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Command and Leadership at Chickamauga

Often overshadowed in light of the more popular battles of the Civil War's eastern theater, the battle of Chickamauga stands as the largest battle of the western theater, and at approximately thirty-five thousand casualties also the bloodiest. It is also the only significant engagement Confederate forces won in the West. By the fall of 1863, Confederates forces in the West had endured a series of strategic defeats, often resulting in the loss of vital territory and resources. Capitalizing on earlier victories in Tennessee, General William Rosecrans, now commanding the Union's Army of the Cumberland, sought a war of maneuver to force the Confederates out of Tennessee and northern Georgia. In early September General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee evacuated Chattanooga. Situated in the Cumberland Mountains, Chattanooga held strategic importance both as a vital railroad junction and as the gateway into the heartland of Dixie. On the night of September 18, Bragg, reinforced with units from the Army of Northern Virginia, under the command of General James Longstreet, positioned his army along the banks of the Chickamauga Creek, approximately twelve miles south from Chattanooga. The battle began on the following morning, September 19, and for the ensuing two days the armies struggled for supremacy of the field. The "high tide" of the battle occurred on September 20 when Confederate forces under the immediate command of General John Bell Hood assaulted the Federal center, thereby exploiting an unintentional gap in the Union line. As the Southern soldiers sought to gain the tactical advantage, Union General George Thomas rallied his troops to stave off complete disaster and earned himself the title "the Rock of Chickamauga." Tactical victory came at a high cost for the victory deprived Army of Tennessee, sustaining approximately nineteen thousand casualties. Having gained possession of the battlefield, Bragg's army moved to reclaim Chattanooga.

The Chickamauga Campaign, edited by Steven E. Woodworth, distinguished Civil War scholar and history professor at Texas Christian University, is the second volume in the Civil War Campaigns in the Heartland series. Seven of the eight essays examine and analyze the battle's leaders and lost opportunities, while the final essay explores elements of the "new military history" by outlining the creation of Chickamauga National Military Park. Contributors include Ethan S. Rafuse, Woodworth, Alexander Mendoza, Lee White, John R. Lundberg, William G. Robertson, David Powell, and Timothy B. Smith.

The introductory essay, "In the Shadow of the Rock," by Rafuse, professor at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, offers an evaluation of two neglected Union corps commanders, General Thomas Crittenden and General Alexander McCook, who indeed have stood in the shadow of George Thomas. Rafuse explores Crittenden and McCook's leadership prior to the engagement at Chickamauga as an indictor of their performance during the battle and as a means of evaluation independently from the success of George Thomas. By the fall of 1863, on the one hand, McCook suffered from a damaged reputation in light of his poor performance at Perryville and Stones River. On the other hand, Crittenden's men were not engaged at Perryville and, unlike McCook, Crittenden's conduct at Stones River improved his reputation within the Army of the Cumberland. Evaluating their leadership at Chickamauga and particularly their involvement in the execution of the "fatal order" that removed General Thomas Wood's division from the Union line, thus creating the gap that Thomas filled, Rafuse finds fallacies in both generals' conduct. The War Department's 1864 inquiry into the debacle at Chickamauga exonerated both McCook and Crittenden; however, neither general saw service in the Army of the Cumberland again. To this end, Rafuse concludes that such

termination of McCook was justified because the general "did not possess the personal or intellectual qualities necessary to lead a corps effectively on a Civil War battlefield" (p. 41). Based on his pre-Chickamauga performance Crittenden's removal, however, was unjustified. Rafuse contends that Crittenden's "lapses in judgment" during the battle stand as an "aberration" to an otherwise solid career (p. 42).

Woodworth's essay explores a "great military nonevent" at McLemore's Cove when the Confederates had the opportunity to destroy portions of the Federal army as they passed through the mountain gaps around Chattanooga between September 9 and 11. Major General Thomas Hindman's Confederates enjoyed numerical superiority, but their failure to capitalize on their advantages remains, according to Woodworth, "one of the most inexplicable missed opportunities" of the war (p. 65). Woodworth attributes this missed opportunity to four factors. First, he applauds the leadership of Union commanders, namely Major General James Negley, and their careful reconnaissance to accurately ascertain the enemy position. Second, Unionist civilians played an integral role in providing Union forces with accurate information on the Confederate position. Negley's forces evaded disaster at McLemore's Cove, in part, because of Hindman's poor leadership. And finally, Woodworth concludes that the factious command within the Army of Tennessee undermined Bragg's authority and his subordinates' confidence in his abilities.

Expanding on evaluations of Union and Confederate leadership, Mendoza's essay considers relations within the high command of the Army of Tennessee, focusing specifically on corps commander Daniel Harvey Hill. Following poor performance at Chickamauga, Bragg relieved Hill from command and subsequently transferred him out of the Army of Tennessee. Hill sought to restore his reputation and to return to active duty to no avail and consequently returned to North Carolina to witness the war's final years as a civilian. Hill neglected to execute Bragg's orders to move his corps to McLemore's Cove in the hopes of trapping advance elements of the Union army maneuvering through mountain gaps toward Chickamauga Creek. Following this Pyrrhic victory, several of Bragg's subordinates, including Longstreet and Hill, orchestrated a cabal to relieve the divisive general from command of the army. President Jefferson Davis, however, remained steadfast in his support for Bragg. Mendonza does not seek to justify Hill's involvement in the effort to remove Bragg from command, but he does argue that Hill's removal was unfair, namely, because other critics of Bragg, including Longstreet, Leonidas Polk, and Hindman remained on active duty.

Two essays evaluate the performance of division commanders within the Army of Tennessee. White's essay offers the one positive interpretation of leadership within the Army of Tennessee. White argues that newly appointed Major General Alexander P. Stewart exhibited strong command and control during the battle. In addition to a solid battlefield performance, Stewart successfully straddled the factions within the high command, remaining on positive terms with Bragg and Polk, one of Bragg's most vocal critics. Notwithstanding this performance, Bragg reorganized his army in the wake of Chickamauga, which resulted in the dismantling of Stewart's division. Lundberg narrates yet another example of inadequate leadership from Major General Patrick Cleburne. Lundberg contends that had Cleburne assaulted the Federal left, held by Thomas, as Bragg initially ordered on the morning of September 20, the Union position would have collapsed.

In the wake of defeat at Gettysburg, Davis approved the transfer of Longstreet and his First Corps to join Bragg's forces in Tennessee. In "Bull of the Woods?-" Robertson evaluates the leadership of the much-maligned Longstreet. Recent scholars, led by Ezra Warner, William Piston, and Jeffrey Wert, have sought to restore the reputation of Robert E. Lee's "old warhorse." Chickamauga provides historians with the opportunity to evaluate Longstreet's abilities outside of the long-casted shadow of Lee. Robertson contends that his campaign for a transfer out of the Army of Northern Virginia was based largely on personal motives. Longstreet recognized his career limitations as long as Lee remained in command of the Army of Northern Virginia and believed that he could provide better generalship to the western forces than Bragg. During the battle, Robertson concludes, Longstreet's generalship was mediocre at best. He failed to capitalize on the breakthrough of the Union position and allowed the initial success to degenerate into a series of costly and futile frontal assaults against a strong position. Free of Lee's shadow, Robertson concludes that Longstreet's performance was "far less exceptional and far more average" than his supporters maintain. Instead, Longstreet "employed no innovative methods and showed no tactical brilliance" (p. 135).

In the final essay, Smith shifts the interpretive focus away from questions of battlefield leadership and addresses issues of the "new military" history by exploring the career of Henry Van Ness Boynton and his role in the preservation of Chickamauga National Military Park.

Boynton, a veteran of the 35th Ohio, received the Medal of Honor for his valor on Chattanooga, but upon being wounded at Missionary Ridge spent the remainder of the war as a war correspondent for the *Cincinnati Gazette*. Boynton remained active in postwar affairs as a member of the Society of the Army of the Cumberland and a dutiful shaper of the memory of the Civil War and particularly the fighting at Snodgrass Hill. In 1888, nearly twenty-five years after local residents of Gettysburg established the nation's first battlefield preservation organization, Boynton proposed the idea of creating a similar park at Chickamauga to fellow veterans of the Army of the Cumberland. The timing was appropriate. Boynton and other like-minded preservationists capitalized on the increasing patriotic sentiments of reconciliation to create battlefield memorials that sought to honor soldiers' valor and also to bind the nation's war wounds. His work was without precedent; Boynton drafted the legislation to introduce into Congress, termed the phrase "national military park," and recommended that each newly created park be managed by a three-member commission. Boynton's efforts came to fruition on September 18, 1895, with the creation of Chickamauga National Military Park. In addition to introducing the legislation to preserve Chickamauga, Smith argues that Boynton willingly molded the interpretation of Chickamauga by emphasizing the fighting at Snodgrass Hill, where Boynton and the 35th Ohio fought. Although at times downplaying earlier preservation efforts by the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association, Smith finds Boynton's work pioneering and titles him the "father of the modern military park movement" (p. 183).

The essays in Woodworth's *The Chickamauga Campaign* offer a compelling study in command and leadership at the battle of Chickamauga. This work is not intended to provide a general overview of the campaign, but to explore specific events within the battle. Woodworth's Civil War Campaigns in the Heartland works toward bringing due attention to the war's western theater. When complete, these seventeen volumes will reenergize otherwise neglected campaigns and provide a more nuanced understanding of the decisiveness of the western engagements. In its entirety, this series will do for the western theater what Gary Gallagher's edited campaign and battle series did for the war's already popular eastern theater.

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