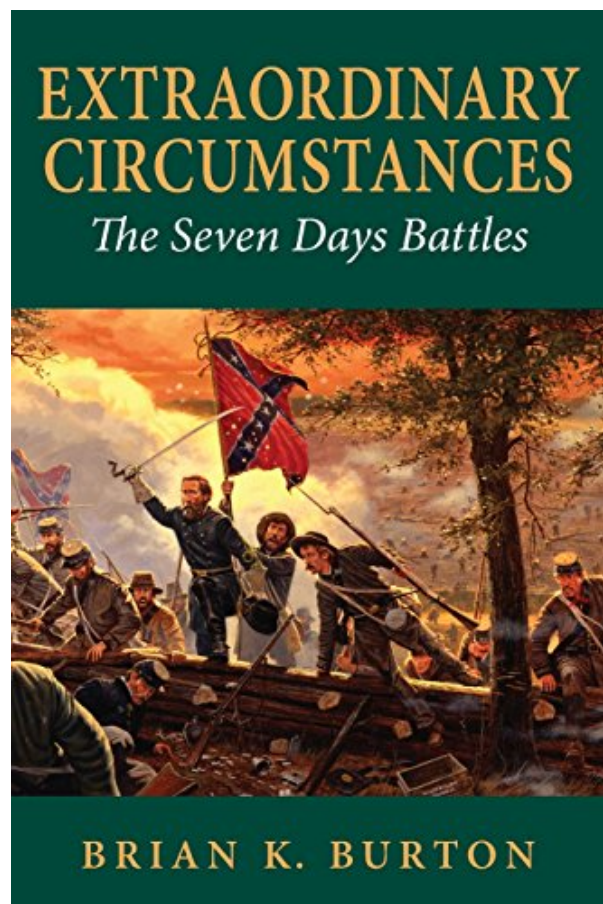


**EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES: THE  
SEVEN DAYS BATTLES BY BRIAN K.  
BURTON**



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# EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

*The Seven Days Battles*



BRIAN K. BURTON

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## Review

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The first campaign in the Civil War in which Robert E. Lee led the Army of Northern Virginia, the Seven Days Battles were fought southeast of the Confederate capital of Richmond in the summer of 1862. Lee and his fellow officers, including "Stonewall" Jackson, James Longstreet, A. P. Hill, and D. H. Hill, pushed George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac from the gates of Richmond to the James River, where the Union forces reached safety. Along the way, Lee lost several opportunities to harm McClellan. The Seven Days have been the subject of numerous historical treatments, but none more detailed and engaging than Brian K. Burton's retelling of the campaign that lifted Southern spirits, began Lee's ascent to fame, and almost prompted European recognition of the Confederacy.

- Sales Rank: #1624972 in Books
- Published on: 2010-10-08
- Released on: 2010-10-08
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 1.20" w x 6.12" l, 1.69 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 544 pages

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Insightful and Thorough

By Amanda Warren

I loved and lived this book! I will not go into a detailed overview as others have already covered that territory, but instead will point out two admirable assets of this work. The first is that the author penetrated General McClellan's mind and personality and, I felt, solved the mystery of his baffling Civil War performance. His classmates at West Point fully expected that McClellan was bound for military glory, yet he failed to achieve his predicted destiny. Throughout the book Burton revisits this question and offers many insights into McClellan's state of mind. I felt that he came closest in the comment that McClellan harbored a mortal dread of failure. This is true of gifted people, especially those like George McClellan whose intellectual gifts are recognized and celebrated early in life. Obviously, it is not as simple as that and many other factors are addressed, but this represents one of many intriguing points made by the author. Another unique perspective of this book is the author's divergence from the usual blame assigned to Confederate generals who commanded during the Seven Days, most notably Stonewall Jackson. Instead of easy accusations, Burton analyzes everyone's performance in depth, including Lee who is not exempt from his microscope. The result is a balanced and seemingly reliable view which convincingly exonerates Jackson for his apparent inaction of the first few days until Glendale when his failure to contribute clearly undermined the Confederate cause. Once again, Burton's grasp of the generals' personalities in their complexity lifts this book to a higher level of understanding. I appreciated the detail and intricate descriptions of troop involvement down to the regimental, and sometimes even company, level. The book does not gloss over the moment-by-moment unfolding of battles or the viewpoint of the common soldier. It's all here, in addition to the author's theory of how the Seven Days represented a kind of microcosm of the whole war to come, as well as what could have been had the battles concluded differently. If you love to delve into the meat of Civil War history, you must read this book!

43 of 48 people found the following review helpful.

The Seven Days analyzed, but not humanized.

By Chris Carter

I approached this book with the high expectations of a readable and thorough account of the Seven Day's battles, and mostly I think that Mr. Burton has succeeded. However, I found that it really wasn't quite as readable as I had hoped. I tended to get bogged down in the details of the book, especially in the battle scenes, which I really had high hopes for. Instead of the "you are there" realism that authors such as Gordon Rhea provide, I instead was struck by the way that the writing almost obscured the action.

Burton tends to fill his tactical descriptions with somewhat too much information, such as the location, movements and name of every single regiment on the field. Now while this is of course necessary for a good understanding of a battle, in this case it tends to overwhelm the actual fighting, leaving the sense that it is more a recitation of troop movements instead of the exciting details of a fight. The end result, at least for me, was confusion, coupled with the desire for a more intimate explanation of the battle. There just isn't a good balance between action and analysis. After having visited the battlefield, I longed to read of the breakthrough

at Gaines Mill in a personal, action-oriented manner. Instead, I came away with a pretty good idea of who was where, but no sense of just what they had accomplished. The emotion is simply not there, just the facts. Perhaps emotion just tends to obscure the truths of a battle, but I like the sense of "being there", and of knowing what the soldiers were experiencing first hand. While Burton does make use of period accounts, they just aren't as effective as they could be.

To me, the whole book seemed to be geared more towards strategy and troop movements, with a minimal emphasis on the actual fighting. In this respect, it does a fine job, and is actually an entertaining read in that respect. I was just left somewhat unfulfilled that the tactical side of the book wasn't as good.

As the previous reviewer mentioned, this book is not for the beginner. A moderate knowledge of the war seems to be assumed, and provided you are a Civil War buff, this should not be a problem.

Overall, it is a pretty good book. I don't know that I would call it the definitive account of the Seven Days though. Maybe so, if you are mostly interested in the strategic side, but the battle descriptions just lack the "spark" that makes you a part of the action. If you like the writing of such authors as Gordon Rhea and John Hennessy, you might come away feeling a little unsatisfied, as I did. I would recommend this book as a good analysis of the strategy and command decisions of the campaign, but perhaps Sears' "To the Gates of Richmond" is better at the human aspects of the action.

14 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent New Addition to Peninsula Campaign Literature

By Brett R. Schulte

I liked this book a lot. Finally the Seven Days' fans out there can sit down and read a very good book dedicated solely to these battles. The only thing better would be an "Ed Bearss Vicksburg Campaign" type treatment with 3,000 pages and 3 or so volumes. I know, it's a long shot, but I can dream can't I? For now, though, at least we have this book, and it's more than just a good start. The maps are extremely good and there are plenty of them! Aside from Clifford Dowdey's book, this is the only one that concentrates specifically on the Seven Days. Burton does go down to the regimental level in many cases. Since this is my favorite campaign in the whole ACW, I was extremely happy when this one came out. 534 pp., 21 maps

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