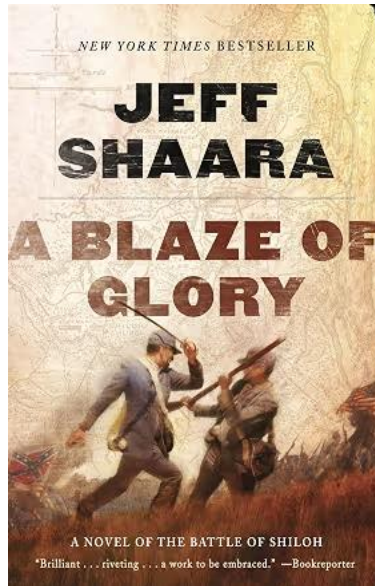




# Book Review: *A Blaze of Glory: A Novel of the Battle of Shiloh*

By Jeff Shaara

Reviewed by Curtis Jerry Smothers

## A Gripping Account of Shiloh

Jeff Shaara's *A Blaze of Glory* is an absorbing novel about the Battle of Shiloh, fought in western Tennessee in April 1862. Through the experiences of commanders and ordinary soldiers, Shaara captures the confusion and suffering of a battle that shattered hopes for a short war.

The novel's strength lies in making a vast military disaster immediate and personal. Decisions made at headquarters become matters of survival for men struggling to understand what is happening around them.

## History Through Its Participants

Shaara continues the approach familiar from his other historical novels, including *Gods and Generals* and *The Last Full Measure*. He moves between perspectives, placing readers alongside a Confederate cavalry lieutenant, a Union private, and commanders such as Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman.

Confederate leaders Albert Sidney Johnston and P. G. T. Beauregard also figure prominently. Their competing judgments and limited knowledge help convey how difficult it is to direct a battle once events outrun expectations.

The characters' thoughts and conversations are imagined, but they give the historical setting emotional depth. Fear, ambition, loyalty, and uncertainty shape the narrative as much as troop movements.

## **An Early Confederate Advantage**

The opening Confederate assault catches Union forces poorly prepared and drives them back toward the Tennessee River. Shaara conveys the shock of the attack through troops facing the collapse of familiar routines into chaos.

Johnston's death and Beauregard's decision to halt the attacks that evening become pivotal moments. Yet the novel's tension comes partly from the uncertainty surrounding those decisions: an apparent opportunity does not guarantee victory. Reinforced Union troops counterattack the next day, forcing the Confederates to retreat.

## **Command Under Pressure**

The story invites questions about leadership on both sides. Why were Union preparations inadequate? How much did Confederate decisions contribute to the failure to secure a victory? Could different choices have changed the outcome?

Shaara's portrayal gives these questions weight without making their answers seem simple. Readers see commanders acting with incomplete information while soldiers bear the consequences. Confidence, misjudgment, and courage often exist side by side.

## **The Human Cost**

Shiloh's roughly 24,000 casualties are difficult to comprehend as a statistic. Shaara makes that toll tangible through individual experiences of injury, terror, and loss.

For me, these passages are the novel's most powerful. The scale of the fighting matters, but its meaning emerges through the people caught within it. The narrative leaves little room for a romantic view of combat.

## **Final Assessment**

*A Blaze of Glory* combines a compelling battle narrative with a moving account of war's human cost. Its shifting perspectives connect the decisions of generals with the experiences of soldiers, giving both the military action and its consequences depth.

I found it gripping and sobering. The title suggests splendor, but the lasting impression is of suffering—and of lives changed or ended by decisions made amid extraordinary uncertainty.