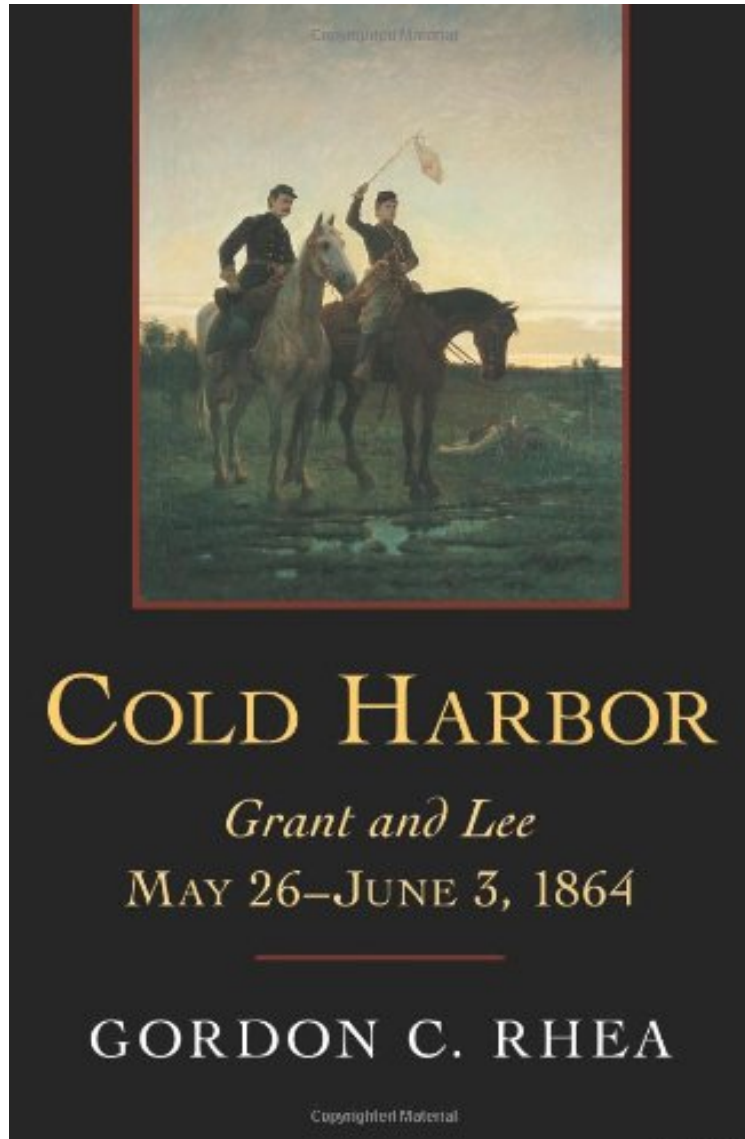


[Free] Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26–June 3, 1864

## Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26–June 3, 1864

*Gordon C. Rhea*

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**Gordon C. Rhea : Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26–June 3, 1864** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26–June 3, 1864:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is game, set, match the best book on Cold Harbor, period. By mchoneburnardkI always wanted to know not only what actually happened at Cold Harbor and what the controversy was about the losses suffered on the left flank. Numerous writers quote Grant as saying in his memoirs that he always regretted the "second assault" at Cold Harbor. And then there is all that sensationalism by historians trying to sell by

catchy titles and dramatic quotes. What Grant actually said was that he regretted the "last assault". Rhea has actually taken the time to read everything, and either has a gift of writing or has taken the time to learn how to write professionally. Book is very detailed but not boring. It moves at a good pace and traces all major skirmishes and developments up to and through the final big assault. There is no other book than this that tells the history of Cold Harbor. 9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. The culmination of a series of bloody battles By Steven Peterson Gordon Rhea has written a series of four books, providing a chronicle of the bloody fighting in 1864 as Ulysses Grant headed south and Robert E. Lee tried to prevent him from success. From the Wilderness to Spotsylvania Court House to the North Anna River to Cold Harbor. These four books take us through this sanguinary period, day by day. There is no obvious end of one battle and start of the next. It was a continuing slugging match between Confederate and Union forces. This book begins with Grant pulling away from the trap that Lee had set for him at the North Anna River. The moves in the chess match between Grant and Lee featured both misreading the other. Each missed opportunities to maul the other. Grant cleverly sidestepped Lee from the North Anna line, but did not follow up the march that he had gained on Lee. Each side moved in response to what they thought the other was doing, and did a slow dance of maneuver toward Cold Harbor. Major cavalry fighting broke out (e.g., Haw's Shop). Both sides saw some problems with generalship at Corps level (Early's hotheadedness led to some foolish attacks on Union positions; Burnside continued his blundering; Warren dithered; Anderson was at the very limit of his competence). The bleeding of Confederate generals slowly reduced the effectiveness of the Army of Northern Virginia, and Lee had to assume more direct control. Finally, the two armies fought it out at Cold Harbor, with the Union forces being driven back with many casualties. And here is where Rhea's book is distinctive. He argues that Cold Harbor was not nearly as disastrous to Grant's forces as often thought. Indeed, as a percentage of forces lost to casualties, the Confederate Army was in worse shape after Cold Harbor than Union forces (that is, they had lost more troops percentagewise than Northern forces). Grant could replenish his forces; Lee had a much more difficult time. At the end of the slugging matches from The Wilderness to Cold Harbor, Grant pondered his next move. And that's how the book ends. This is well written. Many maps help the reader visualize the movements of the two armies. The order of battle at the end shows the organization of each army, down to brigade and regimental levels. All in all, a worthy addition to the library of students of the Civil War. 30 of 31 people found the following review helpful. Cold Harbor as campaign history... By Thomas Moody Most contemporary histories of the Civil War cover the 1864 Overland Campaign as a series of maneuvers from the Rapidan river ultimately to Appomattox with emphasis on the major battles fought at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, North Anna River, Cold Harbor and the siege at Petersburg. Little is publicized concerning the planning and marches to and from these prestigious battlefields, until Gordon Rhea's study of this series of battles. In Cold Harbor, Rhea's latest in this series, he comes clean with the details of the maneuvers from the North Anna river to Cold Harbor and the ensuing battles on June 1st and 3rd, 1864. By providing such a complete and comprehensive campaign history, Rhea sacrifices (in my opinion) some of his previous improvements in "readability" and essentially redefines what a "campaign history" reads like. Even though this period does encompass a significant amount of maneuvering, cavalry battles, small infantry engagements and entrenchments, Rhea, as in his previous works, feels obligated to discuss all of it in detail. While he does accomplish an amazingly organized study of this amazingly complex series of movements, he loses many a reader to these details and ultimately the whole book suffers somewhat in terms of quality. This isn't to say that this is a bad book...on the contrary, as I've previously stated, Rhea presents an impressive study, taking no liberties in his research to uncover what really happened and when. We start out with the armies facing each other at the North Anna river. U.S. Grant, having realized that R.E. Lee's inverted "V" entrenchment south of the river is indeed a trap, decides to again move "by the left flank" and steals a march on Lee by crossing the Pamunkey river with his sights set on Richmond. Lee finally discovers this and sets up strong defenses along Totopotomoy creek between Grant and Richmond. Cavalry battles at Haw's Shop/Enon Church, Bethesda Church and Matadequin Creek presage the infantry "skirmishes" along Shady Grove Road and Old Church Road. Then "a fateful cascade of events had brought Cold Harbor to the forefront Grant's and Lee's attention. Federal commanders initially had no intention of using the place in their offensive operations. They considered the road junction significant only because Confederates might exploit it as a staging area to harass Union supply lines and thwart (Union General Baldy) Smith's arrival." Lee, sensing Grant's intention to capture the crossroads and use it as a launching pad for an invasion of Richmond, sends Cavalry to Cold Harbor to prevent them from taking it. Union Cavalry under Phil Sheridan fears that the Confederates plan to attack him there and goes on the offensive. Lee conversely thinks that the Cavalry attack is the vanguard for a major Union attack and shifts an entire infantry corps there. Grant sees this and starts his infantry there and the engagement is on. The famous confrontations on June 1st and 3rd mark the true battles at Cold Harbor and Rhea hits his stride in discussing them: "Writers later alluded to a 'Cold Harbor' syndrome, claiming that the carnage Union soldiers witnessed in the fighting there persuaded them to shy away from assaulting entrenched positions. In fact, by the time the Army of the Potomac reached Cold Harbor, veterans had already learned that valuable lesson. Cold Harbor is where newcomers discovered what old timers already knew." Famous engagements involving the 2nd Connecticut Heavy Artillery and the 8th New York Heavy Artillery are detailed here making these stories a remarkable companion for the History Channel's "Civil War Combat" episode on Cold Harbor.

These army-wide assaults against the entrenched Confederate positions have driven many historians to indict Grant for mis-management of this battle and garnering him the reputation of a "butcher". Rhea dispels these myths: "When viewed in the war's larger context, the June 3 attack falls short of its popular reputation for slaughter. Grant lost more men each day in the Wilderness and on two different days at Spotsylvania Court House than he did on June 3, making his main effort at Cold Harbor only the fifth bloodiest day for the Federals since crossing the Rapidan." What Grant and the Union army is guilty of is army-wide coordination. Time and again, they have an advantage taken away when coordinated movements go awry and the Confederates are able to capitalize...Rhea documents these in his closing chapter and discusses Grant's feeling that this was not a major defeat, but just another obstacle in his road to defeating Lee's army. A study not for the general reader, but an essential component for historians and of Civil War history, Gordon Rhea's latest book continues his impressive documentation of the close of the war in Virginia and I would encourage all Civil War buffs to read these books.

In his gripping fourth volume on the spring 1864 Overland campaign -- which pitted Ulysses S. Grant against Robert E. Lee for the first time in the Civil War -- Gordon Rhea vividly re-creates the battles and maneuvers from the North Anna stalemate through the Cold Harbor offensive. Once again Rhea's tenacious research elicits stunning new facts from the records of a phase oddly ignored or mythologized by historians. The Cold Harbor of these pages differs sharply from the Cold Harbor of popular lore. We see Grant, in one of his most brilliant moves, pull his army across the North Anna River and steal a march on Lee. In response, Lee sets up a strong defensive line along Totopotomoy Creek, and the battles spark across woods and fields northeast of Richmond. Their back to the Chickahominy River and on their last legs, the rebel troops defiantly face an army-wide assault ordered by Grant that extends over three days. Rhea gives a surprising new interpretation of the famous battle that left seven thousand Union casualties and only fifteen hundred Confederate dead or wounded. Here, Grant is not a callous butcher, and Lee does not wage a perfect fight. Every imaginable primary source has been exhausted to unravel the strategies, mistakes, gambles, and problems with subordinates that preoccupied two exquisitely matched minds. In Cold Harbor, Rhea separates fact from fiction in a charged, evocative narrative. He leaves readers under a moonless sky, Grant pondering the eastward course of the James River fifteen miles south of the encamped armies.

About the Author Gordon Rhea is the author of three previous books, a frequent lecturer throughout the country on military history, and a practicing attorney. A winner of the Fletcher Pratt Literary Award, he lives in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, and in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, with his wife and two sons.