rosecrans had good suggestions to alleviate the situation and that he didn't understand why Rosecrans hadn't already put the plans in place. At Grant's request, Sherman was transferred to take over the command of the Army of Tennessee which was headquartered near Grant's location. In chapter forty-one, Grant tours the area and the first order of business is to create a workable supply line. He said that it was obvious that the troops were relieved when rations were again flowing to them.

In chapter forty-two, Grant described the military situation. He outlined troops, their positions and their strengths under specific commanders. Grant ordered a commander named General Dodge to begin rebuilding the railroad though they have only primitive tools and Dodge's abilities with which to work. Sherman prepared to march on Bridgeport. In chapter forty-three, Sherman is ordered to prepare to attack Chattanooga and he successfully maneuvers into position. In chapter forty-three, Grant described the various points of attack, including that of Sherman at a place called Missionary Ridge. In chapter forty-four, Grant described the actual battle. Grant knew that the Confederate Commander Bragg was among those facing the Union Army. Grant told a story about Bragg that he said epitomized Bragg's character. According to the story, Bragg was serving as quartermaster for a regiment while commanding a group within that regiment. As commander, he filled out a request form that was submitted to the quartermaster. Bragg, as quartermaster, turned down the request. Bragg, as commander, appealed the decision to a superior who noted that Bragg had managed to argue with every commander in the army, including himself.

In chapter forty-five, Grant was moved to Knoxville and established a headquarters there. General Burnside found himself in distress for rations. The loyalists soon began to float rafts of provisions down the river to a spot where the Union men snagged the supplies and dragged them in. Added to cattle provided for the soldiers, the situation was resolved. Grant outlined a letter from Lincoln who expressed gratitude for Grant having played an important role in the war situation at Chattanooga. In chapter forty-six, Grant was promoted to

Lieutenant General in command of the Union Army. In that role, he met Lincoln for the first time. Lincoln said that his lack of military expertise was a problem and that he expected Grant to make decisions based on his own military experience and to carry those out with the assurance that Lincoln and the government were behind him. Grant promised to do just that.



In chapter forty-seven, Grant reviewed the current military situation. Grant wrote a lengthy letter outlining a new plan to move all the Union troops in tandem to a central goal. Grant appointed Sheridan commander of the cavalry, believing that body of the military had been underutilized to that point. Grant had another meeting with Lincoln, When Grant outlined his plan and reason for advancing, Lincoln said that he understood and compared it to a saying he'd heard, "If a man can't skin he must hold a leg while somebody else does". In chapter forty-eight, a new campaign got underway, with Grant in command. He described the details of the first raid of the cavalry under Sheridan's command. In chapter forty-nine, Sherman advanced into Georgia and the siege of Atlanta was outlined. A change in Confederate commanders alerted Grant that there was likely to be a change in tactics, a fact that was soon proven true. Grant said the campaign against Atlanta lasted some four months and "was one of the most memorable in history". Grant said there was little about the campaign to rouse criticism from him.

Grant described the condition of Union troops as he was arriving at Chattanooga. He said that they had little wood available to them and their clothing was insufficient for the coming winter, but that there was no way to get supplies in until the reinforcements arrived.

Grant described the men posted at the edge of the river at Chattanooga and said they were accustomed to seeing Confederates getting water from the opposite side of the river. Grant and other officers were within full view - and rifle range - of the Confederates one day but the enemy never shot at them. On another occasion, Grant saw a man drawing water from a tree that had fallen in the river and, believing him to be a Union man, questioned him before discovering that he was actually a Confederate soldier.



# Chapters 50 through

## Chapters 50 through Summary and Analysis

In chapter fifty, Grant said that soon after the fall of Atlanta, the Army of the Potomac began the campaign that would eventually result in the fall of the Confederate capital. The march began with a supply of ten days' rations, a supply of ammunition and a herd of cattle being driven along with the army. Each man carried three days' supply of food in addition to what was being hauled. As a wagon was emptied, it returned to a base camp where it was again filled with the same load and returned to the army camps. The march was grueling and Grant said that everyone had been told to carry only what was necessary, but he saw various items discarded along the way in soldiers' efforts to lighten their loads. The Army of the Potomac clashed with Lee's forces at the Battle of the Wilderness, and Grant noted that there were dead and wounded left in a large, wooded area. When the woods caught on fire, there was no way to reach the wounded and those unable to drag themselves away died there.

In chapter fifty-one, Grant looked back on the battle. He said the Union forces were commended for their ability to cross a stream in close proximity to the Confederate troops, then performing as a unit. Grant said that the army always created a trench fronted with a compilation of wood and dirt whenever they stopped, even if just for the night. He said this proved effective at providing cover though in the case of the Battle of the Wilderness, the wood caught on fire and the heat became so intense that it drove some men away.

In chapter fifty-two, Grant detailed the battle at the Courthouse at Spotsylvania. Grant sent a letter to Major-General Halleck, Chief of Staff of the Army in Washington, outlining the casualties which he said probably approached twenty thousand Union troops and included eleven generals. Grant said the Confederate losses were bound to be higher and outlined his plans to continue the attack, even if it took the entire summer. In chapter fifty-three, Grant recommended several of his officers for promotion. Lee moved his center of operations leaving an entire Union regiment without an enemy to face. Grant ordered those troops moved and they returned to the rear of the fighting, ready to move in any direction necessary in order to provide reinforcements. On May 16, 1864, Grant sent a letter to Halleck, outlining the poor roads that had become impassable due to heavy rains. He urged Halleck to assure President Lincoln that the Union Army remained strong and confident and that the temporary halt in attack was prompted solely by the weather. Two days later, Grant set up a military trap with several troops apparently exposed to attack, hoping that the Confederates would use the apparent opportunity.

In chapter fifty-four, Grant said the troops traveling in Virginia were faced with a different kind of country than they'd typically encountered across the south. The roads were in better condition and there was hardly ever a person seen other than those armed with Confederate sympathies. On May 22, Grant issued orders that scouts be sent out in



search of the Confederate forces. The following day, the orders were carried out, and Hancock's corps was soon in control of a railroad that they destroyed. When Lee's forces were discovered, Grant learned that he'd chosen a place to stand and fight that gave him the tactical advantage. Lee had also received reinforcements.

In chapter fifty-five, the troops under Sheridan's command advanced on Cold Harbor but the Confederates, knowing that the position was one of tactical importance to the Union Army, were determined to hold it. The Confederates attacked a section of the Union forces repeatedly but were turned away each time, and Grant noted that the Confederates paid heavily in casualties. A letter dated June 3, 1864, from Grant to General Meade, indicated Grant's desire that Meade determine when he should withdraw troops from a deadly situation and when to press. Grant dedicated reinforcements whenever necessary. By that night, the task turned to strengthening the Union front. Grant communicated with Lee after a particular stage of the battle, asking that there be a temporary truce to remove the dead and wounded from the battlefield. The request was not granted until many hours later and Grant noted that almost all the wounded had died by that time. Grant noted that, looking back on the battle at Cold Harbor and that of Vicksburg, he could say that both should have ended without a final push.

In chapter fifty-six, Grant faced the problem of a swampy area and was forced to move a flank to cut off Lee's movement to Richmond. Grant described the complicated maneuvering it took to establish a siege of Petersburg. In chapter fifty-seven, Grant turned more of his attention to the southern railroads in an attempt to stop the lines of communication and supply for the Confederate troops. He detailed the attacks on the Virginia Central Railroad and Weldon Railroad. Meanwhile, the Union troops left behind in Washington were called on to defend the city from invading Confederate soldiers. Grant noted that the man left in charge in Washington, General Lew Wallace, was left with "raw" recruits and that he had no surplus of those. Veteran fighters were moved to Baltimore and Wallace set out to meet the threat, expecting only to delay a serious attack until more troops could be put into place. Grant said that Wallace's ability to delay the Confederate advance for a day meant that more troops were ready when they did arrive in Washington, and the Confederate advance was stopped. In late July, Grant set up an elaborate plan and issued the orders. He said that the situation was carried out by the commander in charge, but that it was a colossal failure due to unforeseen circumstances. Communication issues caused additional problems. Grant went north to oversee operations and discovered more problems there, including an organized effort to avoid the draft.

In chapter fifty-eight, Grant described additional advances with Sheridan's troops and his victory at the Shenandoah. Grant and the other officers then began preparations to establish winter headquarters for the troops as the weather became too difficult to withstand.

One of Grant's commanders, General Meade, arrived at a house where Grant was seated on the verandah. The house belonged to Confederate loyalists and Grant was simply waiting there to watch the advance of his men. Meade addressed the ladies of



the house politely and "remarked that he supposed they had never seen so many life Yankees before". Grant said one of the women immediately replied that she had, in the prison camp in Richmond. Grant noted that when the ladies learned the truth about the condition of the Confederate Army and that the Union had the upper hand, they began to cry. It was typical in those days to share misinformation, whether by design to keep Confederate loyalties intact or to promote morale. The ladies had, until Grant received communiqués from his commanders and read them in front of the ladies, believed that the Southern armies were beating the Union and were on the verge of winning the war.

The book includes a series of footnotes, apparently written by Grant, further explaining sections of the text. For example, at one point Grant went into detail about a particular plan, saying that he could have attacked from the front without facing the likelihood of heavy losses. Grant said that they could have pushed on through but that the victory wouldn't have justified the losses.



# Chapters 59 through Appendix

## Chapters 59 through Appendix Summary and Analysis

In chapter fifty-nine, Grant stepped back in time to September and described Sherman's "march to the sea". Grant telegraphed Sherman in early September, urging that Sherman continue to press the Southern troops. Grant said that if the Confederates had time to rest, it would inevitably draw out the war. He also noted, however, that Sherman should remain camped long enough for his own men to be rested for the next attack. Sherman decided to move first against Milledgeville and then Savannah. The Union tried to secure railroads in areas they controlled but the Confederates managed to destroy tracks anyway. Grant wrote Sherman a letter on December 3, 1864. He said that it appeared Sherman faced no real obstacles but Grant declined celebrating Sherman's victory, saying he didn't want to do so until "the victory is assured". Grant told Sherman in that letter that there were no specific directions forthcoming but urged that he keep to the general plan.

In chapter sixty, Grant wrote to Major General Thomas from Grant's headquarters in City Point, Virginia, in early December. In one of those letters, Grant urged Thomas to attack Hood's rebel forces in Nashville or risk losing the ground he'd gained as far as Chattanooga. Nine days later, Grant wrote another letter to Thomas, this time demanding that Thomas attack. Grant predicted that Thomas would soon witness the "mortifying spectacle" of the Confederates moving, and that Thomas would then be forced to act. On December 15, Grant wrote Thomas again, this time congratulating him on his success and urging that he not give the Confederates time to rest and recover. In chapter sixty-one, Grant detailed the events leading up to the attempts to rout the Confederates from Fort Fisher, located near Wilmington. The fort was a port of great importance to the Confederates, which made it important that the Union military take control. The first attack on that fort was a failure and the troops were forced back to regroup for a second assault before taking control. Grant placed part of the blame for the failed attack on "free talk" that gave the Confederates warning and time to prepare for the assault.

In chapter sixty-three, it became evident that the war was nearing an end. The peace commissioners from the Confederacy arrived in January to meet with Lincoln. The talks weren't immediately successful. Grant continued his maneuvering with the ultimate goal being to crush Lee's forces and end the war. Grant described the situation that led to the battle of White Oak Road. In chapter sixty-five, Grant described the battle at Five Forks and the battles leading up to the final march on Petersburg. In chapter sixty-five, the Union captured Petersburg and Lincoln visited with Grant there the day after the final assault. The Confederate Army was soon desperate for supplies. Grant joined up with General Meade and said their next goal would be to get ahead of Lee rather than pursuing his retreat. In chapter sixty-six, Grant described the battle at Sailor's Creek and another at Farmville. On April 7, 1865, Grant sent Lee a note, saying further fighting would be useless and urging an end to the war. Lee responded, saying he didn't feel it



was hopeless, but asking for terms of surrender in an effort to end further bloodshed. The Union was able to head off Lee's men and cut off their route to their supply train. With that final defeat, Lee "set up a white flag".

In chapter sixty-seven, Grant described the peace negotiations at Appomattox and the terms of surrender that came from that meeting. In chapter sixty-eight, Grant said the Union army was suddenly energized, no doubt because they felt they'd soon be getting ready to go home. The South was in chaos, having lived for years with the absence of all the able-bodied men. In chapter sixty-nine, Grant described the capture of Jefferson Davis and the surrender of General Johnston. In chapter seventy, Grant said the troops took on a new outlook as it became evident that the war was actually at an end with no more fighting likely. In the conclusion, Grant pointed out that race played a role in the Civil War and predicted that the issue might arise at some time in the future.

Grant's descriptions of battles, battle lines, maneuvers and strategies may become tiresome to the casual reader. For example, Grant gave a great many details leading up to the battle of White Oak Road. These details included movements by several military groups. He ordered that three infantry divisions and one cavalry division move "from the north side of the James River" to a spot about thirty miles from Grant's location. Grant then went on to say where other brigades were situated in relation to those troops and what their objectives were. This was typical of his descriptions which are generally lengthy when it came to battles and battle plans. Grant also provided numbers of dead, wounded and captured on both sides for also every battle.

Grant said that he'd met Lee prior to the Civil War but didn't expect that Lee would remember him. However, Lee claimed to know Grant from their service together in the era of the Mexican War. Grant said that it was only later that he realized what a difference there was in the appearance of the two men. Grant, the victor, was dressed in a private's uniform with only his stripes to confirm his rank. His clothes were old and he was bedraggled. Lee, on the other hand, was dressed in a new uniform and wore an expensive, elaborate sword. Grant also pointed out that Lee was careful not to show any emotion. Grant guessed that Lee might have been relieved to have the conflict past or might have been sad, but that he gave no clue either way. Grant, on the other hand, admitted to being depressed. It's possible that Grant was feeling that way because he had devoted his entire life to the war for more than four years and that cause was suddenly at an end.

The book concludes with an appendix titled, "Report of Lieutenant-General U.S. Grant of the United States Armies. The opening of that section was addressed to E.M. Stanton, who was the Secretary of War and was intended to be an overview report of Grant's involvement in the war. Grant pointed out that he was certain from the beginning that he had to press the Confederates, regardless of the weather, whenever the Union held any advantage. Grant then outlined specific aspects of the war and detailed movements of the various troops as well as their objectives and their successes.

Grant outlined several opinions regarding the war and its cause, including his views on slavery. He pointed out that the Southern states were dependent on laws to keep



slavery in check and that the free portions of the United States were "inhabited by an intelligent and well-to-do population". Grant said that it was only natural that the people of the free territories of the United States would hate being called on to help perpetuate slavery.



# Characters

## Ulysses Grant

Born in 1822, Grant was the son of a strict father who believed in the need for education. Though Grant had no personal ambitions toward a military life, his father applied to West Point in Grant's name. Grant said that he didn't mind attending West Point but was afraid that he might fail. Despite the fear, he easily passed the entrance exam and gained admittance. Grant admitted that he didn't apply himself to his studies as he should have. Instead, he spent a great deal of time reading novels. Grant said that he had no intention of making a military career for himself. He planned to finish his studies at West Point, do a short stint in the military, then apply as a teacher back at West Point. However, he was soon caught up in the Mexican War and spent years in the military. When he left the service, he tried his hand at farming, real estate and clerking, but was quick to offer his services when the United States called for volunteers at the start of the Civil War. Grant was soon assigned a command and climbed to the point of commander of the Union Army. He believed in the Northern cause and was able to coordinate large forces for common goals to further that cause. Grant pressed the other commanders and his men but also went to great lengths to ensure that supply lines were intact and the men ready to face situations. At one point he urged a commander to press on but not before the soldiers had time to rest. Grant admitted to being jubilant the day Lee sent word that he was ready to surrender but was depressed on the day he actually accepted the formal surrender. He said that he couldn't help but admire Lee for having worked so hard for the Southern cause.

## General Sherman

A commander under Grant, he was in charge of a famous "march to the sea". When Sherman completed a particular leg of his journey, Grant notified him that moving forward against the Confederates was vital at that stage in order to hasten the end of the war. Sherman was told, however, to wait until his men were rested before moving forward. Sherman was a strong commander and led a number of successful assaults, including one on Atlanta. Sherman was in the South with his men when the winter weather wreaked havoc with the roads. Grant told Sherman that he could wait for river barges to take the men up the river, thereby avoiding the hassles of traveling on roads that were nearly impassable because of recent rains. Grant noted that he would never have ordered that Sherman take his men on that difficult route but that Sherman, seeing the time it would take to arrange and complete the transport by river, opted to take the muddy roads. Sherman spent a great deal of time working on plans concocted by Grant and Grant noted that Sherman often had good ideas, and that he often was able to make decisions on his own, eliminating delays while he waited for Grant to issue orders.



## General Scott

Grant first met him when General Scott visited cadets at West Point. General Scott was careful about appearances and tended to have plans written and ready to be distributed when faced with any military situation. Scott was very interested in how his actions would appear to others and let his officers know when he planned to travel among the men so that the officers could ensure that everything and everyone was ready to greet Scott.

## General Taylor

One of two commanding officers who led Grant during the Mexican War. Grant noted that he was personable but not a conversationalist and that he was a good writer. Taylor, according to Grant, was not overly interested in his appearance and would dress with an eye toward comfort rather than worrying about his appearance. Grant noted that Taylor did not pay particular attention to planning and would often issue orders designed to meet a particular situation rather than having a plan in place. Grant said that Taylor cared little for how his actions might later be presented to those studying the history of the campaigns he led.

## General Meade

A commander who was ordered by Grant to move against Nashville. Meade failed to move as ordered, prompting Grant to issue another order, this time telling Meade that he would be "mortified" if he were forced to follow the Confederates in bad weather. Meade is with Grant when he cuts off Lee's troops from their supply trains.

## General Robert E. Lee

Commander of the Confederate Army. Lee was in contact with Grant a couple of times prior to the end of the war. When Grant asked Lee to surrender, Lee said that he didn't feel the cause was impossible but agreed that surrender would mean an end to the bloodshed. Lee formally surrendered a short time later at Appomattox. Grant noted that Lee appeared in a new uniform and that his emotions were hidden throughout the meeting.

## General W.H.L. Wallace

A general who was serving during the early part of the Civil War, Grant said that Wallace's arrival during the battle at Pittsburgh Landing cinched a Union victory. Wallace was left with the need to defend Washington, though he had only raw recruits at his disposal. Grant said that Wallace did all that could have been expected of him



under the circumstances by delaying the advance of the Confederates by a full day, giving the Union Army time to get in place.

## **President Abraham Lincoln**

Elected while Grant was in the military, Lincoln came to depend on Grant's insight into military matters and trusted Grant. Lincoln pledged the full support of the government and thanked Grant for the endeavors of the Union Army. Lincoln visited with Grant several times over the course of the war.

## **General Albert Sidney Johnston**

A Confederate General who was wounded at Shiloh. Grant said the man's wounds weren't life-threatening but he failed to seek medical treatment and refused to give up his command. He continued commanding his men until he literally collapsed from blood loss and died. News of his death prompted a celebration among the Union Troops.

## **Commander Bragg**

The Confederate commander who was serving as both a commander and a quarter master at the same time. As commander, he issued a formal, written request for supplies but, acting as quartermaster, he declined the request. He argued with himself over whether he was entitled to the supplies until finally taking the matter to a superior officer to be resolved.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Montgomery County, Pennsylvania**

Where Grant was born.

### **West Point**

Where Grant attended college.

### **Vera Cruz**

Where Grant's troops took a walled city and then quickly moved on to avoid the possibility of catching yellow fever.

### **Detroit, Michigan**

Where Grant was ordered to serve for about two years following his marriage to Julia Dent.

### **Slug**

The name given the fifty-dollar gold pieces common in the San Francisco area that were not government issue.

### **Galena, Illinois**

Where Grant was working as a clerk in his father's store when the first call for volunteers was issued.

### **Cold Harbor**

Where Grant asked Lee for a truce to remove the dead and wounded from the battlefield. By the time an agreement was reached, all but a few of the Union wounded had died.

### **Chattanooga**

Where Grant questioned a Confederate soldier before discovering that the man was actually a Union soldier.



## **City Point, Virginia**

Where Grant is headquartered when he orders Meade to advance on Nashville, then repeats the order when he discovers Meade still hasn't moved as ordered.

## **Appomattox**

Where Grant accepted Lee's surrender.



# Themes

## Belief in a Cause

Grant believed in the Northern cause during the Civil War though he didn't particularly want to be involved in a war. It's noteworthy that as soon as the call went out for volunteers, Grant offered his services even though he had left the military after the Mexican War in favor of the private life. Grant talked at some length about the fact that slavery is an issue that prompted strong emotions. He said that the free states of America were populated by "intelligent and well-to-do" people, obviously indicating that he believed their views on the issue to be correct. He said that the Southern states depended on laws to protect slavery as an institution and that without those laws, slavery as a whole would fail. The problem is that the South needed the people of the North to approve of the cause, and they - on the whole - didn't. The cause divided the United States and Grant said that there was a need to settle the issue. Though he didn't seem to approve of war as a rule, he said that it was just as well that the issue was finally determined, even though it meant a Civil War. Grant noted that the Southern people believed in their side of the cause just as fervently. When Grant was looking back on the war, he said that he felt no jubilation at the Confederate loss because it was evident that they also believed in their cause.

## The Tactics of War

Grant described the various tactics used by the Union Army as well as some of those used by the Confederates in the battles waged during the Civil War. In many cases, Grant described tactics in detail, going so far as to outline which commander was ordered to a specific section of a battlefield and which was held as a backup to be used to fill gaps that developed as the battle progressed. These details may become somewhat tedious to the casual reader but are evidence of Grant's understanding of military tactics and his ability to use men to their fullest potential. An examples of this is seen when he sends word to General Meade, urging that he advance on the Confederates as soon as possible. When Meade fails to follow the order, Grant readdresses the situation, predicting that the Confederates were about to make a move of their own, and that Meade would then be forced into a "mortifying" situation in which he was the defender rather than the aggressor. Grant's assessment of situations of this sort made him a good commander and allowed him to make the most of some serious situations. Grant learned these skills during the Mexican War. He detailed several specific campaigns during the Mexican War and said that, looking back on them, he could see that the battles were probably unnecessary. His ability to learn from those situations gave him the experience to foresee situations in the Civil War and to create tactical advantages for the Union soldiers on many of those battlefields.



## Concern for the Soldier

Grant realized the importance of the common soldier and made sure that he took care of his men, as much as was possible, during his command. At one point, Grant is facing many tasks but sets up a supply line to ensure that the men have the food and ammunition they need. At another point, Grant describes the trenches built by the men. Knowing that the battle would be drawn out and that the men would be forced to remain entrenched for days, the trenches were dug deeply with the dirt thrown over timbers piled to the front. The dirt and timber fronts provided additional cover so that the men were able to stand upright in the trench without fear of being shot. On several occasions, Grant made a point of saying that the men should be given time to rest before being forced to march again. When Grant needed Sherman's forces to move, Grant took into account the fact that the roads were nearly impassable making the trek difficult for the men. Grant said he wouldn't have ordered Sherman to make that march but that Sherman took it upon himself to move the men. Grant realized that Lee's troops were equally dependent on supplies and made every effort to cut off those supplies in order to press an advantage. Grant's interest in the well-being of the common soldier extended to those in need of attention. When many wounded lay on a battlefield besieged by the Confederate troops, Grant contacted Lee, asking that they call a truce in order to make time to remove the wounded from the field.





# Style

## Perspective

The book was Grant's "personal memoirs". As such, it was written exclusively in first person. The perspective was entirely limited, as is appropriate for a memoir. Grant told the story of his life, relating incidents from his childhood through adulthood, including his term as leader of the Confederate Army. The fact that the perspective is so completely limited means the reader has to beware of Grant's personality and prejudices. The reader must also keep in mind that details were presented as Grant's memories. It's possible that some details were skewed because his memory was faulty. It's also important that the reader remember that details Grant placed great importance on may not really be that important. For example, he related the story of being ridiculed by other boys for making a poor deal in purchasing a horse. It seems possible that he remembered the teasing as more important than it really was. Other events related throughout the book may be similarly distorted and it's left to the reader to decide the importance of each. In one case, Grant mentioned the battle of Shiloh and said that it was "more persistently misunderstood" than any other Civil War battle. The reader has to decide whether Grant's interpretation of the events was more reliable than other historians and other accounts.

## Tone

The overall tone of the book is one of neutrality. Grant seemed determined to set that tone, probably in an effort to make the reader accept this account of his life as true. It may also be that this tone accurately reflected Grant's personality as a military leader. The reading is dull and often monotonous, making it seem that Grant's life was also dull and uneventful. Even when there were battles raging, Grant's accounts were matter-of-fact with few emotional moments throughout the entire book. The writing was fairly straightforward. He began with his childhood, relating the details of his birth, his parentage and several events from his youth. The majority of the book was presented in chronological order which made it easier to understand. Grant has been touted as a very organized military leader and this organization was evident in the writing. In some cases, this organization led to extensive detailing of people, places and events that would really have been unnecessary to the storyline. From the tone, it is evident that Grant's purpose was the sharing of information rather than any effort to entertain or engage. The reader who is expecting constant action will be disappointed. The writing was typically easy to understand. Grant used few words and phrases that would not be understood by readers of the present day.

## Structure

The book is divided into two "volumes" that are titled "Volume I" and "Volume II." The first includes chapters one through thirty-nine. Chapters are titled by Roman numeral along with a subtitle that provides some information about the details included in that chapter. For example, chapter twenty is titled by Roman numeral, then read, "General Fremont in Command - Movement Against Belmont - Battle of Belmont - A Narrow Escape - After the Battle". The subtitles are very direct and each includes a list of events in that chapter. The second part includes chapters forty through seventy. The final chapter is followed by a "Conclusion" and a section of letters between Grant and other military leaders. The letters vary in length, though some are very brief. For example, there is a letter between Grant and Major-General Halleck that is a single paragraph. There are also notes between the letters explaining the context. The book concludes with an index so that researchers can easily find references to people, places and events. The book also includes a number of drawings, maps and other graphics. There is an artist's rendering of Grant's childhood home early in the book. Later, there are maps outlining the details of specific battles. In addition, the reader finds samples of Grant's handwriting and a portrait of Grant in his Confederate uniform.



## Quotes

"From that age until seventeen I did all the work done with horses, such as breaking up the land, furrowing, ploughing corn and potatoes, bringing in the crops when harvested, hauling all the wood, besides tending two or three horses, a cow or two, and sawing wood for stoves, etc., while still attending school. For this I was compensated by the fact that there was never any scolding or punishing by my parents; no objection to rational enjoyments, such as fishing, going to the creek a mile away to swim in the summer, taking a horse and visiting my grandparents in the adjoining county, fifteen miles off, skating on the ice in winter, or taking a horse and sleigh when there was snow on the ground."

Chap. 1, p. 9

"In later years, if not at the time, the battles of Molino del Rey and Chapultepec have seemed to me to have been wholly unnecessary."

Chap. 11, p. 6

"I had not been in Mexico many weeks when, reading a St. Louis paper, I found the President had asked the Illinois delegation in Congress to recommend some citizens of the State for the position of brigadier-general, and that they had unanimously recommended me as first on a list of seven."

Chap. 19, p. 130

"This interruption in my communications north - I was really cut off from communication with a great part of my own command during this time - resulted in Sherman's moving from Memphis before McClernand could arrive, for my dispatch of the 18th did not reach McClernand. Pemberton got back to Vicksburg before Sherman got there."

Chap. 31, p. 232

"A retreat at that time would have been a terrible disaster. It would not only have been the loss of a most important strategic position to us, but it would have been attended with the loss of all the artillery still left with the Army of the Comberland and the annihilation of that army itself, either by capture or demoralization."

Chap. 40, p. 318

"Orders had been given, long before this movement began, to cut down the baggage of officers and men to the lowest point possible. Notwithstanding this I saw scattered along the road from Culpeper to Germania Ford wagonloads of new blankets and overcoats, thrown away by the troops to lighten their knapsacks; an improvidence I had never witnessed before."

Chap. 50, p. 410

"More desperate fighting has not been witnessed on this continent than that of the 5th and 6th of May."

Chap. 51, p. 419



"The knowledge that wounded men are now suffering from want of attention, between the two armies, compels me to ask a suspension of hostilities for sufficient time to collect them in, say two hours. Permit me to say that the hours you may fix upon for this will be agreeable to me, and the same privilege will be extended to such parties as you may wish to send out on the same duty without further application."

A letter from Grant to Lee at Cold Harbor, Chap. 55, p. 461

"Western members might be throwing it up to the members of the East that in the suppression of the rebellion they were not able to capture an army, or to accomplish much in the way of contributing toward that end, but had to wait until the Western armies had conquered all the territory south and west of them, and then come on to help them capture the only army they had been engaged with."

Grant to Lincoln, Chap. 65, p. 562

"Whatever his feelings, they were entirely concealed from my observation; but my own feelings, which had been quite jubilant on the receipt of his letter, were sad and depressed. I felt like anything rather than rejoicing at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought, and one for which there was the least excuse."

Chap. 67, p. 580

"I do not believe that the majority of the Northern people at that time were in favor of Negro suffrage. They supposed that it would naturally follow the freedom of the Negro, but that there would be a time of probation, in which the ex-slaves could prepare themselves for the privileges of citizenship before the full right would be conferred; but Mr. Johnson, after a complete revolution of sentiment, seemed to regard the South not only as an oppressed people, but as the people best entitled to consideration of any of our citizens."

Chap. 69, p. 594



## Topics for Discussion

Describe Grant's life prior to joining the military. How did he come to attend West Point? How did he begin his military service? What were his plans?

What kind of person was Grant? List at least two weaknesses and give examples of each. List at least two strengths and give examples of each. What do these strengths and weaknesses indicate about Grant's character?

Describe Grant's military career and how he came to be commander of the Union Army. What kind of soldier was he? What kind of commander was he? Support your answer with examples.

Describe two of the battles in which Grant was involved, either as a soldier or as a commander. What was his role in each? What was the outcome of each? Compare the two battles with regard to strategies and the ultimate goals.

Describe two of the battles in which Grant was involved, either as a soldier or as a commander. What was his role in each? What was the outcome of each? Compare the two battles with regard to strategies and the ultimate goals.

Describe Grant's interactions with General Lee. What were the reactions of each of the men when Lee surrenders, bringing the Civil War to an end? What did that indicate about the characters of each of the men?

Compare Grant with any two of the other military men described in the book. Why do you believe Grant became commander of the Union Army? Were any of the other military leaders in the book capable of that role? Support your answers.