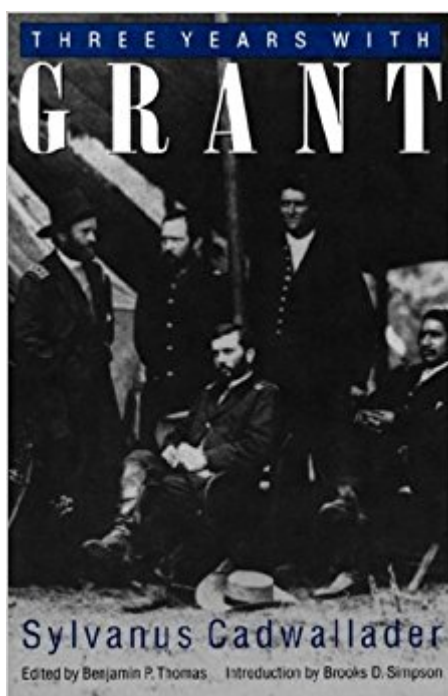


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Three Years With Grant: As Recalled By War Correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader



Synopsis

Sylvanus Cadwallader, a war correspondent for the Chicago Times and later for the New York Herald, was attached to General Grant's headquarters from 1862 to 1865. He enjoyed rare access to personalities (Lincoln, Sheridan, and Lee) and events (Vicksburg, Chattanooga, City Point, and Potomac), and he makes them come alive here. Cadwallader also includes information about his own role in constraining and concealing Grant's drinking. Through his pages the real Grant emerges. The manuscript of *Three Years with Grant* was edited and annotated by Lincoln biographer Benjamin P. Thomas and first published nearly a century after the Civil War.

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Customer Reviews

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Brooks D. Simpson is the author of *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861-1868* and other books. He is an associate professor of American history at Arizona State University.

A very lively guy.

“Three Years With Grant” • Sylvanus Cadwallader, University of Nebraska Press, 1955
Sylvanus Cadwallader was a newspaperman who became an “embedded” correspondent with the Army of the Tennessee under the command of a somewhat obscure but rising General, Ulysses S. Grant. He was to become a civilian member of Grant’s staff and followed him from the fall of 1862 through to the 1865 surrender at Appomattox at which he was present. In the 1800s newspapers were the only medium for information. However, the standards of professionalism were not at all universal in the press of the age. Many Civil War correspondents were as apt to report; rumor, inference, gossip, favoritism and conjecture, as they were fact. Worst of all, it seems that at times the press had little compunction for revealing sensitive military information. This was important because newspapers circulated between the North and South. For these reasons newspaper reporters were generally mistrusted if not reviled by professional military leaders. Sylvanus Cadwallader was the opposite of the typical newspaper correspondent. He was intelligent, affable, honest, discrete, accurate and professional. Because of his integrity and his competent writing Cadwallader was quick to earn the respect, trust and friendship of General John Rawlins, Grant’s Chief of staff, and subsequently of the General himself. Cadwallader was a colleague, close friend and an important member of General Grant’s staff with unlimited access. This book tells the story of General Grant’s war from the view of a trusted insider at his headquarters. During his time with Grant and especially his tenure with the Army of the Potomac, Sylvanus Cadwallader almost single handedly made the New York Herald the premiere newspaper in the Nation with a circulation 10 times that of other newspapers. He did this by orchestrating a group of hand picked professional correspondents of the highest skill and integrity, and by setting up a network to deliver their supremely accurate reports very rapidly to the Herald offices allowing the newspaper to scoop the competition by days. The New York Herald reigned supreme for swift, accurate information about the war. Cadwallader’s access and skill in recording the persons and events in Grant’s command make for a lively, informative and educational read. Although not very technical on the strategies and nuances of the battles, Cadwallader’s insight makes this the best book I have read on Grant the man. Three Years with Grant is a lively and thoroughly enjoyable book. It should be noted that Sylvanus Cadwallader completed the manuscript for this book in 1896, however the book was never published. Much later the original manuscript

was discovered and edited for publication by Benjamin Thomas (in 1955). Thomas must take much credit for the flow of the finish work. This said, the content and the words are Cadwallader's alone. This book is a delight, 5 stars.

During the early part of the Civil War, war correspondents were, for the most part, despised reptilians. As far as most of the Union High Command was concerned, they were a scurrilous lot that could not be trusted to be fair in their reporting. They were people who fabricated stories, published battle plans before the battle, were capable of being bribed to produce favorable and untrue stories to assist in one's career planning and could, with the scratch of a pen, terminate the careers of good soldiers. Small wonder the relationship between journalism and the military was adversarial. Sylvanus Cadwallader set standards in Civil War journalism. This is not a story about the Civil War but rather is the story of how this intrepid man's character enabled him to establish himself as a valuable addition to Sam Grant's Headquarters staff. Becoming a permanent fixture on Grant's staff he literally endeared himself as a trusted confidant. His tent was always pitched close to Grant's, Grant signed passes that enabled him to go wherever he wanted, whenever he wanted to. He had the ability to use, even commandeer, any form of transportation he required, horse, train or boat. He did not abuse his privileges nor did he betray confidences. These reminiscences reveal information not contained in his dispatches. Cadwallader remained with Grant through Union operations in southern Tennessee and northern Mississippi, the Vicksburg campaign (where he is captured and released and subsequently, in a different escapade, gathers intelligence for Grant at the battle of Champion Hill), Chattanooga, the Wilderness (where he is again captured, but escapes), Cold Harbor, the crossing of the James River, City Point and is present for the Union Army's breakthrough at Petersburg and Lee's subsequent surrender at Appomattox Court House. We get a clear picture of Grant, a man Cadwallader thought a military genius. Living close to Grant from October 1862 until the end of the war, Cadwallader was one of the few men, certainly the only civilian, who had a clear view of how the Civil War was fought at the command level. He depicts Grant in the heat of battle and relaxing with friends. He reveals Grant as a surprisingly good military politician, that Grant thought more highly of Sheridan than Sherman, that Grant personally disliked Ben Butler and thought little of Gouverneur Warren's military skills. Cadwallader observed many Union officers at close range: Sherman, Sheridan, Logan, Wallace, Thomas, Butler, Warren, Meade and others. He appraises their military talents candidly. The author finished this work in 1896 when he was seventy years old. It was never published. Until its acquisition by the Illinois Historical Society and subsequent publication in 1955, few people had ever read it. It is a wonderful, colorful,

insightful work that transports you back into a period of our history when our survival as a Nation was in serious doubt. But perhaps as important, through these reminiscences we get a clear picture of Cadwallader himself. He appears honest, straight forward, scrappy, tenacious, remarkably loyal and above all, exceptionally professional in his work and conduct. He gains our respect and admiration today, just as surely as he did throughout the campaigns he covered and the men he interfaced with, 150+ years ago. This book is as fine a glimpse into this segment of our history as is available today.

This is a controversial book because of one reason: the author maintains he witnessed Grant getting drunk during the Vicksburg campaign in 1863. Why this is particularly contentious with Grant supporters is a trifle mystifying, but Grant fans still vociferously contend the author "embellished" or "lied" about the drinking binge. Never mind that two other people who were also with Grant corroborate the drinking story. Never mind that his chief of staff specifically wrote about the binging in a private letter. Aside from this drinking anecdote, the book is a warm, rich portrayal of General Grant from a man with a discerning eye. Cadwallader relates many small incidents of Grant's everyday life as a man and as a general that are fascinating and not to be found in other first-person narratives. Cadwallader truly loved Grant and his book shows his regard and his profound attachment to him. It's a pity that so many people denigrate such a fine book simply because they feel the author's memory was fallible or because they refuse to see Grant as a multi-faceted man. A man with his share of human frailties and weaknesses, but still a towering individual: a great general and a man of uncommon moral fiber and decency. If you know little about Grant, this is a good place to begin a journey in seeking to know him as a man and as a great soldier who saved the union.

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