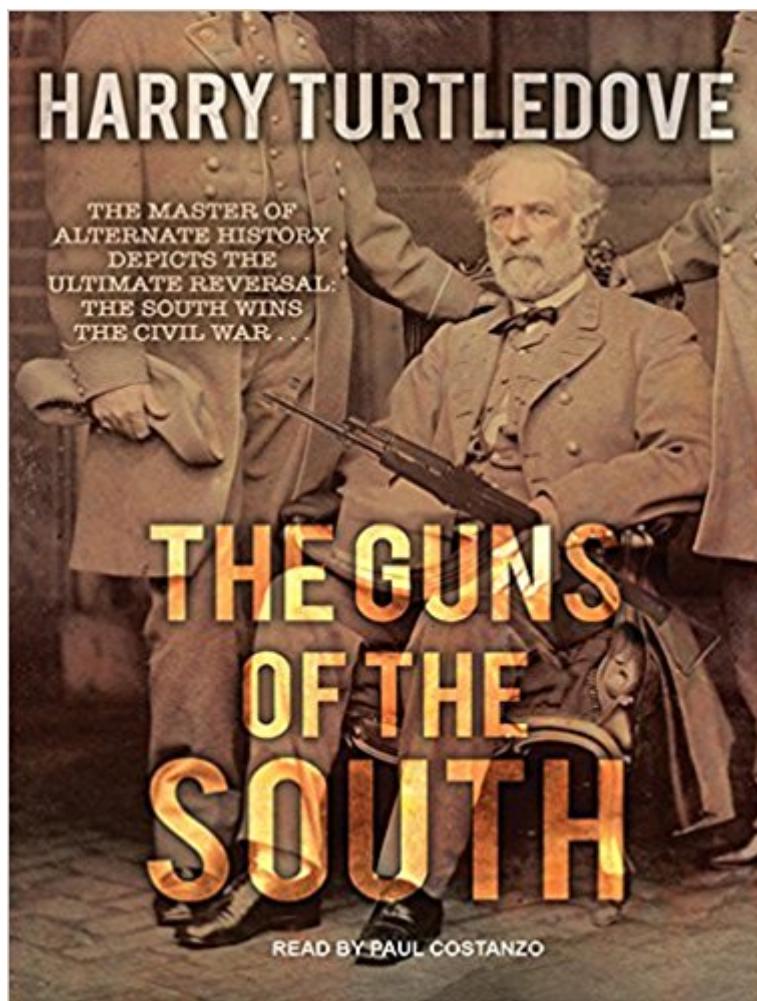


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# The Guns Of The South



## **Synopsis**

January 1864: General Robert E. Lee faces defeat. The Army of Northern Virginia is ragged and ill-equipped. Gettysburg has broken the back of the Confederacy and decimated its manpower. Then, Andries Rhoodie, a strange man with an unplaceable accent, approaches Lee with an extraordinary offer. Rhoodie demonstrates an amazing rifle: its rate of fire is incredible, its lethal efficiency breathtaking-and Rhoodie guarantees unlimited quantities to the Confederates. The name of the weapon is the AK-47 . . .

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The Confederates win the Civil War with aid from South African time travelers in this unconvincing "what-if" tale. Using a time machine, Andrew Rhoodie and his cadre of white supremacists from A.D. 2014 join the rebels and supply them with AK-47 assault rifles. Rhoodie's "America Will Break" brotherhood hopes to foster a haven for slavery and extreme racism that will last into succeeding centuries. Thus armed, Gen. Robert E. Lee's troops are soon victorious, and Lincoln agrees to divide the nation. Lee wins political office in the South, and, ironically, becomes both a proponent of emancipation and a foe of the bigoted visitors from the future. Turtledove ( Krispos Rising ) might win over some Civil War buffs through his knowledge of historical figures and events. But stilted dialogue, slack pacing and thin characters diminish the book's appeal. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Mass Market Paperback edition.

The Guns of the South begins in January 1864. Lee's army suffers from shortages of arms and

supplies, and the general is privately convinced that the war is lost. Then Andries Rhodie appears with a new type of rifle--an AK-47--and offers unlimited arms to the Confederacy. With the new weapons, the South wins the war and history is changed. The peacetime Confederacy still confronts divisional strife over slavery, however, and Rhodie and the group he represents become angry when the Confederate government begins relaxing laws concerning slavery. Their whole reason for helping the South win had been to create a supremacist white culture for the future. The Confederate government is now faced with a new enemy--Rhodie and his soldiers, armed from the future. Successful alternate history makes readers believe that they have stepped back in time; although his research is meticulous, Turtledove fails to convince. A marginal purchase.- Anne Keenan, Blair P.L., Neb.Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Mass Market Paperback edition.

This book impressed me, so many different ways<sup>1)</sup> The nineteenth-century characters are all historical (as best I can tell). In the entire novel, only the "Rivington men" (the South Africans time-traveling from 2014) are fictional.<sup>2)</sup> The experiences of character Nate Caudell (First Sergeant in Company C of the 47th North Carolina) all seem plausible. Meaning, the character's experiences read like what the historical Nate Caudell must have experienced and must have felt, during and after the war.<sup>3)</sup> Turtledove has given a lot of thought to how the experiences of the American Civil War would change the Confederacy, even after it won in 1864. Even in this reality, the antebellum South is gone, never to return.<sup>4)</sup> How the North (a.k.a. the USA) reacts to losing the ACW also surprised me. Invading Canada, really? Lincoln is un-assassinated in this reality, but scorned by both countries.<sup>5)</sup> The most interesting thing to me is how point-of-view character Robert E. Lee and point-of-view character Nate Caudell change their thinking when they get a chance to read the book Picture Book of the Civil War, 1861-1865 (published 1996), and they see how the institution of slavery is savaged by historians of the future. There is nothing bad that I can say about this book. It works as ACW historical fiction, and it works as alt-history fiction.

Harry Turtledove is not for everyone, but I really enjoy his books. This one is an excellent blend of history and science fiction with a great premise--what if a group of militant South Africans traveled back in time and gave the Confederate army AK-47s during the American Civil War. The book offers lots of action as well as thoughtful and balanced speculation of what would have happened if the South had had that kind of firepower. There's also a fun love story. If you've never read any of Turtledove's books, this is a great place to start.

This novel was mentioned in passing by my literature professor. He was talking about how you can, in fact, sometimes judge a book by its cover. The cover of "Guns of the South" boasts General Lee clutching an AK-47, and it promises anachronistic, what-if fun. That's exactly what the book delivers. For a US history fan like myself, this image is irresistible. Many other reviewers mention that the book gets bogged down around the halfway point, which is where the Second American Revolution ends and the CSA is officially established. Yes, there is next to no fighting and there is a lot of conversation, but the latter half of the book holds some gems that all readers would enjoy, especially history fans. The negotiations between the USA and CSA and Lee's presidential campaign are great. The last 100 or so pages, however, really ups the ante, bringing back the bloodshed and the stakes of war. I don't want to spoil anything, but this climax is fantastic. To put vaguely, it is an epic war where the past and the future clash. It is engaging, heartbreakingly, and suspenseful. To stop halfway and miss this great portion of historical fiction is a severe disservice.

The first 25% of the book can be summed up as follows: AK-47s good. Confederates not as racist as history shows. AK-47s good. Gettysburg was very bad. Yay for AK-47s. Wow, that Gettysburg sucked. That's about it. The writing is technically fine, but the plot consists of ...well, it's pretty much AK-47s all the way down. Not sure I'll finish the book unless something else happens, but if this were a drinking game where I had to do a drop of tequila every time AK-47s or Gettysburg were mentioned, I'd need a new liver by now, and I'm only 25% through.

Historians have often wondered: what if the South had won the Civil War? In "The Guns of the South," Harry Turtledove doesn't quite do that; rather, he answers the following question: What would have happened if 21st century white supremacists went back in time and gave a whole bunch of AK-47's to Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army? My initial reaction: it is an implausible plot that borders on laughable. For that reason, I was skeptical about purchasing this book. But when I read it for myself, I saw that it actually works. The reason why is Turtledove's attention to historical detail; particularly the personalities of the main characters. One particular scene stands out (minor spoiler alert): when Lee's AK-47-armed men capture Washington, D.C., he meets President Abraham Lincoln to discuss the terms for a ceasefire. The dialogue that ensues is totally believable: after the initial niceties, Lee's humble, patient firmness is able to wrestle a ceasefire and eventual surrender out of the lawyerly Lincoln. Had the South actually won, it is entirely likely that this is how Lee and Lincoln would have spoken to one another. In my opinion, this was the most amazing part of the

book, and I was very impressed with it. But this momentous scene takes place only halfway through the story. The rest involves Lee coming to terms with the reality that slavery will one day become an outdated institution, and the sooner the Confederate States of America (CSA) jettisons it, the better. Of course, not everyone sees it this way, including Nathan Bedford Forrest, who quickly becomes Lee's rival in the CSA's next presidential election. All the while, the white supremacist group from the future is scheming to keep slavery alive, by any means necessary. In taking the story this way, Turtledove wants to show his readers that slavery was not the main issue that led to the Civil War; it was state's rights. Does he succeed? With some nuance, I believe he does. However, individual readers must answer this question for themselves. My only hesitation in giving this novel 5 stars is the time travel element. Hence, I give it four stars. Nevertheless, *The Guns of the South* is an entertaining tale that attempts to answer one of history's ultimate "What if" questions. I highly recommend it for both Civil War buffs and readers of historical fiction.

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