



The Bloody Ground

Bernard Cornwell

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Battle of Antietam, 1862

In this fourth, final, and rousing installment of Nathaniel Starbuck's Civil War adventures, Nate is given command of a punishment battalion: a motley collection of cowards, thieves, deserters, and murderers. Setting off to join General Robert E. Lee's army, Starbuck's men reach Harper's Ferry in time to take part in Stonewall Jackson's capture of the Union garrison. From there, the regiment moves on to the legendary horror of Sharpsburg, beside the Antietam Creek, forever to be remembered as the bloodiest single day of the war. There, Starbuck and his troop will have their courage and commitment tested as never before.

The Bloody Ground Details

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From Reader Review The Bloody Ground for online ebook

Christopher says

The final volume of Cornwell's Civil War series is a bit stronger than the middle two but still feels like less-than-solid Sharpe stories. Taking the better known battle of Antietam is a good start as it enables Cornwell to tell a broader story of the battle with more identifiable set-pieces.

Getting there was a challenge as there's no real antagonist here. Starbuck's battles with his inept commander Washington Faulconer aren't that satisfying as Faulconer gets removed to Richmond and isn't really heard from. When Starbuck is given command of a battalion of rejects/stragglers (due to Faulconer), it had potential for some quality scenes where he whips them into shape, but it's more minor level staff officer backbiting and none of the foils for Starbuck are that challenging/memorable.

The best little scenes are Cornwell's dealing with how McClellan came to possess Lee's General Order 191 detailing the Confederate troop placements prior to the battle. It's inventive and entertaining.

But other than that, the characters here just aren't that memorable. You'd think Starbuck by this volume have developed at least SOME sense of himself other than "I just like soldierin'" but it's not to be. We still have no idea why Starbuck is fighting for the South, neither does he and neither does Cornwell.

Renata says

Fabulous series by Bernard Cornwell.. Those of us who have had a chance to visit Antietam will never view it the same way again. This was the second Cornwell series I completed after the Arthur books and since then, although I've read them all excepting the Sharpe books, it remains my favorite. Please, Please, Please, dear Mr. Cornwell from a great fan and I know many more who lost their heart to Starbuck and the way you made those haunting fields come alive, let Starbuck ride again?

Renata de Ris

Michael Campbell says

About the same as the first two. Well depicted and researched action scenes, decent characters and dialogue, and it gives you a good feel for the politics and culture of the time.

I do wish it had spent more time on Antietam though, as it's arguably one of the most significant battles in US history.

This was a pretty decent series overall, but it felt too much like the Richard Sharpe series for me to really enjoy. I felt like I had already read this series before, and it was hard for me to give it my full attention due to that.

If you like Civil War history or military history in general, this is probably a good series to read. If nothing

else, Bernard Cornwell does excellent research and knows how to immerse one in the period he's writing in.

Gracie Mastic says

Nothing short of brilliant

Fourth in the series if is very exciting and will not let you put it down. My grandfather got me hooked on Civil War History as a little girl and I have read a great deal of fiction and non fiction about the war. This series is top notch.

Dabdog says

great detail and insight to the war.

Sheryl Collmer says

Well researched and written. Somehow Cornwell can make a compelling novel out of the horror of Antietam, with good characters and a very clear explication of the flow of battle.

Ed says

This is the last book in the Starbuck Civil War series, even though Cornwell hints that more will be coming. This covers the events leading up to and the battle of Antietam, the bloodiest day in U.S. military history.

Starbuck takes over a punishment battalion made up of alleged cowards, deserters and other motley individuals. This after proving that the previous commander was a crook. Before they are really trained the battalion is marched off to join Lee's army. They take part in Stonewall Jackson's capture of Harper's Ferry, a Union stronghold. They then undergo a forced march to the town of Sharpsburg next to Antitam creek and learn the lessons that only combat can teach and do quite well in the process.

As always Cornwell's battle scenes are riveting. His characters have matured since the first volume and his descriptions of their behavior are much more realistic. He does a great job of describing General McClelland and is aligned with the descriptions of the popinjay general that I've read in other books about the Civil War.

Another thing I admire about Cornwell is how he integrates his research into his fiction. The discovery of Lee's plans by the Union, a real event, is interestingly developed in this story.

I'm sorry I have no more Nate Starbuck adventures to anticipate reading.

Dillon Stubbs says

Probably the best battle descriptions I've ever read!

Gerald Matzke says

This book is the fourth in the Nathaniel Starbuck series set in the Civil War. It builds up to the Battle at Antietam in the first part and then in the second part presents a gruesome account of one of the bloodiest battles of the war. Cornwell is at his best in the vivid descriptions of the battlefield as he employs all of the reader's five senses to experience the reality of armed conflict. Along with the brutality of war, the reader also gets to experience the psychological, spiritual and political conflict that is faced by soldiers as they find themselves thrust into situations over which they have no control. I've read a lot of Cornwell's books and I feel that this is one of the best.

Cathy says

Enjoyed this one better than the last one. About the battle at Antietam. More character development and back story made this more interesting.

Graham says

THE BLOODY GROUND is the last in the Starbuck series so far, although the author insists there will be another at some point. I hope there will be: there are too many loose ends left in this one.

As with the previous entry, I've lost my original review, but I remember liking this - a lot more than the previous books. It feels like Cornwell's finally found his groove with this series, and THE BLOODY GROUND is up there with the best Sharpe books. There are vivid battle scenes, overriding realism, plenty of humour and a lot of detailed, engaging characters that come alive on the page. I remember that this one contains one of the author's best written battle scenes, an extraordinary and violent encounter in the American countryside.

Art says

I love Bernard Cornwell's Nathaniel Starbuck Chronicles! The only problem with them is they stop in mid-Civil War and since one hasn't been written in more than a decade, it is unlikely there will be another.

But each of these books captures the strategy and the battle movements better than many other fiction and non-fiction accounts of the war.

Starbuck is a bit of a rogue, which makes him more likeable. And Cornwell's research and background for each battle is astounding.

This time around, Starbuck is at the Battle of Antietam. His Rebel army continues to get smaller in the face of superior northern resources. But Starbuck fights on, giving hope that one day Cornwell will come to his senses and write another in this amazing series.

May says

Just finished THE BLOODY GROUND! Incredible detail of the Battle of Antietam. I occasionally had to put the book down to take a breath; the back and forth furor was so overwhelming. Truly disappointed when Adam Falconer was killed mid-way. So glad to learn that Starbuck survives for a Book 5!

Eric_W says

There are just so many good mysteries out there. The Starbuck books view the Civil War through the eyes of a transplanted New Englander fighting for the Confederacy. This is the 4th in the series. Not being a fan of the Southern point of view, I was reluctant to pick these up, but Cornwell tells such a good tale that they are very difficult to put down. Nothing deep here, just lots of fun. Starbuck in this one has been yanked from his company — he's a major — and assigned to the Yellowlegs, a regiment so-named because they ran away from a fight. Starbuck, unhappy with the assignment, and also a transplanted northerner, arrives at camp only to be mistaken for a drunk Lieutenant Potter, who is late in arriving at his new assignment to the Yellowlegs also (interestingly, yellowlegs was an appellation given to U.S. cavalry troops). Masquerading as Potter, Starbuck soon discovers a pattern of corruption and with the help of his friend Delancey — who happens to be a Yankee spy unbeknownst to Starbuck — turns tables on the other officers in the company who had been tormenting him, believing Starbuck to be a lowly lieutenant. The events of the novel revolve around the Battle at Sharpsburg (known as Antietam in the North), the bloodiest battle in United States history, where more than 23,000 soldiers died. McClellan does not fare well, seen rightly so, as a vacillating, reluctant, overanxious general who placed too much reliance on his Pinkerton intelligence. Lee had invaded the North with far fewer troops than McClellan had at his disposal, but McClellan insisted he was outnumbered. Starbuck and his brigade are placed in the thick of the battle (most of the characters are completely fictional — and the famous copy of order 191 is delivered to McClellan by Delancey who appears to have no basis in fact).

An example of Cornwell's fun: Starbuck is speaking with Potter: "You've still got the whiskey?" "Safe in its stone bottle, wrapped in two shirts, a piece of canvas, and an unbound copy of Macaulay's Essays. It isn't a complete volume. I found it dangling in a Harper's Ferry privy and the first thirty pages had already been consumed for hygienic purposes." "Wouldn't you rather have found his poetry?" Starbuck asked. "In a privy? No, I think not. Besides, I already have swathes of Macauley in my head, or what remains of my head," Potter said, touching the bloody bandage over his left ear. "'To every man upon this earth Death cometh soon or late, And how can man die better Than facing fearful odds.' " Potter shook his head at the appropriateness of the words. "Too good for a privy, Starbuck. My father hung the works of Roman Catholic theologians in our outhouse. It was, he said, the only thing they were fit for, but the insult misfired. I damn nearly converted to popery after reading Newman's lectures. Father thought I was constipated till he found out what I was doing, and after that we used newspapers like every other Christian, but father always made

sure that any verses of scripture were cut out before the sheets were threaded on the string.”

In a historical note at the end, Cornwell references *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam* by Stephen Sears as the best book on the battle, so I've added that to my reading list which continues to grow beyond an unreasonable size.

Dave says

The Civil War ends with Sharpsburg????????????? This awesome account had a harrowing description of the West Woods/Miller's Cornfield fight. I'm still waiting (& hoping) that Mr. Cornwell will take the time to come back across the pond and do the necessary research to finish this series. Sharpe has all but run its course and this series deserves another shot. When I attended the 140th Anniversary Sharpsburg reenactment in 2002 I regaled my fellow 1st Texans with memories of this book.
