

Paul Krugman - New York Times Blog

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Horse Soldiers Blogging

When I was little I loved, just loved the John Ford movie *The Horse Soldiers*, a dramatization of Grierson's Raid; I think I made my father take me four times. As an adult, unfortunately, I found it more or less unwatchable — the prettification of war just won't wash for me now. (The famous scene with the military school students never happened during that raid; something like it did happen during Sherman's sweep through the Carolinas, but it was a slaughter).

No matter — the reality was actually more dramatic than the movie, with the real Benjamin Grierson — a music teacher who hated horses — a far more interesting character than the one John Wayne played.

And now that we're at the 150th anniversary of the raid, I'm going to have a chance to start indulging my U.S. Grant obsession. I've always had a thing for Grant — the stubby, unprepossessing guy who failed at most things until he turned out to have a unique understanding of modern war. The scene at Appomattox — aristocratic Lee in his dress uniform surrendering to disheveled, unimpressive-looking Grant — represents for me the coming of the modern world.

On to Vicksburg!

Update: Some readers are portraying Grant as a crude attrition-type general based on his record in Virginia. But it's pretty clear to me at least that the problem in Virginia was basically the Army of the Potomac, or more specifically many of its officers, who were spooked by Lee and repeatedly failed to carry through even when they had clear advantages. Grant had completely outmaneuvered Lee several times, for example at Petersburg, which should have been a Vicksburg-style sweep, only to have the moment thrown away by sluggish commanders; the same thing happened to Sheridan in the Valley. And in the final chase to Appomattox, once the Army of the Potomac finally realized that victory was at hand, Grant showed every bit as much vigor as at Vicksburg.

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