

A STUDY OF COMMAND

Bearss, Edwin C., "Bedford Forrest and His "Critter" Cavalry at Brice's Cross Roads" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

Bergeron, Arthur W., "Mansfield Lovell" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

Current, Richard N., "Lincoln, the War, and the Constitution" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

Davis, William C., "John C. Breckinridge and the Confederate Defeat" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

Glatthaar, Joseph T., Partners in Command: The Relationships Between Leaders in the Civil War, The Free Press, New York, NY, Joseph T. Glatthaar, 1994.

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Hewitt, Lawrence L., "Braxton Bragg and the Confederate Invasion of Kentucky in 1862" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992

McDonald, Archie P., "Jedediah Hotchkiss: Stonewall Jackson's Map Maker" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

McMurray, Richard M., "Civil War Leaders" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

McWhiney, Grady, "Jefferson Davis and Confederate Military Leadership" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

Thomas, Emory M., "Young Man Lee" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

Wakelyn, Jon L., "The Speakers of the State Legislatures Failures as Confederate Leaders" Leadership During the Civil War, edited by Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L Hewitt, White Mane Publishing Company, Shippensburg, PA, 1992.

This essay approaches command during the Civil War as a case study by focusing upon three important areas as they applied to both sides. The first of

these examines the effective strategic and tactical management of available military assets. The second will focus upon the political skills of both the military and civilian leadership understanding of the political ramifications of military actions as well as the military ramifications of ineffective or poor political leadership. The third will focus upon command relationships, and how certain of these relationships produced military successes, while others failed.

To say that the cause of the Confederacy failed is merely stating the obvious. Not every battle or command decision resulted in failure. The Confederates enjoyed many successes as well as failures as they pursued their cause, and it is important to understand both to truly understand why things turned out the way they did.

One of the more direct studies of the Confederate's pursuit of independence is contained in Grady Whiney's essay "Jefferson Davis and Confederate Military Leadership." McWhiney begins his essay by quoting from an observer inside the Confederacy that Davis was "the heart and brains of the Confederate government." (Pg. 17) Without question, Jefferson Davis was the man most responsible for the way the Confederacy would fight the Civil War. From the very beginning, the South had few men who fit the job description of President of the Confederacy than did Jefferson Davis. The organizers of the new Confederate government reasoned that should war come, Davis was the perfect blend of politician and military expertise to lead the war effort, and most important, was in the best position to select the best military men for leadership positions in the new Confederate Army. (Pg. 18)

According to McWhiney Davis was neither a devious nor a modest man, and while displaying a certain reluctance upon notification of his selection, certainly had no doubts about his ability to lead the Confederacy's war effort. (Pg. 17)

Over time, the widespread belief of many Southerners at the beginning of the war that Davis was the right man at the right time began to change. Soon after he took office, his negative personality traits began to appear and interfere with his ability to lead. According to Howell Cobb, one of the more influential organizers of the Confederacy wrote his wife that "Only patriotism keeps them [Confederate congressmen] from rebelling against him," labeling Davis "perverse and obstinate." Within weeks, an editor of a southern newspaper referred to Davis as "cold, haughty, peevish, narrow-minded, pigheaded, and malignant." (Pg. 18)

In addition to the personality flaws observed by others, Davis was in poor health throughout the war, and often did not possess the mental and physical stamina necessary to bear up under the pressures of the duties he had to perform. Davis soon proved to be indecisive, and his strategic judgement seemed to deteriorate causing him to lose much of his mental flexibility, often unable to grasp new concepts, and when placed under stress and fatigue his weaknesses tended to be amplified.

One of Davis' greatest shortcomings was his undeterred loyalty to old friendships. In addition to the competency of his command appointments, (i.e., Polk, Bragg, Cooper, et al) which have always been the topic of discussion,

McWhiney's argues that a number of the South's highest-ranking field officers had physical handicaps or were in poor health before, during, and after the war. The conclusion he is drawing here is that sickness is a part of weakness, and that Davis was prone to select men much like himself as field commanders. Bragg was ill much of the war, John Bell Hood literally had to be strapped to his saddle following the loss of the use of an arm at Gettysburg, and a leg at Chickamauga, Beauregard's premature retirement due to illness, and the list goes on. (Pg. 21)

When it came to politics, Davis was like most politicians liked to have it both ways. When speaking to civilians he liked to say that none of his appointees were political, and when talking to governors or other state politicians, he liked to be able to point to the number of appointees from each state or political party, whichever the case might be. (Pg. 23) McWhiney concludes that it was from Davis' tendency to try to have it both ways that two conflicting impressions about his leadership arose. One argument was that the President had appointed too many or almost no politicians to military positions, while the other that he had appointed not enough. (Pg. 25)

McWhiney concludes his essay by arguing that if the "Fathers of the Confederacy" failed, it was because they selected Davis to lead their revolution in the first place. They could argue and complain about Davis and the men he selected as generals. But the fact remains, Jefferson Davis had been around a long time. The conditions of his health, as well as his many personality flaws could not have been a well-kept secret. Also, it was not like the South was home

to an overabundance of military command talent. McWhinney's final argument is that when the elites of the South selected Davis to prosecute their rebellion, they indirectly chose his generals as well. (Pg. 33)

A most interesting case study of command is that of Braxton Bragg. Lawrence Hewitt opens his essay Braxton Bragg and the Confederate Invasion of Kentucky in 1862. By making the argument that historians have routinely looked at Robert E. Lee as the genius of the Confederacy, while labeling Braxton Bragg Lee's antithesis. (Pg. 55) As more recent scholarship has somewhat tarnished Lee's reputation, Bragg's has largely been left unchanged. Hewitt argues that Bragg was more the victim of indecision, poor decision-making, and just plain poor communication by his good friend Jefferson Davis than of his own actions.

Hewitt argues that had Davis named Bragg to command the Department of the West rather than Joseph E. Johnston, the Confederacy would have at least had a commander who was willing to fight, a far cry from the unaggressive Johnston. Such a move would have elevated Bragg out of the political squabbling among his subordinates in the Army of Mississippi, and ultimately the back-biting of Hardee and Polk during his command of the Army of Tennessee, which proved to be his undoing. Some historians have labeled Bragg one of Davis' friendship appointments, causing his competence to be immediately called into question and debated. But Hewitt argues had Bragg been given sufficient support in men and materials by the Confederate government, he could have been an effective commander. (Pg. 68)

There was one Confederate commander in the West who never left a question in anyone's mind as to who was in charge, and but for the circumstances of Fort Pillow, the wisdom of his command judgements. In his essay Bedford Forest and His "Critter" Cavalry at Brice's Cross Roads, Edwin C. Bearss describes the incredible attacking movement of Forrest and his cavalry at Brice's Crossroads. According to Bearss, Forest was most effective because he always took the offensive, used his cavalry as mounted infantry, and successfully, time and again, used deception in fooling the Federals as to the actual size of his force. (Pg. 75) During the battle for Brice's Crossroads, Forrest's "Critter" Cavalry proved to be savage fighters as they fought Sturgis' infantry then pursued the routed Federals from Brice's Cross Roads through Ripley, 22 miles from the crossroads. When Sturgis tried to re-form his command, the cavalry attacked once again and continued to push the Federals all the way to Salem before nightfall, where Forrest ended the pursuit. It had taken Forrest 8 days to reach the crossroads, but just 64 hours during the retreat and pursuit back to Memphis, a distance of some 60 miles, all within the space of 30 hours. (Pg. 84)

In his essay Stephen D. Lee and the Guns at Second Manassas, Herman Hattaway examines the Civil War contribution of a man he labels dullest of all of the Confederate generals, Stephen D. Lee. Hattaway argues that while referring to Lee as one of the dullest of all Confederate Generals, Lee was worthy of study because he was unique in that he was everywhere. (Pg. 124) Lee was at Fort Sumter, most of the battlefields of Virginia, then to Mississippi, and subsequently

all over the western Theater, finally serving as a corps commander in Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. (Pg. 125)

Lee's greatest contribution however was the performance of his artillery battery at Second Manassas. Here his battery assumed a strategic position, which the Washington Artillery of Louisiana had occupied the day before, and from that position held a line of fire across the enemy's position, repelling repeated charges. According to Hattaway, the expenditure of ordinance at this battle, much of it by Lee's battery, ranks Second Manassas as one of the greatest muzzle-loading artillery conflicts in history. (Pg. 136)

While it has been a long accepted idea that war is just an extension of politics, an assumption that the warrior understands the political implications of his actions on the battlefield is just as false as the assumption that every politician is a warrior. The truths of these statements may well have been best displayed on the battlefields of the Civil War. Fremont's failure to understand the political implications of his emancipation of the slaves in Missouri, and Polk's failure to understand the political ramifications of his invasion and occupation of Kentucky come to mind.

Possibly the best blend of military strategist and politician was Abraham Lincoln. Initially, Lincoln brought little in the way of military experience or training with him to the office. He had little public or experience or general education period, but what he did have was a vision. Abraham Lincoln proved to be a quick study in terms of military strategy, and at the same time had the ability to see

past the short-term political landscape and see the big picture. According to Douglas Southall Freeman, Lincoln was the master politician, and communicator as well as the master of himself. He possessed the ability to speak in plain language to the effect that most people of his day could clearly understand what he was saying, and most important he was able to communicate the meaning and purpose of the war to the people for which they were sacrificing so much.

It is easy to view the issues and conflicts of 1861 through the eyes of nearly one hundred and fifty years of perspective and draw conclusions, many of which would bear little relevance to the circumstances in which Lincoln lived and functioned. When one considers that the American Constitution was a mere seventy-three years of age when Abraham Lincoln took office in 1861, and although there had been serious debate over the years, many of the principles we take for granted today, had yet to be resolved. First and foremost of these was what did it really mean to be a nation. Did the ratification of the Constitution mean that a state was permanently enclosed within the American Nation, or did it mean that the state could invoke its sovereignty and withdraw at anytime it deemed such an action to be in its best interests, much like the old Articles of Confederation. The American Civil War was probably the first real test of whether the republic, as well as constitutional government and the American experiment with democracy would survive, and Abraham Lincoln was the man that destiny called upon to rise to the occasion of this formidable national crisis.

Lincoln had to be pondering the question of what the value of the rights and protections of the Constitution would be if he were to allow the Union as well as the Constitution to fall into the hands of those who sought to destroy it.

In his essay "*Lincoln, the War, and the Constitution*" Richard Current sets out three important ways that his critics argued that Lincoln had abused constitutional principles. First, he expanded presidential war powers to reach into areas never before considered, i.e., the confiscation of private property, in this case slaves. Second, he authorized, and even ordered the military to arrest and imprison thousands of citizens whose only offense was their disagreement with the way in which he was handling the war. Third, he backed up the silencing of dissent not only by imprisoning his detractors but closing down unfriendly newspapers. (Pg. 2)

Current argues that in Abraham Lincoln's mind the Constitution was of secondary standing to the Declaration of Independence. But having said that, it is also important to understand that Lincoln viewed the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Union as an inseparable triad. The destruction of one would mean the destruction of the other two. In other words, he focused on the preservation of the Union, for by doing so the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the human rights provided by the Constitution would likewise be preserved. (Pg. 2) From where Abraham Lincoln sat, the Constitution was not clear. The framers had provided for the declaration of a foreign war, but clearly had not taken into account the possibility of an internal rebellion. Keeping in mind Lincoln's view of the trinity between the Declaration,

the Constitution, and the Union, it is easy to understand how he could never accept secession as a legal or constitutional undertaking. (Pg. 2)

Lincoln initially invoked the Militia Act of 1795, but soon broadened its scope by enlarging the army and the navy, ordering a blockade of Southern ports, and finally the emancipating the slaves. Almost immediately, the propriety of all of these actions were all called into question. (Pg. 3) Continuing to build on this new executive power, he had the army arrest and detain dissenters without the opportunity of a legal defense, and supported by congressional authorization, took control of all telegraph lines, and the transmission of all war news through the war department. (Pg. 5) In some cases he went so far as to completely shutting down newspapers that insisted upon publishing military information or anti-war rhetoric. (Pg. 12)

Current argues that had Lincoln wanted to be a dictator as charged by his critics, 1864 posed the perfect opportunity. He easily could have played upon the hysteria and many conspiracy theories running rampant to suspend the election on the grounds of military necessity. But such is an example of Lincoln as a visionary. He believed that the very strength of the republic was evidenced by its ability to hold elections, even in wartime, and for this reason, believed holding the election absolutely essential. (Pg. 13)

Current concludes his essay by admitting throughout the war Lincoln may well have stretched the Constitution a bit, maybe even a little intentionally, but he always recognized its limitations, and never intentionally disregarded or discarded the founding document. In fact, Current states that Lincoln probably

read the document and understood its meaning much more than most of his critics. (Pg. 13)

One of the more interesting political perspectives was contained in William C. Davis' essay John C. Breckinridge and the Confederate Defeat. In this essay Davis observes the keen political insight of John C. Breckinridge in his service as last Confederate Secretary of War in the final days of the Confederacy. How Breckinridge, realized the reality of the lost cause, but yet had the innate political instincts to not be caught up in the emotion of the present. Breckinridge encouraged all Confederate field commanders to surrender their armies as military units, rather than allow their men to surrender in small groups, appearing as bands of renegades. All this at a time when Jefferson Davis was fleeing from Richmond issuing orders for his commanders to break their armies into smaller partisan groups and continue the fight as guerillas. Breckinridge was more interested in how the movement for southern independence would be seen by history, than carrying on a fight that was already lost. (Pg. 145) Clearly, in the last days of the Confederacy John Breckinridge was the man in charge of the government on the brink. According to Davis, Breckinridge took over for a president who had been weakened physically and mentally by four years of war, and lifted the office of Secretary of War to its level of intended purpose. (Pg. 148) When crunch time came, his leadership and keen political instincts had much to do with ending the war, and restoring some legitimacy to the cause for which so many men died. Unlike Jefferson Davis who fled only to be hunted down like a common criminal by the Union Army.

Jon L Wakelyn contributes an insightful understanding of local politics in the South and how they came to play in influencing military decisions in his essay The Speakers of the State Legislatures Failure as Confederate Leaders. In this essay, Wakelyn undertakes a study of the speakers of the state legislatures in the South during the war, and how their political skills and/or shortcomings contributed to the failure of the Confederacy. According to Wakelyn, as a group, the political leadership of the South has often collectively been characterized as a failed enterprise. He argues that, for the most part, the men who rose to power as state legislative leaders during the Civil War were men who had been raised and trained in a localistic political environment. Such backgrounds caused them to question all power, and as a result, found themselves incapable of supporting the central government in Richmond when such actions appeared to be in conflict with local interests. Wakelyn argues that such attitudes were reflective of how these political leaders saw the cause, which most all openly embraced. (Pg. 167) Accordingly, most were unable to overcome popular resistance to the draft as well as exemptions, and to the government's use of slaves in support of the war effort. (Pg. 167)

Most had risen in life through family connections, some through business association, and most through party loyalty. In the 1850s most were relatively young men in their late thirties, but by 1861, most were in their fifties. Most tended to be followers rather than leaders, and were more susceptible outside influences rather than originating measures to support the Confederacy's war effort. (Pg. 162)

These legislative leaders found themselves susceptible to the pressures of the many competing factions within the Confederacy since there were no party leaders to maintain political control. (Pg. 162)

Throughout the war, most of the speakers registered disaffection with the central government, and it would appear that many of the speakers who openly refused to support the central government hardly considered themselves disloyal to the cause. (Pg. 164) As Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Tip O'Neal said, "all politics is local." This was especially true during the Civil War, and few of the men who came to power in the state legislatures during this time were able to rise above it.

Richard M. McMurray continues the study of localistic nature of the southern mindset in his essay Civil War Leaders. In begins his work McMurray by drawing a clear distinction between commanders and leaders, making the simple statement that leaders are found in the lower echelons of the military hierarchy, while commanders are higher in the command structure. (Pg. 172) He continues by pointing to the fact that In the spring of 1861, few men in the United States were qualified to assume positions as small unit officers or non-commissioned officers. Most were intelligent enough to eventually learn what they needed to know, and many would prove brave enough to win the respect of the men they led, but in the beginning they simply lacked the technical knowledge to serve effectively in such a capacity. (Pg. 173)

For the most part, they had no understanding of day to day unit administration, nor did they understand the manual of arms, or nineteenth

century drill tactics, both of which were of critical importance. According to McMurray, as long as both armies lacked trained small unit leaders, their mutual disadvantages offset each other and there was little impact on battle or the course of the war other than to increase the length of the casualty lists. (Pg. 176)

McMurray identifies basic categories of men who had been trained and were capable of assuming such leadership positions. (1) Those men with previous military experience in the United States Army; (2) Those who had served in antebellum militias in the south; and, (3) Men who had been educated and trained in military schools but who had not seen military action. (VMI, the Citadel etc.) (Pg. 176) These men understood small unit-drill tactics, administration, weapons and other important functions of leading a small unit on the parade ground or the battlefield. In antebellum America not many ordinary men knew how to unlimber, limber, fire, and care for an artillery piece, but such men would. An army able to draw upon a military school alumni as the nucleus of its junior officer corps would have a ready made cadre of small unit leaders and hence a greater advantage and strength of command. Only one of the Civil War armies found itself in that position. (Pg. 179)

In 1861, the South had maybe 3,000 men who had been educated in Southern military schools to fill the positions of small unit leaders. (Pg. 180) While this seems to be a large number the vast majority were found in the Army of Northern Virginia, where their presence helps to explain the success of that army especially during the early years of the conflict. (Pg. 180) The fact that most units were raised by the states then mustered into Confederate service, along

with the well regulated militias in the southern states, most of the men with military school backgrounds were found in the older states along the Atlantic seaboard. In 1861, Virginia had 104 living graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, while the ten other Confederate states had 184. Because most of the men with military school training were in the east, states like Virginia were able to place trained men in leadership positions from the beginning. Virtually every Virginia regiment, battery and battalion had a nucleus of VMI trained officers. Some regiments had more than a dozen of such men on their rolls, and most all of these units served in the Eastern Theater. (Pg. 181)

Finally, McMurray makes the point that the Confederate government organized its army in Virginia before it organized armies elsewhere. For this reason, during the early years, those units formed in the West were rushed to Virginia, taking with them most of the military trained men from the West. This would explain much of the early success of the Army of Northern Virginia, and to some extent, the lack of Confederate success in the West. The army in the East had a better level of small unit leadership, and to a great extent, this unit leadership never effectively developed in the western commands. (Pg. 182)

The Civil War is replete with stories of interaction between and among commanders. Many were unsuccessful, some were successful but strained, and in rare instances, the personalities of two men would compliment each other to such an extent that a synergistic relationship or partnership would develop elevating those involved beyond what either could have accomplished individually. In his book Partners in Command: The relationships Between

Leaders in the Civil War, Joseph T. Glatthaar six such relationships; two Confederate, one being a resounding success and the other a failure, and four Union, three of which bore success and one failure. According to Glatthaar, Lincoln succeeded where Davis failed in providing vision and materiel, as well as shielding his officers from the hazards of politics, leading the Union to ultimate victory. (Pg. 225) Through the collaborative successes of men like Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, et al, the Union made better use of its military talents and resources than did the Confederacy. Possibly Glatthaar's most important point is that the Union, through both its political as well as military leaders did a better job of coming to grips with the first massive war the nation had fought, in a new age of industrialism and nationalism because they functioned better as a team. (Pg. 225)

Glatthaar draws a contrast between the Confederate successes in the East, much to the credit of a successful meshing of two extraordinary personalities in Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, to the failed Confederate fortunes in the West. This failure he attributes to conflicting agendas of Jefferson Davis and Joseph E. Johnston. Davis insisting on dispersed forces, guarding as much Confederate soil as possible, and Johnston upon concentrated forces. In this instance, the failure to successfully mesh political necessities with military strategy and tactics was as much to blame for the Confederate failure in the West as it was to the credit to the Union successes of 1864-65 between Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman. Accordingly, Glatthaar attributes the failures of the Union in the East during the early years of the war directly to the failed

relationship of Lincoln and McClellan and credits Confederate successes to the successful relationship of Lee and Jackson

Glatthaar points to the importance of the partnership of command forged between Grant, Sherman, and the brilliant Union naval commander David Dixon Porter, offering Grant and Sherman an entirely new perspective on the battle front. (Pg. 253) Glatthaar draws an interesting contrast to Davis' failure to forge a similar relationship in the defense of New Orleans as illustrated in Arthur Bergeron's essay Mansfield Lovell. (Pg. 94)

Glatthaar concludes his book by noting that the key to successful command relationships rested in the leaders ability to understand strengths as well as weaknesses. This included an ability to objectively understand their strengths as well as weaknesses, as well as get the most from their underlings. While the relationships were an important building block for success, a personal relationship between commanders was helpful, but not necessary. What counted were professional attitudes, which lay at the foundation of these successful military partnerships. Despite its overwhelming advantage of manpower, as well as agricultural and industrial strength, the Union struggled during the first years of the war. Just possessing superiority in physical assets did not assure success, it not being until the Union figured out how to mesh the military with the political leadership the fortunes of war shifted to the advantage of the Union. (Pg. 236)