Battle Hymn

The Best and Worst Civil War Generals

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History professor Richard M. Walsh's entertaining book reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the Civil War's top generals using extensive primary documents and original research. Included are the surprising answers to intriguing questions. Walsh explains why Ambrose Burnside was demoted, who gave George McClellan the nickname "Young Napoleon," and why men of both sides respected Robert E. Lee. He uncovers why Nathan Bedford Forrest and William T. Sherman were both hated and respected and why Stonewall Jackson was labeled "Tom Fool" while teaching at the Virginia Military Institute. Walsh even includes citizen-soldiers who quickly advanced in rank on both sides. Fascinating facts are gathered in chapters that group the generals from the worst to the not so bad to the best, all punctuated by satirical portraits drawn by Charles H. Hayes. Walsh's record is a must-read for history buffs from both sides of the Mason-Dixon!

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PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
Gretna 2016

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Walsh, Richard M., author. | Hayes, Charles H. (Artist), illustrator.
Title: Battle hymn : the best and worst Civil War generals / by Richard M. Walsh ; illustrated by Charles H. Hayes.
Description: Gretna : Pelican Publishing Company, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016003631 | ISBN 9781455621361 (hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781455621378 (e-book)
Subjects: LCSH: United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Biography. | Generals—United States—Biography. | Generals—Confederate States of America—Biography. | United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Campaigns. | Command of troops—History—19th century.
Classification: LCC E467 .W235 2016 | DDC 355.0092/2—dc23 LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2016003631

Maps by Hal Jespersen, www.cwmaps.com

Printed in the United States of America
Published by Pelican Publishing Company, Inc.
1000 Burmaster Street, Gretna, Louisiana 70053

To my wife, Rose Ann; my children, Matt, Kelly, Colleen, and Erin; and my grandchildren, Oliver and Jace—thank you

Contents

Introduction

April 12, 2011, began the four-year celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the United States' bloodiest and most interesting conflict. It is also the struggle that has received the greatest attention in print. Wanting to make a contribution to the anniversary, but not quite sure what direction to go in, I decided to have a look at the military leaders, North and South, who had the largest impact on the war. Every major battle and campaign of the Civil War has numerous volumes written about it, so I did not think one more was needed. A glimpse at the all-too-human men who made the decisions that determined the outcomes of those battles is another matter. For in the end, it is the general and his soldiers who must fight the battles and decide the victor and the loser. Often, victory or defeat hinges on the fortitude of the commander and his ability to impose his will on the enemy. This book makes no claims at being comprehensive or authoritative. My goal is to create discussion and debate among Civil War buffs concerning their heroes and goats, while stirring the interest of the novice in the awesome War between the States.

What makes a great general? The ability to inspire and lead his troops to victory would top the list of required attributes. He must remain calm under pressure, while adjusting to changing circumstances as they arise. The drive and energy to not let up on a defeated foe until they are completely vanquished also separates an excellent commander from a poor or mediocre one. A top-tier general must also know when it is prudent to make a strategic withdrawal—to fight another day—instead of uselessly sacrificing men in a vainglorious stand. The reverse is true as well, possessing the nerve to call off a suicidal attack.

It is a fine line, but one successful leaders can tightrope to victory.

I have grouped the generals into five categories: poor, mediocre to good, great, political, and a special look at two citizen soldiers. Those men discussed in the first three groups are by and large professional soldiers. The political ones obviously could be placed in the other classifications, mostly the first, but were unique enough to the Civil War to deserve their own chapter. In placing a general, I looked at his overall contribution to the war and decided where he best fit. For example, Union general Oliver Otis Howard, in the final analysis, was a poor officer. A personally brave man who lost an arm as a brigadier general during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, Howard proved incompetent when given more responsibility. As commander of the XI Corps, Army of the Potomac, in 1863, he allowed his right flank to be crushed in successive battles: Chancellorsville on May 2 and Gettysburg on July 1. He did perform better in 1864, however, under William T. Sherman during the famous March to the Sea. That good service, unfortunately, does not outweigh the near disaster he visited twice upon the Army of the Potomac in less than two months.

Another interesting case is Henry Wager Halleck—"Old Brains"—acknowledged martial expert for his translation of French military texts before the war. Halleck had trouble turning theory into practice. A prissy officer who loved to gossip, "Old Brains" possessed bulging eyes and the annoying habit of scratching his elbows while pondering a question. The only field service Halleck saw occurred after Shiloh, when he led the combined forces of Grant and Buell on a snail-like approach to Corinth, Mississippi, the Rebels abandoning the city before the Yankees got there. Paradoxically, "Old Brains" was promoted to general-in-chief, primarily due to Grant's early victories, after unsuccessfully attempting to drive that general out of the war with false tales of excessive drinking. Once in Washington, Halleck displayed a trait that exasperated President Lincoln to no end—the ability to offer advice but not make any concrete decisions. By so doing, "Old Brains" showed

his true colors, a paper-shuffler at heart. Ironically, Halleck was able to employ his administrative skills with good effect when none other than U. S. Grant became general in chief in 1864, assuming the responsibility for conducting the war. Overall, Henry Wager Halleck's service puts him within the mediocre grouping.

Lastly, some generals were difficult to place because death in battle or from wounds and illness cut their careers short. A stellar example is Charles F. Smith. A ramrod-straight, stiff-necked, old-time professional, tall and thin, with a long, white, handlebar moustache, he cut the very figure of a soldier. He had served as commandant of cadets at West Point from 1838 to 1843, where one of his pupils was U. S. Grant. Assigned to serve under Grant at Fort Donelson, Smith displayed no bitterness or jealousy but faithfully carried out his duties. It was he who led the counterattack after the Confederates tried to break out of the fort. He led his men forward with the cry, "Damn you gentlemen, I see skulkers. I'll have none here. Come on, you volunteers, come on. This is your chance. You volunteered to be killed for love of country, and now you can be."[1] The assault pinned the Confederates back in their works, setting up the well-known surrender. Grant showed the note from Gen. Simon Buckner, asking for terms, to Smith, who barked, "No terms for the damned Rebels!"[2] U. S. Grant, soon to be "Unconditional Surrender" Grant, chuckled before sending his famous reply. Charles F. Smith may have had a great impact on the war in the Western theater if his life had not ended tragically. Leaping from a boat at Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee, before the great Battle of Shiloh, Smith scrapped his shin. The cut became infected, which led to pneumonia and death on April 25, 1862. Although his time in the Civil War was brief, Charles F. Smith earned a spot among the greats for his exploits at Donelson and influence on U. S. Grant.

This is just a sample of what follows: a look at the military leaders in a conflict on which Pres. Abraham Lincoln reflected near its end, "Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained."[3] No, they did not.

Battle Hymn

Part I

The Timid and the Terrible

Chapter One

South—Why the Cause Became Lost

At the beginning of the Civil War, it appeared the South held the advantage over the North in terms of professional military officers. From the small pre-war US Army of 16,000 men, 313 officers—about one-third of the total—resigned to cast their lot with the Confederacy.[1] Included in that number were those considered preeminent leaders, chiefly Robert E. Lee, Albert Sidney Johnston, and Joseph E. Johnston. Lee was offered command of all the Union armies by Pres. Abraham Lincoln but turned it down to follow his home state of Virginia. J. E. Johnston and Lee were placed in high positions relatively quickly by Confederate president Jefferson Davis in the Eastern Theater, giving the Rebels an early edge there. It would be a different story in the West. Davis gave control of Western operations to the officer he considered his best. The result was a far cry from what anyone in the South expected.

Albert Sidney Johnston (1803-1862) — "Water Our Horses in the Tennessee"

Albert Sidney Johnston was perhaps the most well-regarded officer, North or South, in 1861. A native of Kentucky, Johnston had gone to Transylvania University and West Point with Jefferson Davis and won the future Southern president's esteem and friendship. He had fought for both Texas and the US against Mexico, and in 1855 he was named commander of the famed Second Cavalry by then secretary of war Jefferson Davis. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he headed the Pacific Department

in California. Similar to Lee, he refused a high position in the Union army to join the Rebels. Johnston was fifty-eight, tall, and well-built when he reported to the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, for duty. Later on, Davis commented, "I hoped and expected that I had others who would prove generals, but I knew I had one, and that was Sidney Johnston."[2] The Rebel president made Johnston a full general, second only to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper among Confederate generals, and the highest ranking field officer. In September 1861, Albert Sidney was given overall command in the Western Theater—an assignment he would quickly come to rue.

Johnston's bailiwick stretched from the Appalachian Mountains in the East to the Mississippi, even into Arkansas on the far side of the great river. At the outset, he only had twenty-three thousand men to defend this immense area. Adding to his woes was the presence of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers smack in the middle of his defensive line. The two streams afforded natural avenues of invasion into the Deep South for Northern gunboats and armies. To defend them, the Rebels built two forts: Henry on the east bank of the Tennessee and Donelson on the west bank of the Cumberland. The two rivers were only twelve miles apart at the bastions' locations, just below the Kentucky border in Tennessee. The site for Fort Henry was poorly chosen; it became swamped when the level of the Tennessee rose, and the heights on the west bank across from it permitted the enemy to easily sweep the inside with cannon fire. Donelson was much better situated and promised to be a tougher nut to crack for any Union attack. By January 1862, Johnston's numbers had risen to forty-five thousand. The Yankees had at least twice that many, poised to strike at various points along the Confederates' lengthy defenses. How Albert Sidney Johnston countered their blows would be his great test.

Albert Sidney, knowing the weakness of the Confederate position, had kept the Yankees off-balance in the fall of 1861 by a masterful charade. He seized Bowling Green, Kentucky, made threatening gestures, and greatly overstated his actual

numbers while issuing bold proclamations for Kentuckians to rally to the Southern cause. By the dawn of 1862, the North was ready to call Johnston's bluff. The first hammer fell in late January in the mountainous region of eastern Kentucky on the far right of the Rebel line. A small Confederate force under Nashville newspaper editor Felix Zollicoffer was defeated at Logan's Crossroads by a larger Union army led by George Thomas. Rugged terrain and poor weather would minimize the damage to the Rebels, as Thomas could not follow up his victory. Two weeks later, a more ominous threat appeared on the horizon, as a combined Yankee army and navy expedition steamed up the Tennessee River to attack Fort Henry. An early crisis for Johnston and the South was at hand. The Northern gunboats reduced the fort after a brisk fight before the infantry under Brig. Gen. U. S. Grant even reached the scene. The fort's commander, Lloyd Tilghman, had wisely sent the twenty-five-hundred man garrison over to Fort Donelson before the attack began, leaving just an artillery detachment to slug it out with the Yankee fleet.

The fall of Fort Henry convinced Albert Sidney that Fort Donelson must be abandoned as well. He wired Richmond that Donelson was "not long tenable" and expected it to fall "without the necessity of the Federals employing their land force in cooperation."[3] Johnston felt his only option might be a retreat all the way to Alabama below the Tennessee River. The arrival of the South's first hero at his headquarters gave him pause. Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard, victor at Fort Sumter and First Bull Run, showed up, though it would have been even better if some troops had accompanied him. Beauregard initially agreed with Johnston's decision to fall back, concurring that points along the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers were basically indefensible with Yankee gunboats roaming freely on both. Possessing a flair for the dramatic, Beauregard changed his mind, however, and thought the Rebels should make their stand at Donelson. He urged sending as many troops as possible into the fort. Albert Sidney vacillated and then chose

the inexplicable option of committing too few to hold the place, but too many to lose. There were five thousand men there at first, with Johnston gradually adding twelve thousand more. He was not helped by the Rebel commanders at the scene. John Floyd and his second in charge, Gideon Pillow, treated their responsibility as a hot potato, each trying to pass it to the other. Both eventually dumped the mess on Simon Buckner, third in rank. Floyd and Pillow slunk away in the night, leaving Buckner to surrender the fort to Grant on February 16, 1862.

Donelson's capitulation unleashed a firestorm of criticism in the South aimed at Albert Sidney Johnston. Jefferson Davis quickly rushed to the defense of his beleaguered officer: "If Sidney Johnston was no general, then we had best give up the fight, for they had no generals."[4] Johnston took the barbs in manly silence, perhaps because he had no rational explanation for his actions regarding the fort. His fighter instincts seem to have overridden the better judgment to save the garrison for another day. Albert Sidney retreated to Corinth, Mississippi, with the remaining troops to ponder his next move. While contemplating, he also called for reinforcements from all over the South. His numbers soon exceeded forty thousand again and every last one would be needed. Bearing down on him were two Yankee armies, whose combined strength totaled close to eighty thousand. The first, under Grant, was encamped at Pittsburgh Landing on the west bank of the Tennessee River, twenty miles north of Corinth. The second, led by Don Carlos Buell, had left Nashville and was marching to join Grant.

Albert Sidney decided his best option, or maybe the only one, was to strike Grant before Buell could reach him. A bold move, considering the majority of the Rebel troops were untrained and untested in battle. Johnston started north from Corinth in early April 1862 toward Pittsburgh Landing. The march was painfully slow as the inexperienced troops straggled excessively. A terrific thunderstorm the second night out soaked the men's muskets and gunpowder. The next morning, the troops made a tremendous racket, firing their guns off to make sure they

still worked. At this point, the usually audacious Beauregard advised calling the whole thing off and heading back to Corinth. He believed there was no possibility the Yankees were unaware a Confederate attack loomed. In fact, Union commanders Grant and William Sherman knew the Rebels were lurking, but they never expected a major blow against their camp. Johnston brushed aside Beauregard's misgivings, booming:"I would fight them if they were a million!"[5] He ordered a frontal assault by his entire army for the following day.

Albert Sidney left the tactical arrangements to Beauregard, who lined up the army's three corps one after another: Gen. William Hardee in the lead, Gen. Braxton Bragg in the middle, and Gen. John Breckinridge bringing up the rear. One can quibble with the alignment, which dissipated the momentum of the attack and led to much intermingling among units from different corps. Having the three corps side by side would have meant a more compact striking force and supports within easy reach. Johnston seems not to have given much thought to the tactical plans but was instead just eager for the battle to commence. Beauregard, with great difficulty, got the troops into position and awaited the dawn. At a last conference of his commanders, Johnston exuded quiet confidence and determination, saying, "Tonight, gentlemen, we water our horses in the Tennessee."[6] That required an overwhelming victory against Grant's army. Albert Sidney's troops were as itchy to get going as their commander.

Given the rawness of the troops on both sides, the Battle of Shiloh on April 6-7, 1862, was amazing for its ferocity. Hardee's men caught the Yankees off guard and sent them fleeing rearward. The Federals rallied and began offering stiffer resistance, which centered on a sunken road soon to be known as the Hornet's Nest. It was near there that Albert Sidney Johnston made his last mistake, while preparing to lead a charge. Out of generosity, he sent his personal surgeon to treat some captured, wounded Yankees. Several moments later, Johnston was struck by a bullet in the back of the right leg, severing an artery. He

bled to death before his surgeon could return. The Confederates came very close to fulfilling Albert Sidney's prophecy about their horses, but not quite. Grant beat back the last desperate Rebel assaults from the bluff overlooking the Tennessee. The next day, the Yankees counterattacked and retook the ground they had lost. Beauregard, now in command, retreated back to Corinth. Albert Sidney Johnston's gamble to regain all that had been lost since Donelson failed. Some Johnston supporters believe the subsequent war in the West may have been much different had he lived. This author does not think so. It is perhaps overly harsh to place him among the terrible, but Albert Sidney Johnston's own utterance sealed his fate: "The test of merit, in my profession, with the people, is success. It is a hard rule, but I think it is right."[7] No truer words were spoken.

Braxton Bragg (1817-1876) — Quarrelling with Himself

Braxton Bragg is one of the most fascinating and perplexing figures of the Civil War: a fierce fighter who seemed to win several stunning victories only to have them wasted through mind-boggling indecision. Bragg was crusty, cantankerous, and combative. His prickly reputation had been well-established in the pre-war US Army, as highlighted by the story of how he debated himself over supplies while serving as both company commander and quartermaster at a certain post. His conduct led the post commander to exclaim in exasperation, "By God, Bragg, you have quarreled with every officer in the army, and now you are quarrelling with yourself."[8] Bragg was a strict disciplinarian, which at first raised morale among his troops as they were learning to become soldiers. Eventually, however, when meaningful victories did not follow to justify the sternness, the men, particularly the officers, turned against him. The discord between Bragg and his subordinates would plague the great Army of Tennessee for as long as the general retained command.

Bragg saw his first major action at Shiloh, turning in a fine performance as one of Johnston's corps commanders. Soon afterward, when Beauregard went on sick leave, he took over the remnants of the Rebel army that fought that horrific battle. Bragg molded his new charges into the formidable Army of Tennessee, an outfit which would be better than its leaders. Braxton's first foray with his new command was a jaunt into Kentucky in the late summer of 1862. His objectives were to recruit more soldiers for the cause, and maybe carry the war to the Ohio River and beyond. His wagon train filled with thirty thousand muskets for new volunteers remained mostly untouched as Kentuckians failed to rally to the flag. Beyond installing a pro-Southern governor in the capital of Frankfurt, Bragg's expedition turned out mostly barren. A Union force under Don Carlos Buell, sent to intercept the Rebels, finally caught up in early October. The sides collided near the town of Perryville on October 8, while both were searching for water during a hot Indian summer. Buell had more men on the scene, but the Confederates rocked the Federals back on their heels. It showed for the first time—if anything—that despite his shortcomings, Bragg was a slugger. The two armies separated after each suffered heavy losses. Braxton's subordinates urged a renewal of the contest the next morning, feeling they had given the Yankees a good licking with inferior numbers. Unfortunately, Bragg also displayed the bewildering initial brain freeze that marked his stint in top command.

He waffled, then finally decided to retreat south toward Tennessee, much to his officers' disgust. The finger-pointing between commander and his lieutenants started in earnest. The grumblings grew so loud they were heard in Richmond. Jefferson Davis called Bragg to the capital, where the two old friends talked before the president gave the general a vote of confidence. Davis also consulted with one of Bragg's senior officers, Leonidas Polk, urging conciliation in the name of patriotism. Would the president's pep talk work?

The Army of Tennessee's next clash came in December of

1862 at Stones River (or Murfreesboro, Tennessee). Bragg had his troops positioned near the town of Murfreesboro, with the Federal Army of the Cumberland, now under William Rosecrans, marching down from Nashville to give battle. By December 30, the two armies sat facing each other on both sides of Stones River. By odd coincidence, the opposing commanders came up with the same battle plan—hold with their right and attack with the left. Rosecrans had a slight advantage in numbers: forty-four thousand to Bragg's thirty-eight thousand. The key might be who struck first. Braxton got his men up a little bit earlier than Rosecrans did and beat the Yankees to the punch. At dawn on December 31, William Hardee's Corps hit the Union right flank a crushing blow, driving it back three miles while capturing twenty-eight guns and three thousand prisoners. The whole Federal line seemed in danger of collapse, before a stand was made on a piece of high ground known locally as the Round Forest. Bragg's efforts to dislodge the Yankees from among the cedar trees failed, and the fighting petered out by late afternoon.

By all measures, Bragg appeared to have won a major victory: he blunted the Union advance, drove one-third of its army from the field, and inflicted twelve thousand casualties as compared to nine thousand of his own. A jubilant Braxton wired Richmond, "God has granted us a Happy New Year!"[9] He fully expected the battered Yankees to retreat, rightfully leaving the victorious Rebels masters of the field. He was wrong. Rosecrans did not fall back, though he did move his troops out of the Round Forest to straighten his defensive line. Bragg was dumbfounded that the Federals did not abandon the battleground. He sent a force under Polk through the Round Forest to see what the Yankees were up to. They discovered not only that the Union army was still there but that it was arrayed in line of battle. Polk tapped at the defenses before falling back. That was the extent of the action for New Year's Day 1863. Bragg acted as though the Yankees were going to retreat, ordering details to gather discarded muskets scattered over the ground, and began paroling his prisoners. When January

2 dawned—who could have fathomed—the Federals had not moved. Bragg was at a loss to explain why Rosecrans did not admit he was whipped. After seeming befuddled most of the day, Braxton finally shook off the cobwebs and determined to renew the offensive on January 3.

In preparation, Bragg felt some Yankee artillery on the east bank of Stones River had to be driven off, lest they unleash a murderous flanking fire on the attacking units. He gave the assignment of silencing the guns to Brig. Gen. John Breckinridge, former vice president of the United States. Breckinridge came to Bragg's headquarters to protest the assault, stating that to attack as ordered would expose his men to lethal artillery fire from Union batteries on Stones River's west bank. Braxton, who thought the ex-VP had dragged his feet on the battle's opening day, responded with a curt dismissal: "Sir, my information is different. I have given the order to attack the enemy in your front and expect it to be obeyed."[10] Funny thing, but Bragg was mistaken, again. Breckinridge's troops stood no chance. The assault lasted less than twenty minutes and added another 1,800 men to the already long list of Rebel losses. Once more, Bragg's officers wanted to stay and fight, while their commander wavered. Bragg worried about reports the Yankees were being reinforced (they were not), and that his supplies might run out. He ordered a retreat south thirty-six miles and put his army into winter camp. The animosity between leader and subordinates boiled over into deep hatred. Braxton manifested a poor quality for any army commander—blaming others for what was his responsibility. It was he who did not exploit his initial success, letting it fade away in a haze of doubt. Not surprisingly, the Army of Tennessee passed a very unhappy winter and spring of 1863.

The two armies, in fact, were so battered by Stones River that it would be six months before they stirred again. In late June of 1863, Rosecrans and his Army of the Cumberland finally began to move against Bragg and with a series of deft moves caused the Rebel commander to retreat with the Army of Tennessee

into northern Georgia. Bragg stopped falling back and turned to fight a dozen miles or so below the important rail junction of Chattanooga. After major defeats at Vicksburg and Gettysburg that summer, Richmond sensed that a turning point of the war was at hand and desperately needed a victory in Georgia. As such, reinforcements from Lee's Army of Northern Virginia were dispatched on the South's rickety railroads, heading for Bragg. The dour general's battle plan was simple—cut Rosecrans off from Chattanooga with his right wing, then herd the Yankee army into a valley called McLemore's Cove, where it could be destroyed. Bragg possessed the added advantage of having a widely dispersed Army of the Cumberland now rushing to consolidate, when the Federals discovered the Confederates had turned to give battle. For two days, however, Rebel generals Polk and D. H. Hill somehow failed to launch the attack against the Yankee left flank as ordered by their commander. Bragg was in a white fury, but the broken relationship with his officers had come home to roost. The delay did allow most of the eastern troops, under James Longstreet, to reach the field. On the other hand, it also gave Rosecrans more precious time to gather his widely scattered troops.

The Confederate assault was finally delivered on September 19, 1863, opening the Western Theater's bloodiest battle: Chickamauga. For all his faults, when Bragg did attack, it was with sledgehammer force. The Rebels quickly had the Yankees on the ropes, leaving Rosecrans scrambling to hold his lines, which he managed to do until night fell. Bragg renewed the struggle on the morning of the 20th, again striking the Union left, with the blows working their way down the Federal lines. In the confusion of the vicious fighting, Rosecrans mistakenly opened a gap in the center of his line. Longstreet's men struck the hole moments later, splitting the Yankees in two. Half of the Union army beat a hasty retreat toward Chattanooga, carrying their commanding general with them. A stubborn stand by a group of Federals at a place called Snodgrass Hill permitted the remainder of the Army of the Cumberland to fall back in good

order after dusk. The Army of Tennessee had won an amazing victory. Would Braxton Bragg make it complete by a vigorous pursuit, destroying the Yankee army before it could reach the safety of Chattanooga?

No. Bragg chose instead to go to bed. Longstreet and other officers pleaded with him to keep going. A bewildered Bragg, who could not seem to comprehend the magnitude of his success, refused with a shrug. The Confederates took their time following the beaten Federals to Chattanooga. Braxton eventually set up a passive siege of the city, placing his troops on the heights that surrounded it on three sides. The fourth side was the Cumberland River, with impassable wilderness behind it. Perhaps they could starve the Yankees into submission. Beyond that, Bragg was out of ideas. The officers and men in the ranks were at the point of near mutiny, fully realizing the golden opportunity that had been missed. Jefferson Davis came to the army this time, in an effort to put out the fire. At a conference of top commanders, Bragg suffered the humiliation of listening to each and every one of his officers inform Davis that a new leader was needed. Inexplicably (but that's the story for another book), the Rebel president decided to retain Braxton in his position. The Army of Tennessee sat and waited.

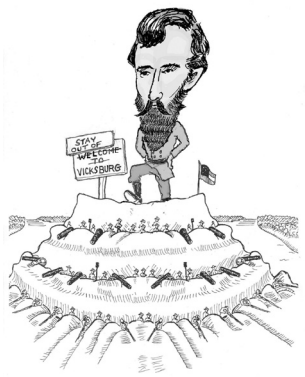
While the Rebels were in disarray, the Yankees had not been idle. After opening a supply line into the beleaguered city, reinforcements were rushed in along with the Union's top commander, U. S. Grant. Bragg weakened his position by sending troops under Longstreet, whom he had been feuding with (what a surprise!), to push a Federal force out of Knoxville, Tennessee. Grant unleashed his drive to break the siege on November 24, 1863, with an attack on the left end of the Confederate line. In the "Battle above the Clouds," Lookout Mountain fell to the Yankees. The next day, Bragg's best fighting general, Pat Cleburne, stymied a Union assault led by W. T. Sherman on the Rebel right flank. Grant ordered a demonstration against Bragg's center on Missionary Ridge to relieve the pressure on Sherman. The feint turned into an all-out scramble by the Army of the

Cumberland to reach the top of the ridge. The unexpectedness of the blow completely surprised the Rebels, causing them to flee down Missionary's rear slope, right past Bragg's headquarters. The stunned Confederate commander tried in vain to rally his troops, before joining the retreat. Objections can be raised concerning the disposition of Bragg's defenses, but the bottom line was that the worn-out and disheartened Rebel troops, who had completely lost faith in their leader, were not properly prepared for the Yankee onslaught. The glow of Chickamauga had turned to gloom at Chattanooga.

Predictably, Bragg blamed the troops for the defeat: "A panic which I had never before witnessed seemed to have seized upon officers and men, and each seemed to be struggling for his personal safety, regardless of his duty or his character."[11] He also glumly stated the obvious to Jefferson Davis: "We both erred in the conclusion for me to retain command, after the clamor raised against me."[12] Davis finally put Bragg out of his misery, replacing him with Joe Johnston. The president rewarded Braxton's loyalty, however, by bringing him to Richmond as a military advisor. He stayed at that post until John Breckinridge, one of Bragg's mortal enemies, arrived to become secretary of war. Davis placed his gloomy friend as a corps commander in Joe Johnston's feeble army attempting to slow Sherman's march through the Carolinas. Braxton Bragg was back where he started at Shiloh in April 1862. The cause may have been better off if he had never gone beyond corps commander. Fate had different ideas.

John C. Pemberton (1814-1881) — Vicksburg Vapor Lock

John C. Pemberton was somewhat of a rarity in the Civil War, a man who forsook the land of his birth and threw in with the opposing side. A Pennsylvanian, he had married a Virginian, and his sympathies were clearly with the South. A West Point graduate, Pemberton saw action in both the



Seminole and Mexican Wars. A lieutenant colonel of artillery in 1861, he offered his services to Jefferson Davis. His Yankee origins made many in the South leery, and their doubts would dog him throughout the war. Victories could help to alleviate the suspicions, but those proved elusive for John C. His first posting along the Carolina coast came to an abrupt end after he loudly proclaimed that given the choice between saving a city or saving an army, the troops got the nod. Sensible, but not what the Southerners being protected wanted to hear (i.e., this Yankee is going to abandon us to his barbaric Northern brethren). The uproar caused Pemberton to be removed by Robert E. Lee, commander in the Carolinas at the time. His words would also come back to haunt him a year or so later and a thousand miles west in Mississippi.

These bold statements did not seem to bother Jefferson Davis, who promoted Pemberton to lieutenant general and put him in charge of defending the Confederacy's Gibraltar of the West, the city that was key to the holding of the Mississippi River and kept a gateway open to those Rebel states west of the mighty stream. Its name? Vicksburg. By the fall of 1862, when Pemberton took control, the stretch of the great river between Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Port Hudson, Louisiana—some one hundred miles—was all that remained in Confederate hands. Under no circumstances could Vicksburg fall to the Yankees. Rebel engineers had done an excellent job laying out the defenses of the city. It was well-nigh impregnable from a river-borne assault and very formidable on the land side as well. Pemberton succeeded in breaking up the first Union attempt to capture Vicksburg. U. S. Grant, with part of his army, was advancing down the Mobile and Ohio Railroad to approach the city from the rear. Simultaneously, several divisions under W.

T. Sherman descended the Mississippi to land at Chickasaw Bluffs north of town. While confronting Grant with infantry, Pemberton sent his cavalry under Earl Van Dorn to ride around the Union flank and wreck their supply depot at Holly Springs, Mississippi. Van Dorn completed the job thoroughly, forcing Grant to retreat northward toward Memphis, Tennessee. Pemberton had enough time to bring his troops back to Vicksburg in order to stop Sherman at Chickasaw Bluffs. This he did on December 29, 1862. So far, so good for John C.

The Vicksburg garrison spent the winter of 1862-63 watching the Yankees on the west bank of the Mississippi in a beehive of activity. With all the hustle and bustle, no imminent threat to the city appeared as spring approached. That changed in April, when Federal ships ran past the Vicksburg batteries, getting below the city. On April 30, word reached Pemberton that Yankee troops had crossed over to the east bank south of Vicksburg. The campaign for the Gibraltar of the West had truly begun. U. S. Grant, still Union commander, started to move fast, and Pemberton could never quite catch up. The Confederate was indecisive, a trait that would mark his conduct throughout the coming weeks. He had difficulty predicting what the Yankees' true intentions were. Thus he had his troops dispersed all over Mississippi. He sent his cavalry and part of his infantry on a wild goose chase, trying to track down a Federal cavalry column that was slashing its way south through the state toward Port Hudson. That move effectively removed Pemberton's cavalry from the campaign. Another segment of his army remained north of Vicksburg, to guard against another possible Union thrust there.

As a result, Pemberton only sent five thousand men to reinforce Gen. John Bowen's four thousand-man command at Port Gibson, near where Grant was crossing his army from the west to east bank of the mighty Mississippi. If Pemberton had concentrated his force, which totaled forty thousand, against Grant before the Yankees got all of their troops on the east side of the river, the campaign for Vicksburg may have been much different. In fact,

his immediate superior, Joe Johnston, had wired Pemberton, "If Grant's army crosses, unite all your forces to beat it. Success will give you back what was abandoned to win it."[13] Sound advice, but too late. Bowen's nine thousand troops put up a stiff fight against the twenty-four thousand Grant had on hand at the Battle of Port Gibson on May 1, 1863, but the Federal advantage in numbers eventually took its toll. At this juncture, Grant did not turn north to march directly against Vicksburg but instead headed northeast towards Mississippi's capital, Jackson. The speed with which he moved completely baffled Pemberton.

Grant's objective was to get between Pemberton and a relief force under Johnston, gathering at Jackson. The Yankees brushed aside another portion of Pemberton's army on May 12 at Raymond, Mississippi, before driving Johnston out of Jackson on May 14. The Federals then turned west to follow the railroad toward Vicksburg. Part of Pemberton's paralysis may have stemmed from the fact that he was receiving conflicting orders. Jefferson Davis wanted Vicksburg held at all costs. Joe Johnston told him to march his army to the northwest and hook up with the relief force at Clinton, Mississippi. Somewhat mind-boggling, Pemberton held a conference of his top commanders and asked them whether they should follow Johnston's command or strike to the southwest for Grant's supply line at Auburn. Pemberton's officers did not like their cold and humorless leader and still questioned where his true loyalty lay. His handling of the campaign to this point also had them grumbling. The majority voted to ignore Johnston and hit the supply line. Rebel troops began moving toward Auburn but were slowed by non-fordable streams—and Pemberton's second thoughts. He eventually decided to obey Johnston's order and turned his men to the northwest, wearying the troops with fruitless marching. The Union supply line was not much to hit anyway, as Grant only forwarded necessities and had his men foraging for the rest. On the night of May 15, Pemberton's army camped only four miles away from Grant's force, though neither side was aware of the situation.

The Battle of Champion Hill on May 16 proved to be the campaign's largest engagement. When the opposing armies became aware of their proximity, they both prepared to fight. Pemberton took a strong position on high ground facing east, the anchor being Champion Hill. The Federals moved up to the assault, beginning a savage, seesaw affair. The Rebel troops gave a good account of themselves, eager to come to grips with the hated Yankees after weeks of pointless tramping around Mississippi. The same could not be said of Pemberton and his officers. One of them commented on their commander's leadership: "To all appearances—so far as my judgment could determine—Pemberton is helpless and undecided as a child."[14] A division commander, Loring, was overheard to say he was "willing for Pemberton to lose the battle, provided he be displaced."[15] He and other Confederate officers openly laughed at Pemberton's orders. The Rebel left flank eventually gave way, followed by the right, causing Pemberton to order a retreat. The army fell back to the Big Black River, with wild talk rampant among the troops on how they had been sold out by their "Yankee" leader. Here Pemberton determined to make another stand, less than ten miles from Vicksburg.

It proved a fool's errand. The Union attack on the Rebel lines was one of the shortest of the entire war, lasting barely three minutes before the Confederates broke in confusion for the crossings of the Big Black and safety of Vicksburg. Another order from Johnston arrived that may have had an eerie ring for Pemberton: "If therefore you are invested in Vicksburg, you must ultimately surrender. Under such circumstances, instead of losing both the troops and place, you must if possible save the troops. If it is not too late, evacuate Vicksburg and its dependencies and march to the northwest."[16] Again, Pemberton gathered a conference of officers, which decided to ignore Johnston's directive even though an escape hatch still existed south of the city. It would not be open for much longer.

Grant's army moved up and clamped the city in a siege. The Rebels were disheartened but possessed enough spirit

to repulse two Union attempts to take Vicksburg by storm on May 19 and 22. The daily grind of a protracted siege soon set in. Pemberton's only hope resided in Johnston's army breaking the Federal grip. Johnston, however, procrastinated while waiting for reinforcements. By the time he was ready to move at the end of June, Grant had enough men to easily hold off Johnston and keep Pemberton penned in Vicksburg. As July began, the city's garrison and inhabitants were down to eating peas and mule meat. On July 3, Pemberton asked Grant for terms of surrender. Showing forcefulness for the first time in the whole campaign, he refused Grant's initial offer of unconditional surrender. The Union commander softened his stance, paroling Vicksburg's thirty thousand-man garrison instead of shipping them to Northern prison camps. As his army trudged toward Vicksburg after being thrashed at the Big Black River, Pemberton, realizing his fate was perhaps sealed, lamented, "Just 30 years ago I began my cadetship at the U.S. Military Academy. Today, the same date, that career is ended in disaster and disgrace."[17] One could not argue with that.

Jefferson Davis, who did not blame his friend for Vicksburg's capitulation, had trouble finding another suitable position for Pemberton after his parole. The hatred for the "Yankee" traitor ran very high in the South. The Pennsylvanian-turned-Rebel finally accepted the post he occupied when the war started—lieutenant colonel of artillery. He served honorably in that role until the conflict's end, seeing much heavy action. Braxton Bragg—head of the Army of Tennessee, corps commander at war's finish—and John C. Pemberton—leader of the Army of Mississippi, lieutenant colonel of artillery by Appomattox; there seemed to be a pattern there.

John Bell Hood (1831-1879) — "Played Hell in Tennessee" (And Georgia, Too!)

John Bell Hood, like Bragg and Pemberton, may have

preserved a better Civil War reputation if he had not risen to army command. Born a Kentuckian in 1831, Hood barely graduated from West Point in 1853, accumulating 196 demerits his senior year—just 4 short of the 200 needed for dismissal. His less-than-stellar performance at the academy did not inhibit John Bell from gaining recognition as an excellent cavalry officer, so much so that he was offered the position of head cavalry instructor at West Point, a post he declined in order to remain on active duty in Texas, fighting the Comanches. With his sad eyes, sagging cheeks, and long beard, Hood could give modern students of history the impression of the cartoon dog Droopy. His somber countenance, however, concealed a born battler. After Fort Sumter, Hood became a cavalry captain in the Confederate service and then eventually switched to colonel of infantry. His prowess quickly won a promotion to brigadier general. His famed Texas Brigade earned the reputation as shock troops for Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. They first acquired notoriety during the Seven Days Battles bloodbath by breaking the Union line at Gaines Mill on June 27, 1862. Their success began the running-fight retreat of the Army of the Potomac away from Richmond to the safety of Harrison's Landing along the James River, which was under the protection of Yankee gunboats.

Hood and his men participated in the sledgehammer attack that crumbled the Federal left flank during Second Manassas on August 30, 1862, causing John Pope's Army of Virginia to flee the field. After the battle, John Bell's combative nature got him into trouble. An argument with his corps commander, James Longstreet, concerning some captured Yankee ambulances resulted in Hood being placed under arrest. Longstreet was willing to let the matter drop if his feisty subordinate would apologize, but John Bell naturally refused. There the matter stood as the Army of Northern Virginia headed north toward its date with the war's bloodiest day, beside a meandering creek in Western Maryland called Antietam. Lee finally intervened, releasing the querulous officer after his Texans chanted "Give

us Hood" while marching past the commanding general. Hood never did apologize. On the morning of September 17, 1862, John Bell's men were cooking their first hot breakfast in more than three days just outside the town of Sharpsburg, Maryland, when they were called upon to bolster the faltering Rebel left, which was under heavy assault. Not getting to eat made the Texans even more ornery as they slammed into the Yankees near the legendary Dunker Church. The Federal advance was blunted, but as Hood confessed afterward, it left his division "dead on the field."[18] Many a commander, North and South, could make the same claim at the Battle of Antietam.

Hood and his boys saw little action at Fredericksburg in December of 1862 and were not even at Chancellorsville in May of 1863, being on detached duty with Longstreet in southern Virginia. Their next big fight came at Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863. On the battle's second day, Hood spearheaded Longstreet's attack on the Federal left near the Round Tops and Devil's Den. He received his first crippling wound, a bullet in the left arm, rendering it useless for the rest of his life. He recovered in time to journey with Longstreet to northern Georgia in September, reinforcing Bragg's Army of Tennessee. Hood delivered another of Longstreet's patented counterpunches on the second day of the Battle of Chickamauga, smashing a huge hole in the center of the Union line. Hood did not get to revel in the victory; he sustained another severe wound, this time to his right leg, which required amputation. Two such fearful injuries should have driven any man out of the war for good, but John Bell determined to keep serving.

He spent the winter of 1863-64 in Richmond, recuperating, tasting the social scene, and befriending Jefferson Davis. The Rebel president gave Hood command of a corps in the Army of Tennessee, now under Joe Johnston, for the spring campaign. Many Southerners expressed surprise at the appointment, citing Hood's youth and inexperience leading such a large body of troops. Time would tell if it was a wise move. Hood took to the field with a wooden leg (paid for by his beloved Texas Brigade)

strapped to his saddle, an orderly trailing behind carrying his crutches. He chaffed as Johnston retreated through northern Georgia toward Atlanta in front of Sherman's Yankee hordes. What Johnston considered strategic withdrawal to buy time and look for openings, Hood condemned as timidity on the part of his commander to engage the foe. John Bell made his feelings known in a caustic letter to Braxton Bragg, now Davis' military advisor, in which he bemoaned the fact the army "had failed to give battle to the enemy many miles north of our present position."[19] The Confederate president concurred, having similarly grown tired of Johnston's seeming lack of aggressiveness. Davis relieved Johnston on July 17, 1864, requiring a replacement to be chosen. William Hardee, senior corps commander, appeared the logical choice. Braxton Bragg traveled to Georgia to gauge the mood of the troops, which was not good given their affection for Johnston. Bragg disliked Hardee, whom he did not get along with while leading the army (another shocker!). Bragg subsequently interviewed Hood and came away impressed with the one-armed, one-legged general, whose views jibed more with his own and Davis'. Upon returning to Richmond, Bragg recommended Hood for the post.

Davis also asked the opinion of Robert E. Lee, who responded, "Hood is a bold fighter. I am doubtful as to other qualities necessary . . . General Hardee has more experience in managing an army. May God give wisdom to decide in this momentous matter."[20] Sagacity proved in short supply as President Davis decided to follow the advice of Bragg—who failed miserably in top command—instead of the counsel of his most successful and trusted general. John Bell Hood was named commander of the Army of Tennessee. Hood knew he had been put in charge to fight, and fight he would. His force consisted of fifty thousand troops, while opponent W. T. Sherman had eighty thousand close to the suburbs of Atlanta. John Bell launched his first attack on July 20, 1864, at Peachtree Creek, just north of the city. It failed with a loss of five thousand men. Undaunted, Hood thought an opportunity existed to crush part of the Yankee

army, which was trying to flank him east of the city. Not a bad idea: flank the flanker and beat them in detail. Unfortunately, the movement was bungled, by Hardee of all people, in what became known as the Battle of Atlanta. Once again, John Bell Hood suffered heavy casualties with nothing to show for it.

Perhaps the third time would be the charm for Hood and his attack-at-all-costs mentality. No such luck. The Battle of Ezra Church saw Confederate assaults beaten back again with a very high number of dead and wounded. Three attempts, three defeats, close to twenty thousand in losses. Even Jefferson Davis could take no more, wiring Hood and telling him to stop attacking. John Bell succeeded not only in losing Atlanta, which fell to the Yankees on September 2, but in all but crippling the mighty Army of Tennessee. They should have listened to General Lee. Hood was undoubtedly brave and his decision to keep serving despite his fearful wounds is beyond commendable. But John Bell Hood, sadly for the South, had shown he was not up for a senior command. Attacking a numerically superior enemy while your main task was to defend one of the Confederacy's most important cities did not make sense. Hood, however, had set his own table by criticizing Joe Johnston's handling of the campaign. The Southern cause paid the penalty, and it was going to get worse.

Hood and Sherman danced a bit in western Georgia, each seeking an opening, before the Union commander tired of the routine and set off on his famous March to the Sea. With a severely weakened army, John Bell's options were very limited. He could trail after Sherman, trying to inflict damage on the Yankee force where able. Or he might head north toward Tennessee and perhaps even Kentucky, hoping Sherman would have to turn and come after him. With Jefferson Davis' approval, Hood started north. However it was not Sherman but his top subordinate, George Thomas, who was charged with dealing with Hood. With part of Sherman's army, Thomas began to gather Union troops at Nashville, Tennessee, the main Northern supply hub in the region. His rearguard lagged behind, offering

Hood a splendid opportunity to isolate and destroy it. John Bell actually got the Army of Tennessee in front of the Yankee force under General Schofield at Spring Hill, Tennessee. But for some inexplicable reason, the Confederates let Schofield's men tramp right past them in the night to the town of Franklin, along the Harpeth River. The Rebels clearly heard the jingling of Union canteens and equipment but did nothing to stop the march. A possible explanation is that the men were so disgusted and disillusioned with Hood's leadership that they were just going through the motions.

Of course, John Bell did not see it that way and was in a white fury when he discovered the Yankees had slipped away. Schofield needed to wait at Franklin while his engineers erected bridges across the Harpeth, so he threw up some hasty entrenchments facing south to confront Hood. As the Rebels approached Franklin, Hood's anger—maybe because of the debacle at Spring Hill, or perhaps in culmination of everything that occurred since he assumed top command—caused him to lose all perspective and rational judgment. John Bell ordered an immediate frontal assault by his entire army without taking the time to reconnoiter or scout the Yankee position. Nathan Bedford Forrest told Hood he could easily get around the Federal left flank, cross the Harpeth at a ford, and block the road to Nashville. John Bell dismissed the idea. Along with his rage, Hood put forth the fallacy employed by many inept generals: the troops had grown timid, not attacking with the same spirit as earlier in the war. They needed a wake-up call. The Army of Tennessee never had trouble with courage, but they definitely knew mismanagement and stupidity when they saw it. The Union defenses at Franklin, though improvised, were strong, while the Confederates needed to attack uphill over open fields. Hood's men charged with the vigor he believed they lacked and then some, even breaking the Yankee line at one point. In the end, however, the troops were asked to do the impossible and retreated before the flames of Federal musketry and cannon fire. Dusk fell early on Franklin, Tennessee, on November 30, 1864, casting ghastly shadows on the battlefield.

Hood's petulance cost six thousand men, including five generals—most notably Pat Cleburne, arguably the South's best combat officer. The bridges complete, Schofield escaped to Nashville, with the Rebels trailing behind. At this juncture, Hood's alternatives were basically down to zero. He took up positions on hills overlooking Nashville with the feeble remnant of his army. What he intended to do was anybody's guess. He could not possibly attack the strongly fortified city and the troops did not possess the strength for a flanking movement north around Thomas. Waiting to be assaulted and then counterattacking offered the slimmest of hopes, so that is what Hood did. A cold snap delayed the anticipated Yankee foray, but it finally came on December 15-16, 1864. The Union hosts proved overwhelming, smashing the Confederate left, sending the proud Army of Tennessee once more in headlong flight. That night, a clumsy private accidentally stumbled into Hood's tent, only to witness tears streaming down the cheeks of the Rebel leader. John Bell Hood sacrificed tremendously for the Confederacy, but the burdens of high command proved too much. As the skeletal remains of the Army of Tennessee marched south after Nashville, the troops began singing a little ditty about how their commander had played something in Tennessee, and it sure was not heaven.