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Charles Bracelen Flood. *Grant and Sherman: The Friendship That Won the Civil War.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005. x + 460 pp. $27.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-374-16600-7.

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Two School Boys at War

If one thing can be said about Civil War historiography, it is that most leading commanders in the war on both sides have received their due in print. Some works have deified their subjects, others have demonized them, and countless others fall somewhere in between. All, however, attempt in some way to explain how these leaders succeeded or failed (and how they themselves defined these two words) by examining the myriad of influences that shaped their character and ideas before 1861 and how these held up in the furor of war. Not often, however, have we seen a dual biography that, instead of comparing and contrasting two opposing commanders, examines the relationship between two officers *on the same side* whose mutual trust and regard became an important ingredient for victory. Well known for his earlier works, Charles Bracelen Flood has produced a well-written and lively book about the bond between William Tecumseh Sherman and Ulysses S. Grant, or what he believes was "the friendship that won the war."

Flood opens with an examination of the prewar careers of both men. From Grant's heroic actions in Mexico to his business failures and bouts with alcohol abuse in the 1850s and Sherman's own troubles during the same period, Flood covers much ground quickly and adeptly. But these stories, of course, are nothing new and he adds little to oft-told tales. Moreover, the rise of Grant and Sherman and their battles against their own demons–Grant with alcohol and Sherman with his mind–are also detailed. All this is foundation for the story of their remarkable ascent from obscure backwater commands to leadership of major Union armies by 1864. The turning point in that progression was the battle of Shiloh. Flood sees the well-known exchange between Grant and Sherman on that dark rainy night after the bloody first day along the Tennessee River in April 1862 as a formative moment in their relationship. Searching for Grant so he could argue for a withdrawal to the opposite bank of the river, Sherman found Grant leaning against a tree, his face illuminated by a single lantern. Checking his desire to discuss the subject of retreat, Sherman instead opened with small talk. "[W]e've had the devil's own day of it, haven't we?" The usually quiet Grant replied in the affirmative, adding stoically: "Lick 'em tomorrow, though" (p. 3). Not only did his response quash further thoughts of retreat, the overall exchange revealed key things about each man. First, the incident underlined Grant's cool composure and dogged persistence in the face of long odds and his ability to envision success even as panic consumed others. He possessed what Karl von Clausewitz called "the inward eye," or the quality that allows a commander to penetrate the swirling chaos and make the right decision. Moreover, this exchange provides a glimpse of Grant's simple, common sense approach to matters that, in addition to a seemingly low-brow, plodding vernacular, masked the potent intellectual firepower lurking beneath the surface. For Sherman, this moment showed that, though exceptionally talented in his own right and perhaps smarter than his friend, he somehow knew instinctively when to subdue his own, sometimes impetuous, desires and defer to those of the much more studied Grant. The fusion of the two commanders' positive attributes–intellectual acumen, willingness to think unconventionally, common sense, self-control and composure in crisis, and dogged determination–not only countered their worst impulses (though not always successfully) but resulted in a synergy that made the Grant-Sherman team a truly fearsome–though not flawless–threat to Southern armies. After Shiloh, Flood describes how the Grant-Sherman relationship continued to grow through the Chattanooga campaign in 1863 and how, by 1864, when Grant left the West for Virginia, the two men had forged such a powerful bond that they could now operate with one mind hundreds of miles apart. The prelude to their unbelievable success in the final year of the war was their meeting in Cincinnati in March 1864. Flood deftly describes this two-day session and the strategy of

simultaneous offensives that emerged from it. One gets the feeling that it was there, in that small hotel room, that the Confederacy began tottering toward destruction. Keeping in mind how much personal and professional failure and humiliation these men had endured by that time, it was also an incredibly redemptive moment as well.

The remainder of the book dealing with the war is a common recitation–well told–of the 1864-65 campaigns and how Grant and Sherman orchestrated the final, lethal blows against the South, each playing his part and supporting the other like two large symphonies in separate theaters playing two different tunes but reaching a crescendo precisely at the same moment. And in that moment their armies thoroughly crushed the Confederacy, saved the Union, and obliterated slavery. But as they stood on the podium during the "Grand Review" in May 1865 and watched their vaunted armies march the final leg into legend, one wonders if Grant and Sherman felt that their relationship, besides playing a role in final victory, had also fueled their individual salvations.

After the war, the friendship endured rough patches. When Grant became commander of the U.S. Army, Sherman once again came under his direction and various political-military brushfires found them at odds, especially over the issue of pay for generals and their differing perspectives on the "Indian problem" on the frontier. Flood describes the most damaging blow inflicted upon the relationship when Grant, as president, appeared to Sherman, now in command of the Army, to be curbing his authority. Their relationship cooled markedly after this episode. This chilly interlude ended when Grant was diagnosed with throat cancer. Sherman called on his dying friend many times, visits that Grant told him had "done more good than all the doctors" (p. 395). Their friendship restored, Sherman's last duty to his friend was not only as a pallbearer at his funeral, but as the defender of Grant's military reputation against the assaults by those arguing that, even though he was defeated, Robert E. Lee's generalship surpassed that of "Butcher" Grant. However, this deliberate effort to build "Marse Robert's" postwar historical renaissance upon the rubble of Grant's reputation was a battle Sherman did not win.

Overall, Flood's book is an enjoyable and at times enlightening read. This being said, however, his contention that this remarkable friendship "won the Civil War" is overblown. Though definitely one of the more important relationships of the conflict in terms of its military implications, the Grant-Sherman alliance alone was, of course, not the decisive factor in the war's outcome. In fact, there were a number of successful and unsuccessful relationships and friendships the consequences of which, when taken together, significantly impacted final victory or defeat on the battlefield and in government halls. Personal and professional associations–both productive and destructive–were woven into the awful tapestry of the war and determined its eventual path, including the relations between Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson, Davis and Joseph Johnston, Davis and John Bell Hood, Abraham Lincoln and Grant and Sherman, Lincoln and George B. McClellan, and Grant and George G. Meade. But to depict one friendship as having won the war seemingly negates the influence of all the other relationships that determined the war's course before the Sherman-Grant machine kicked fully into gear in 1864.

With regard to the history of the Grant-Sherman relationship and the context of the war, historians will find little that is new in the book. However, it is still a great story worth telling and Flood does a superb job for the general reader as well as for scholars. Without doubt, Horatio Alger would have been hard pressed to come up with better storylines than that found in the lives of Grant and Sherman. Their stories were, without doubt, the martial equivalent of the American Dream. The fact that their individual fortunes rested so heavily upon each others shoulders only adds more tantalizing nuance to the tale.

After finishing the book, one is left with a last, almost romantic image of Grant and Sherman at their final meeting before the war's end. Though hardened by the conflict and by the casualties and destruction left in its wake, when they met in March 1865, according to a staff officer, it seemed more like "two school-boys coming together after a vacation" than "the meeting of the chief actors in a great war tragedy" (p. 5). Perhaps this scene underscores what remains so compelling about the Grant-Sherman relationship. Both had traveled far from their common roots and had overcome much hardship along the way. Then, in the midst of a brutal war, they found each other and, working together intuitively, helped save the Union. But despite all their remarkable accomplishments, they were still, in the end, just good friends. And that is something we all can relate to.

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