



George Henry Thomas: As True As Steel (Modern War Studies)

Brian Steel Wills

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Although often counted among the Union's top five generals, George Henry Thomas has still not received his due. A Virginian who sided with the North in the Civil War, he was a more complicated commander than traditional views have allowed. Brian Wills now provides a new and more complete look at the life of a man known to history as "The Rock of Chickamauga," to his troops as "Old Pap," and to General William T. Sherman as a soldier who was "as true as steel."

While biographers have long been hampered by Thomas's lack of personal papers, Wills has drawn on previously untapped sources—notably the correspondence of Thomas's contemporaries—to offer new insights into what made him tick. Focusing on Thomas's personality and motivations, Wills contributes revealing discussions of his style and approach to command and successfully captures his troubled interactions with other Union commanders, providing a particularly more evenhanded evaluation of his relationship with Grant. He also gives a more substantial account of battlefield action than can be found in other biographies, capturing the ebb and flow of key encounters—Chickamauga and Missionary Ridge, Chattanooga and Atlanta, Stones River and Mill Springs, Peachtree Creek and Nashville—to help readers better understand Thomas's contributions to their outcomes.

Throughout Wills presents a well-rounded individual whose complex views embraced the worlds of professional military service and scientific inquisitiveness, a man known for attention to detail and compassion to subordinates. We also meet a sharp-tempered person whose disdain for politics hurt his prospects for advancement as much as it reflected positively on his character, and Wills offers new insight into why Thomas might not have progressed as quickly up the ladder of command as he might have liked.

More deeply researched than other biographies, Wills's work situates Thomas squarely in his own time to provide readers with a more thorough and balanced life story of this enigmatic Union general. It is a definitive military history that gives us a new and needed picture of the Rock of Chickamauga—a man whose devotion to duty and ideals made him as true as steel.

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