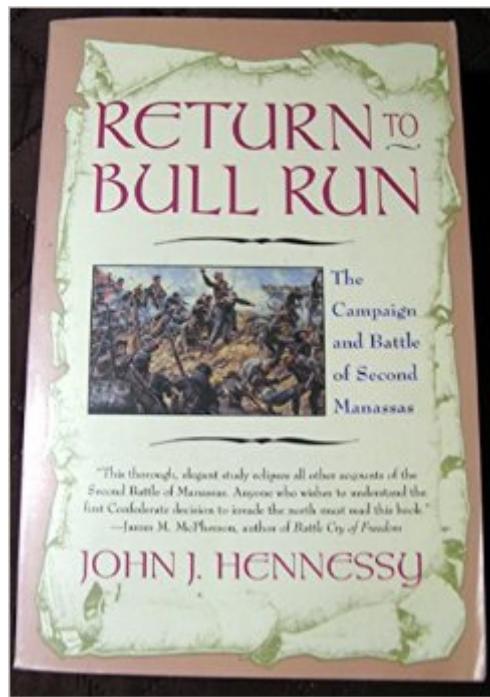


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Return To Bull Run



Synopsis

A comprehensive account of the Second Manassas campaign reveals the stories of the men who participated in the battle and traces the misjudgments and ill-conceived tactics that led to defeat for Union forces.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most people have said it already, but this really is the standard of campaign study. I won't go as far as saying it's as great as Coddington's Gburg work, but Return to Bull Run is 97% there. My few little quibbles are: 1) with the maps, which although numerous, very timely and well placed, can be a bit cluttered when brigades/divisions/etc are placed on top of roads, rivers, cities. Basically, the area is not cleared out, but rather the block is placed right on top. It takes a little getting used to but at the first few glances looks like mixing up letters in a scrabble bag. 2) the background leading into the campaign was a little rushed, imo. I now realize that 2nd Manassas was a very complex battle with several skirmishes and engagements leading into the actual battle. I suspect to spend another 40-50 pages on "the build up" probably would have made this book gigantic beyond what it already is. Not a big hassle if you're well informed on the 7 Days and Cedar Mountain battles and the circumstances as to why the armies found each other where they first did, but it would have been nice to have gotten a little more depth (similar to Coddington covering Chancellorsville, restructuring of the armies, etc. Afterall, the first 2/5 of Codd's book does not even touch on Gburg) 3) it could be that I was in a bad mood when I first started the book, but the initial 75 pages or so seemed to be "thicker" reading than the rest of the book. Sort of like a term paperish style. I found myself

re-reading several passages because I lost my place or didn't grasp the point. That being said, the book really is brilliant. No one will doubt Hennessy's knowledge and to my delight, his writing style opened up and became a breeze to read.

John Hennessy has written the definitive account of the Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas. Regarding the Union commander, the text states "John Pope has come to us as a bumbling fool....But in the summer of 1862 he possessed many of the qualities the administration felt it needed in Virginia. His record was not so much impressive as solid." Chapter 1 notes that the government was partly responsible for the Second Manassas defeat writing "...the real problem lay not just with Lincoln's military inability's, but with the government's insistence on using the military as a refuge for political patrons." The book recalls an interesting fact noting that Pope's infamous orders No. 5, subsisting off the land; No. 7, guerrillas; and No. 11, disloyal citizens were approved in advance by Lincoln. Order No. 5, directing subsistence off the land, was especially onerous as it was used as a license to loot. This was Robert E. Lee's first full campaign as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia and the Federals gave Lee the strategic initiative in Virginia by abandoning the Peninsula. The book details Lee's campaign from the Rapidan to the battle at Manassas. Many interesting and critical events prior to the Manassas are described. While the two armies were stalemated on the Rappahannock, Stuart's raid striking Pope's rear is narrated followed by an account of Stonewall Jackson's August 25 flanking movement which resulted in the burning of Bristoe Station and the capture of Manassas Junction August 27th. The author notes that throughout these actions Pope's cavalry failed to produce intelligence about Lee's movements and intentions but rather "stood ragged and impotent" John Hennessy details the bloody battles on August 28, 29 and 30.

The real question has to be why it took until 1993 for publication of a thorough, detailed account of one of the ten most important campaigns of the eastern theater of the ACW. In his thoroughly researched, convincingly told history, Mr. Hennessy clearly elucidates the strategic significance and tactical nuances of this critical campaign. Second Manassas was the first complete campaign conducted by Lee's Army of Northern Virginia (the Seven Days was already in progress when Lee relieved the wounded Joe Johnston) and his army would never function better, as a whole. Mr. Hennessy, whose authority on this subject - as a former historian at Manassas NBP - is unquestioned, provides the right mix of detail and commentary, with copious annotations and references for further study as well as informative maps. Where this work excels is not in the

research, maps and detail - all well presented - but in the analysis. Mr. Hennessy does not shrink from direct, pointed commentary, and his comprehensive presentation of the facts well supports his conclusions. This is a fascinating story with a cast of interesting characters: the "miscreant" Pope "suppressed" by Lee; Fitz John Porter - the scapegoat who fought a twenty year battle after the war to clear his name; the enigmatic Jackson conducting one of his decisive, textbook flank marches; the Napoleon want-to-be McClellan, scheming from the Peninsula and then Alexandria to regain command of his army; the pompous, mad Milroy; the list goes on and on. The personal aspect of the engagement is emphasized throughout - the reader is never allowed to forget that men and boys with individual hopes and fears fought and suffered at Second Manassas.

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