

Book Reviews



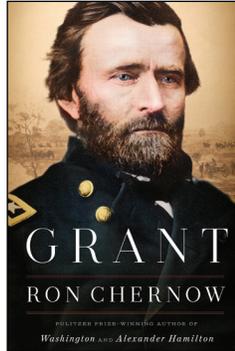
Grant

By Ron Chernow

NY: Penguin Press, 2017,
1,104 pages

Reviewed by Arthur I. Cyr

Best-selling author Ron Chernow is an extremely influential biographer, for good reasons. Previous substantial studies of the lives and careers of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John D. Rockefeller, as well as histories of banking, have earned widespread praise. His signature strengths include an engaging, at times gripping prose style, accompanied by extensive detailed research.



Chernow's biography of Ulysses S. Grant maintains a high standard. The author brings to life the personality and career of the general who commanded all Union armies during the last year of our Civil War and the less gifted civilian leader who twice won the White House. One question regarding Grant, as with George Washington, is whether one more biography really makes sense, given the large number of books and articles written about him. Regarding Chernow's work, the answer is clearly yes, reflecting the author's reconfirmation of this leader's military skill, personal integrity, and varied accomplishments.

Grant provides a particularly dramatic case of a life that combined exceptional difficulty and frustration with extraordinary ability and accomplishments. After graduating from West Point with a commission in the Infantry and serving with distinction in the Mexican War, he abruptly resigned from the Army. Long separation from his beloved family while on assignment in California and Oregon led to excessive drinking plus financial problems. Chernow assembles persuasive evidence that a vindictive, martinet commanding officer targeted Grant. Failures in business followed. Later, tenure as President of the United States was marked with scandals created by other members of his administration. In between, Grant proved an exceptionally able and successful Army commander during the Civil War, with a series of impressive military victories in the Western theater of operations. Overall command of United States armies in the field followed.

Much popular culture has painted Confederate General Robert E. Lee as superior to Grant in field command. This perspective rationalizes Union victory as the consequence of enormous advantages in men and materiel. The "Lost Cause" school of pro-Southern historians emerged soon after the war

and grew influential in the 20th century. Chernow effectively destroys this analysis. Grant possessed a remarkable eye for map and terrain analysis, a genius for military organization, and unrelenting determination. Chernow marshals extensive evidence of Grant's extraordinary capacities to organize logistics and inspire men to disciplined unity. At the outset of the Civil War, he did this remarkably quickly, starting with an untrained volunteer Illinois company.

The long successful siege of Vicksburg, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River, represents a masterpiece of campaign planning and execution that has been widely studied since. Grant orchestrated a series of aggressive, fast-moving expeditions that systematically isolated Vicksburg, while suffering fewer casualties than did the enemy. He was persistent, imaginative, and daring in eventually running ships past extensive Confederate artillery batteries. Grant's critics called him a "butcher," indifferent to casualties, but that was not reality. His operations achieved the surrender of three still functional armies in the field, at Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, and Appomattox. Chernow provides extensive examples of Grant's actions and outlook that portray a decidedly sensitive man, moved by the suffering of wounded on both sides, who often intervened directly to help. This complemented his modesty, in manner as well as dress, in contrast to the often-flamboyant senior officers of that era. Ultimately, the democratic style of this uncommon man won affection as well as respect from the troops.

Grant was a strategist, whereas Lee was most skillful in handling the single battlefield. The final year of the war saw Grant, with President Abraham Lincoln's full support, orchestrating a comprehensive sustained national offensive, coordinated between the Eastern and Western theaters, which brought victory. America's relatively democratic culture permitted Grant to step into command early in the war and move up. In this context, the vast expansion of forces required to meet the unprecedented demands of the Civil War opened tremendous opportunities for a man of Grant's remarkable talents, who had suffered earlier reversals.

Grant faced frustration in the White House but with some successes. He was an excellent judge of military talent but proved naive in politics and victimized relatively easily. A strong sense of loyalty, a vital asset in the comradeship of combat, led him to continue supporting corrupt political appointees. Yet he also protected the rights of newly freed African Americans and effectively fought the Ku Klux Klan. Party political pressures led him to relent late in his administration, something he said afterward was

a terrible mistake. The author develops this dimension, complementing his discussion of the Civil War years and adding to our understanding of Grant.

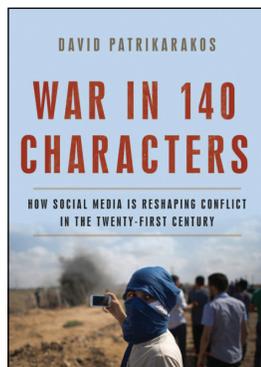
Ron Chernow contributes important fresh perspectives on Ulysses Grant, a complicated as well as extremely talented leader, in a book geared to a general audience. His work is a worthy complement to Grant's own important memoirs.

(Arthur I. Cyr is director of the Clausen Center for World Business at Carthage College in Kenosha, WI.)

War in 140 Characters: How Social Media is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century

**By David Patrikarakos
NY: Basic Books, 2017,
301 pages**

Reviewed by
CPT Kevin M. Bernhardt



Readers make decisions within an instantaneous global media cycle, influenced by anyone who maintains a social media account with the ability to engage an audience's emotions and biases. In almost every moment in modern warfare, individuals consistently update events that occur around them on social media, in which the immediacy of reporting can lead to information supremacy. David Patrikarakos, the author and a British investigative journalist who reports on war and international affairs, shows how social media has changed the landscape of warfare in the 21st century by shifting the power of institutional media outlets to the individual, who he labels "homo-digitalis" or the hyper-empowered individual. Patrikarakos argues that anyone with access to the internet can serve as an actor in war.

Patrikarakos developed his thesis through a collection of primary source interviews from people who shaped the conflict around them by way of social media. The author also taps into his own personal experiences reporting on war, adding to the credibility of his thesis. He describes the effects of photographs posted on social media sites by Farah Baker, a Palestinian teenager, which included graphic images of casualties following air raids in the Israel and Palestinian conflict, immediately influencing the global narrative. The author emphasized that Farah, "the Citizen Journalist," did not have any formal media training; however, she did have a phone and an internet connection, which allowed her to immediately post graphic images that contradicted institutional media reports that claimed the bombing had ended.

Patrikarakos also asserts the importance of data emitted

by social media through the story of Eliot Higgins, "the Interpreter" of imagery and data. Higgins, a former world-class video gamer, analyzed publicly available geo-located images and articles to investigate Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, an airline that unaccountably crashed in the Ukraine in 2014. Higgins' ability to analyze the information from these open source sites ultimately revealed evidence proving the Russian military shot down the airliner, contrary to official Russian denials. Higgins' example displays the power of analytics, and the vulnerability and exploitation value of data produced by open source media.

Patrikarakos also tells the story of Sophie Kasiki, a French woman victimized by the Islamic State's recruiting campaign through social media. Several of Kasiki's male friends who accepted the call to the Caliphate radicalized Sophie through iterative interactions on the internet and convinced her to travel to Raqqa, Syria. Once she arrived in Raqqa, the narrative that her friends described did not come close to the disheartening reality of the Caliphate. After a month, she escaped and returned to tell her story. Sophie's story shows the potential impact of social media in a real-life story and outlines how the Islamic State used social media as an effective but deceptive recruiting tool.

The author transitions well from story to story and allows the reader to understand the impact of social media in war. For balance, he interviewed competing actors, to include Israeli Defense Force officers about their effort to counter narratives by Farah Baker and other Palestinian media reports. However, he shows a subtle prejudice and emotional tone in the quantity and quality of content he presents for Farah Baker, which culminates in overt bias in his conclusion. His closing paragraphs compare effects of current populist movements powered by social media with pre-World War I conditions in 1914, and he suggests that the 2016 U.S. election and the Brexit serve as indicators of future large-scale conflict. Although his lack of objectivity in his out of place conclusion affects his argument, this small misjudgment does not take away from the greater lessons in the rest of his book.

Operational leaders and staffs should understand the impact of social media and the speed in which the effects, whether positive or negative, of operations can proliferate throughout the operational environment. *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media is Re-shaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* provides awareness for the potential effects of social media in war for leaders in an operational environment. Patrikarakos' insights will be valuable to commanders, operations officers, and targeting officers, who are either currently deployed or preparing to deploy to any operational theater.

(At the time this review was submitted, CPT Kevin Bernhardt was a student in the Defense Analysis Program at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA.)