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Last Full Measure (Minnesota)



Synopsis

Since its publication, Richard Moe's *The Last Full Measure* has garnered a reputation as the definitive history of the First Minnesota Regiment and one of a handful of classic regimental histories of the Civil War. The First Minnesota Volunteers, the first regiment offered to President Lincoln after the fall of Fort Sumter, served in virtually every major battle fought in the eastern theater during the first three years of the Civil War. This is the story of the Army of the Potomac during that period: the initial enthusiasm dashed by sudden defeat at Bull Run; the pride at being shaped into an army by George McClellan and the frustration with his--and his successors'--inability to defeat Robert E. Lee; and, finally, the costly battle of Gettysburg, the decisive battle in which the First Minnesota played a crucial, and tragic, role. Drawing on a wide array of letters, diaries, and personal reminiscences, Moe tells the story anew through the experiences of the men who lived it. As James MacGregor Burns notes in his foreword, "Like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, this work sticks close to the men in battle, and hence, like Tolstoy, the author keeps close to the human size of war."

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Customer Reviews

This work makes your jaw sag. There were many heroic actions at Gettysburg: Pickett's charge, the 20th Maine, the 15th Alabama, the Iron Brigade, just to mention a few. But no one unit played a more significant role, to less subsequent acclaim, than the First Minnesota Volunteers. One of the first regiments to respond to Lincoln's initial call, their service reads like a history of the Army of the Potomac. Their key work, however, was done on July 2nd 1863. During the Gettysburg campaign they suffered 70% casualties, 232 out of the 330 engaged. Amazingly, the majority of these casualties occurred in less than 45 seconds. Even more amazing, after three days of fighting in which many units had distinguished themselves, the contribution of the First Minnesota, especially on the second day, wasn't immediately apparent to those who had not witnessed it. Such was the carnage of Gettysburg. This is their story.

This is an outstanding book that gives the detail of the First Minnesota's glorious charge at Gettysburg and helped saved the Union line against a largely superior Confederate force. I have been to Gettysburg and saw the field on which they charged against the Confederate line and closed the gap for the critical time needed for Union reinforcements to fill in the gap. The author also gives great narrative in the book as it does not become overwhelmed with unnecessary details that would be distracting to the reader. The timeframe in the book is mostly the summer of 1863 before the Battle of Chancellorsville and ends with the valliant and brutal charge in which the 1st Minnesota lost so many men in less than five minutes. The details of the charge are gripping and individual accounts by the soldiers who were there make the book impossible to put down. The First Minnesota's bravery ranks it right along with Col Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's 20th Maine as doing the suprizing and remarkable thing at precisely the right time, in which saved the Union Army and possibly saved the Union from defeat. This book needs to be reprinted quickly so other Civil War/U.S. History readers could know about this fine, brave regiment.

Richard Moe draws heavily from the letters and diaries (many of them unpublished) of the men of the First and weaves them into a complelling story. This is one of the few books on any topic that I have read twice and I am sure I will read it again. You will never forget Lyman and Issac Taylor and many of the other soldiers of the First after you have read this book. Their very personal writings cover a three year period and give the reader an insight into a soldier's life not often found in any book. I found myself not wanting to finish the book. These men had become friends and I knew full well their fate. They also knew their duty and did not hesitate. 262 of them charged 1,200. Gen. Hancock asked them to give him 5 min. to bring up reinforcements, they gave him 15. Of the 262

only 47 walked away. Many of the voices I had come to know fell silent. History does not allow you to change the ending as much as you might wish you could. By the way, I bought this book in Freeport ME at the 20th Maine Bookstore (it was their last copy). It can be argued that these two units, a mile apart, saved the Union line on July 2nd 1863.

Devotion to history isn't as strong in the Upper Midwest as in the Old South. Perhaps oblivion is nobler and less risky than living out a myth, but there are few if any "re-enactors" among my Swedish kinfolk in the Land of Lakes. Of course, the earliest settlers in my clan came to Minnesota in 1872. The Minnesota First Volunteer Regiment, nevertheless, has a good claim on being the most heroic single regiment on either side in the whole war, and Mr Moe documents the history of their heroism most eloquently. Another review complains that Moe use too many quotes, too much primary source material. I totally disagree. The use of letters, journals, and bits from local newspapers is the strength of this book, the part that carries both conviction and immediacy. Comparison to the Ken Burns TV documentary is apt, and I feel that this book, *The Last Full Measure*, is stronger both in impact and in scholarship. We're modest, diffident people, we Minnesotans. You won't find many statues of soldiers in our town squares. Truth is, we don't have so many town squares to show them off in. Kids plow through elementary school in Minnesota thinking of the Civil War as a faraway conflict hardly more intimate to us than the Boer War. I remember being surprised, in college, to learn that there'd been a Sioux War in my birth-county, in the 1860s. History was what happened in other places. I wonder... Is our blissful ignorance a handicap or the source of our comparatively lawful and peaceful community? Our grudges stay at home. Anyhow, as we say in Freeborn County, this here tale of young men fighting for what they care about makes pretty good reading.

This book tells the story of the First Minnesota in such a way that makes you feel like you are with the soldiers. It was nice to read a book actually made up a lot of the soldiers own writing through letters and diaries. The First was a large part of the Union winning the battle of Gettysburg and it was nice to read the soldiers account of what happened. The author also put in other accounts of the First from the Generals that were involved as they praised the First. Great Book.

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