



Call to Arms

Brunswick Civil War Round Table Newsletter

The President's Corner by John Butler



The BCWRT Board has decided to undertake a long-term project to capture the history of the BCWRT in an oral format and eventually posted it on the website.

The purpose of the BCWRT Oral History Project is to accumulate and preserve first-person accounts of BCWRT events and activities. This collection includes interviews with some of the founders of the BCWRT and long-term members and volunteers.

Why do an Oral History? There is a lot to learn from what others have been through and the history of the BCWRT. This Oral History will cover such events as the founding of the BCWRT, major speakers, and activities the volunteers and members have participated in.

Readers will discover the history of the BCWRT from first-person recounting of "been-there-done-that" experiences in sometimes funny, frequently poignant, and always riveting detail.

As we fully develop this program, more details will be announced. We plan on interviewing past and current BCWRT officers, volunteers, members and maybe even some of our speakers. If you have ideas let us know.

If you have an interest in helping with this project please contact me at jlbutter2007@gmail.com or Jim Dunn, jdunn44516@aol.com.

Some random items: If you have experience with computers, internet, data bases or websites, our IT advisor, Len Trizinsky can use your help. See me if interested.

We had a tremendous demand for the Fort Fisher tour, which was not surprising. Because of this anticipated demand, we will conduct this tour at least once a year. We are working with the Cape Fear CWRT to have them also schedule a tour in which we can participate. Chris Fonvielle and the manager at Fort Fisher are fully supporting this plan.

John

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BCWRT Upcoming Events

Tuesday, December 3, 2024 Program

“Ulysses S. Grant, Live!”

Union General U.S. Grant returns by popular demand in December with a live guest appearance that will give the audience the opportunity to ask questions about his life and career, and gain his understanding about important historic events during the Civil War.

Actually, Gen. Grant will be portrayed by Dr. E.C. (Curt) Fields, Jr., appearing in his Union uniform and favorite cigar. As James Goff, Professor and Chair of the Dept. of History at Appalachian State University said about his appearances: "It's eerie. Dr. Curt Fields becomes Gen. Ulysses S. Grant...and history comes alive."

Dr. Fields' presentation will be based on quotes from Grant's memoirs, articles and letters that Grant wrote, statements from interviews with Grant, and first-person accounts from people who knew him or witnessed him during events. Fields is a living replica with the same height and body type as General Grant. He has done extensive research in order to speak like him, and therefore presents a convincing, true-to-life image of the man as he really looked and sounded.



Dr. Fields has portrayed Grant at numerous battle reenactments and was chosen to portray him at the 150th Sesquicentennial observations at Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Richmond, Vicksburg, and Appomattox Courthouse. He has portrayed the General on film as well as starring as Grant in the Visitor Center film shown at Appomattox Court House National Historic Park and in the discovery Channel's three-part documentary series, "How Booze Built America." Dr. Fields also was featured as General Grant giving his life story on the Civil War Trust website. He is a member of several Civil War historical societies and associations.

He has a bachelor degree and a master's degree in Education from the University of Memphis, a second master's degree in Secondary Education, and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration and Curriculum from Michigan State University. He taught for eight years at the Junior and High School levels before serving 25 years as a high school administrator. He now teaches as an adjunct Sociology professor at the University of Memphis, and in Education for Belhaven University, Memphis campus, and is also an Educational consultant.

You are encouraged to attend the meeting either in person or via Zoom.

If participating via Zoom, simply use the following link:

<https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/87473774681?pwd=CBa59aRywrKEbA6avtcahddb6vSiU4.1>

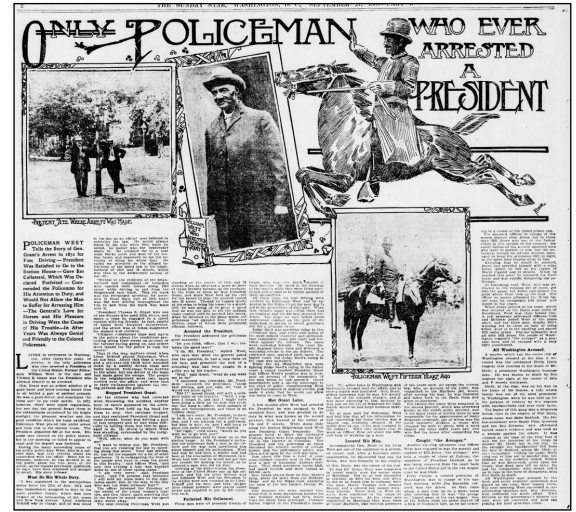
Meeting ID: 874 7377 4681

Passcode: 649807

U.S. Grant - Little Known Facts

When Ulysses S. Grant was Arrested and Charged with Speeding

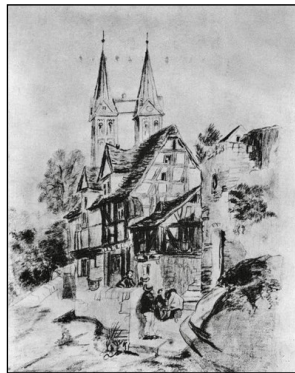
Ulysses S. Grant was racing with friends while driving a horse-drawn carriage in Washington D.C. in 1872., an era when galloping horses presented a serious danger on the streets. He was stopped by a policeman who gave the president a warning for racing with his friends, but the very next day, the same officer caught Grant speeding again and this time arrested him. The policeman was William Henry West, a veteran who'd fought with an all-Black Union regiment during the Civil War. The president willingly consented to being taken down to the police station, even asking West about his wartime experiences during their ride and assured him that he would not face any repercussions for the arrest, as "he admired a man who did his duty."



Credits to *The Flyover* and *The Smithsonian Magazine*

Ulysses S. Grant's Artwork

Ulysses S. Grant's fame as a general and President is well known to most Americans. Yet Grant was also a talented artist. Surviving paintings from his time as a cadet at West Point from 1839 to 1843 attest to his drawing skills. While drawing and painting were favorite hobbies for Grant during his time at West Point,



it was also essential that graduating cadets were proficient in these skills for their future Army careers. It was important for officers to be able to sketch accurate maps of the surrounding landscape and to include notable features on these maps.



Grant was fortunate to have internationally respected Robert Walter Weir as a drawing instructor. One of Weir's most well-known paintings was completed

in July 1843, around the same time Grant graduated from West Point. This painting is the famous "Embarkation of the Pilgrims," which now sits in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.

Cadet Ulysses S. Grant profited from Weir's teachings and several of his works still survive. These drawings cover different subjects and reflect a talented artistic ability. Yet despite his early interest in drawing, Grant does not mention this passion even once in later correspondence or his Personal Memoirs.



Credit to National Park Service

Bread in the Civil War

Traditional Sally Lunn Bread

Fortunately, to get them through the dreadful first days of soldiering, most mothers and girlfriends sent their boys off to war with hampers and boxes packed with home-baked goodies that, alas, lasted not nearly long enough as the recruits shared them with their messmates.



This light, sweet bread was named for the 18th century English woman who first made it. Many recipes, or “receipts” as they were known, were reminiscent of cooking styles brought from the Old World.

Ingredients:

1 cup milk
2 Tbsps shortening
1/2 oz active dry yeast
3 cups flour
1/2 tsp salt
1 Tbsp sugar

Instructions:

Heat the milk and shortening to scalding point and then allow to cool. Pour the milk into a bowl, add the remaining ingredients and mix until smooth. Cover the bowl and leave in a warm place to rise for about 1-1/2 hours. Knock down the dough and put in a greased pan and allow to rise for a further hour. Bake in a moderately hot oven (375 degrees F) for about 45 minutes.

Recipe from [The Civil War Cookbook](#) by William C. Davis shared by Robbin Smith

The Richmond Bread Riots

During the early spring of 1863 in Richmond, Virginia, thousands of working-class Southern women were struggling as their husbands were either off fighting or had died in battle. Hyperinflation from spending and a weak Confederate currency drove the prices of food and other goods way up, and families started to go hungry. By the beginning of April, it reached a boiling point, leading to one of the largest civilian uprisings during the war - the Richmond Bread Riot. When several hundred women marched on the state mansion to petition against exorbitant food prices, Gov John Letcher provided no answers, so the crowd sought immediate redress. Growing to a few thousand by the time they reached the commercial district, a mob of women, men, and children laid waste to ten square blocks.

From [The History Buff's Guide to the Civil War](#) by Thomas R. Flagel and history.com

Bread for Union & Confederate Soldiers

In a well-managed hospital or camp, a soldier might be fortunate enough to get fresh-baked wheat bread. In the field his bread ration was usually less inviting.

For the Union soldier it was usually “army bread,” also known as hardtack. Three inches square and a half-inch thick, unleavened, light, transportable, the crackerlike substance consisted of white flour, water, and a modicum of salt and was as hard as a rock. A daily ration was a pound, or about a dozen cakes. Men hated it and sang ungrateful songs about it, but they survived on it.

Along with precious calories, hardtack often contained maggots, weevils, and larvae, to the point that soldiers called the crackers, “worm castles.” A dusting of mold was par for the course. Still smashed with a rifle or rock, the otherwise flavorless bread fortified soups, stews, and made a good mush when mixed with grease. The crackers were also baked, eaten with a spread of molasses or lard or gnawed plain.

Bread for Johnny Reb was coarse, flavorless corn bread. Sometimes his cornmeal came in a small loaf, which was usually stale and hard. More often than not, he received his ration in meal form and baked it into small cakes or balled it up on the end of ramrod or used it in soups. If he was lucky, his meal consisted of milled wheat. If wheat or corn were not available, sometimes he consumed ground rice or peas.

As much as the boys in blue disliked hardtack, Confederates made it a point to capture as many crates of the Union bread as possible. Outside of Atlanta in 1864, a division of Confederates advanced upon a Union supply depot and its million rations of hardtack. Asked to surrender to avoid the endless effusion of blood,” the Union commander responded, “we are prepared for the ‘needless effusion of blood’ whenever it is agreeable to you.” He held on to save the depot and its rations.

From [The History Buff's Guide to the Civil War](#) by Thomas R. Flagel

Ladies' Forum - Civil War Women

Judith Brockenbrough McGuire

From Virginia to Texas, women of all backgrounds wrote dramatic first-hand accounts, mostly in diaries and letters, of what life was really like for them and their loved ones during the Civil War.

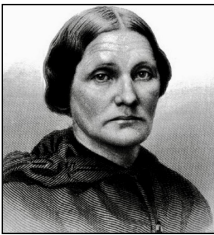
Judith McGuire was the wife of the Reverend John P. McGuire, principal of the Episcopal High School near Alexandria, Virginia. Born in Richmond in 1813, the daughter of Judge William Brockenbrough of the Virginia Supreme Court, she was widely connected throughout the state. Two sons enlisted in the Confederate Army. Her daughters were in school. Mrs. McGuire kept a diary from May 1861 till the war's end "for the members of my family who are too young to remember these days".

From Heroines of Dixie, Volume 1: Spring of High Hopes, Edited by Katharine M. Jones, p. 24. Copyright 1955, by MacMillan Publishing Co. contributed by Robbin Smith.

May 4, 1861 - Alexandria, Virginia -

"Our friends and neighbors have left us. Every thing is broken up. The theological Seminary is closed; the High School dismissed. Scarcely any one is left of the many families which surrounded us...Why did we think it necessary to send off all that was so dear to us from our own home? I threw open the shutters, and the answer came at once, so mournfully! I heard distinctly the drums beating in Washington. The evening was so still that I seemed to hear nothing else. As I looked at the Capitol in the distance, I could scarcely believe my senses. That Capitol of which I had always been so proud! Can it be possible that it is no longer our Capital?"

Mary Ann Bickerdyke



For both armies, nursing was an afterthought. Soldiers physically or mentally incapable of combat service were often charged with hospital duty. Training was minimal or nonexistent, and the orderlies served on a rotational basis. Neglect, theft, and abuse of patients were prevalent.

Into this scene came widowed Quaker Mary Ann Bickerdyke, a stocky, unpolished, and fierce opponent of the Union Medical Bureau. Examining a row of overcrowded hospital tents at a Union camp in Illinois, she labored to contain her anger: "The mud floor was foul with human excrement...patients lay in shirts and underdrawers, filthy with vomit, rank with perspiration."

Bickerdyke immediately rectified the situation. She obtained better food and living conditions for the men, organized kitchens, established wash teams, replaced beddings, dressings, and clothes, assisted with surgeries, and fired anyone who resisted, despite having no authority to do so. Traveling with Ulysses S. Grant's forces to Fort Donelson and Vicksburg, she quickly earned the admiration of the enlisted and emphasized to doctors and soldiers alike the relationship between cleanliness and health. When officers or surgeons complained of her iron-fisted tactics, both Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman advised them to step aside. Grant commented to one objector, "Mother Bickerdyke outranks everybody, even Lincoln."

On his Atlanta campaign, Sherman specifically requested her help for the Fifteenth Corps, permitting her to trade, demand, and confiscate anything needed for "her boys." At the conclusion of the war, for the Grand review of the Armies, Sherman instructed Bickerdyke to ride in the parade at the head of the grateful Fifteenth.

Bickerdyke served all four years and in nineteen battle zones. Remaining with her corps until the last soldier was discharged in 1866, she labored the rest of her life assisting veterans from coast to coast. Alternately called a cyclone, a tornado, and a damned nuisance, she preferred the name the men awarded her - Mother.



For her fast and furious commitment to the service, the U.S. government granted Mother Bickerdyke a pension of three hundred dollars a year, which she did not receive until 1886.

The History Buff's Guide to the Civil War by Thomas Flagel

Civil War Views

Guest Quarters for the General



The General and Mrs. Grant have a place to rest when they visit in December. Member and volunteer John Walsh will be their host.

They are interested in seeing the local sights such as riding the ferry over to see Fort Fisher as well as eating at local restaurants. Be alert! You may see them out and about.

Bentonville Tour

Our guest speaker in January will be Wade Sokolosky who will be conducting the Bentonville Battlefield tour.

The tour is being planned for the spring of 2025. The date and details will be announced at the January meeting.

Members will also be able to sign up at that meeting.

Fort Fisher Now Open

The long-awaited new Visitor Center and reconstructed earthworks officially opened on October 30, 2024.

The Visitor Center is approximately three times larger than the previous one and includes exhibits, a 100-seat orientation theater, gift shop and multipurpose room for events.

The hours are 9 am - 5 pm and admission is



Earthworks and a tunnel system can be viewed by walking along a tour trail.

Photos by John Butler

Fort Fisher Tour

The tour of the new Fort Fisher Visitor Center and earthworks is scheduled for January 15, 2025. This date happens to be the anniversary date of the battle in 1865 which should add to the affair along with having Chris Fonvielle lead the tour for an outstanding experience.

Details were announced at the November meeting where so many members were able to sign up that the tour quickly sold out.

The Cape Fear Round Table in Wilmington is also planning this tour with Chris Fonvielle which will

provide BCWRT members an opportunity to join as well. The date and details for this tour will be announced.

This is a tour that will become an annual event.

Reminder to everyone - there is no need to wait for a tour in order to visit Fort Fisher. There is much to be seen and we are fortunate that we have this important historic site in our backyard. Visit and enjoy!

Civil War Views

Member E. Gifford Stack, who recently relocated to Georgia to be closer to children and grandchildren, says another benefit is visiting new Civil War museums. Recently he traveled to Columbus, Ga, to visit the National Infantry Museum at Fort Moore, and the National Civil War Naval Museum.

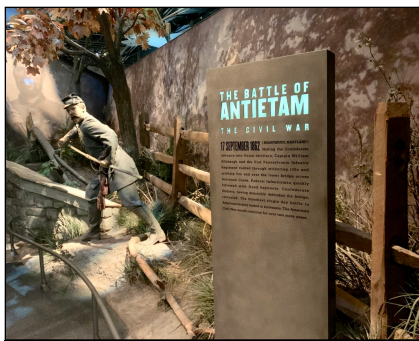


Photo from the National Infantry Museum

(All photos by E. Gifford Stack except torpedoes photo is courtesy of NCWNM)

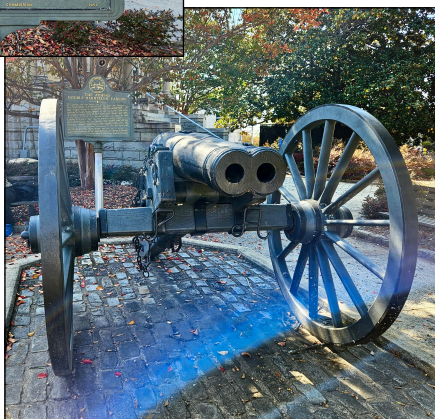
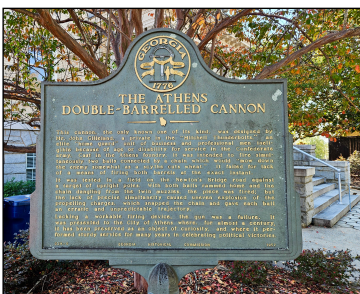
The Naval Museum covers both Union and Confederate activities including beautiful scale model replicas of ships, salvaged parts and pieces of famous sunken vessels, original uniforms, paintings of historical naval events, flags from both navies, and replicas of torpedoes used in the war.



Both are outstanding with the Infantry Museum having several powerful exhibits of the US troops at various Civil War battles.



Member John Walsh recently traveled to Georgia where he found this interesting and popular attraction a one-of-a-kind cannon in front of the Athens City Hall. The cannon never saw battle but is preserved, ever at the ready, facing north.



The Athens Double -Barrelled Cannon

This cannon, the only known one of its kind, was designed by Mr. John Gilleland, a private in the "Mitchell Thunderbolts," an elite "home guard" unit of business and professional men ineligible because of age or disability for service in the Confederate army. Cast in the Athens foundry, it was intended to fire simultaneously two balls connected by a chain which would "mow down the enemy somewhat as a scythe cuts wheat." It failed for lack of a means of firing both barrels at the exact instant.

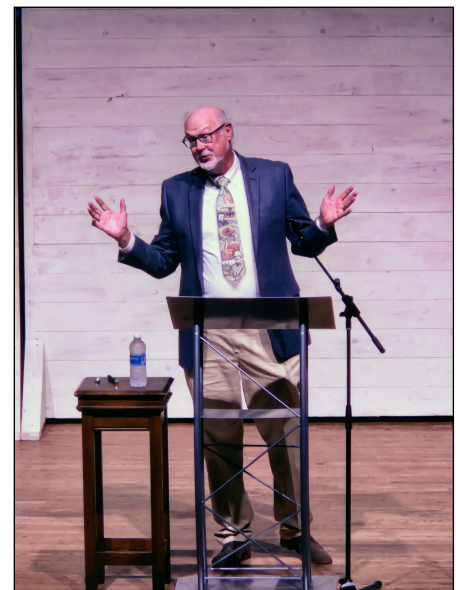
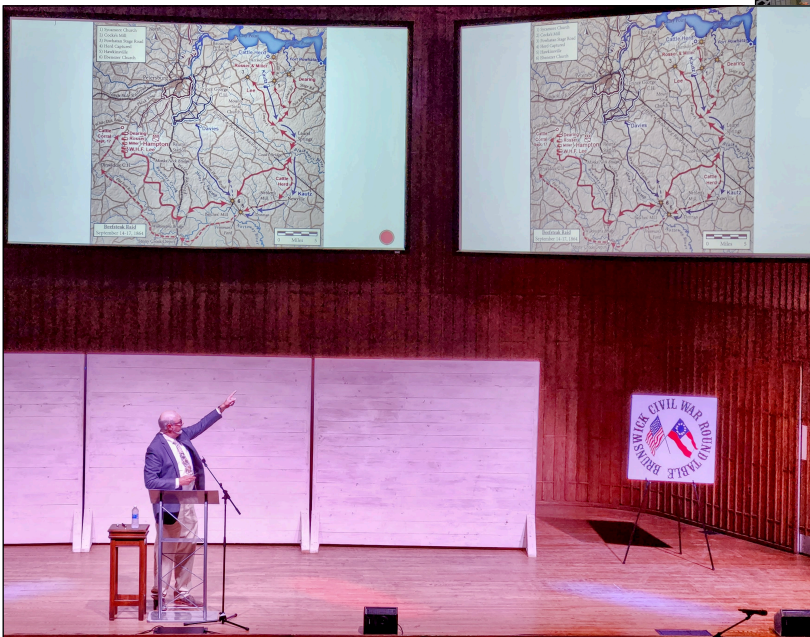
It was tested in a field on the Newton's Bridge road against a target of upright poles. With both balls rammed home and the chain dangling from the twin muscules, the piece was fired; but the lack of precise simultaneity caused uneven explosion of the propelling charges, which snapped the chain and gave each ball an erratic and unpredictable trajectory.

Lacking a workable firing device, the gun was a failure. It was presented to the City of Athens where, for almost a century, it has been preserved as an object of curiosity, and where it performed sturdy service for many years in celebrating political victories.

Georgia Historical Commission 1957

Meeting Photo Gallery

Our Guest Speaker in November was Will Greene who presented the incredible story of "The Beefsteak Raid at Petersburg."



Board Notes & Local Events

Notes from the November 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

1. Our balance as of the end of October is \$6,738.
2. Attendance was lighter than some previous meetings, possibly due to it being Election Day.
3. There was a discussion about the need for the member database program be refreshed in each of the computers used in registration prior to the meeting in order to pull in the most current member information.
4. It was noted that in order for those watching the meeting on Zoom to have the view on the screen that is used by the speaker for pointing out information.
5. No volunteers have come forward to be considered for a Board position. All current Board members have volunteered to serve for another year. Elections will be held at the December meeting.

Our next Board meeting is Tuesday, December 10, 2024. Meetings are held monthly to discuss items that will make our round table more interesting, run better, and keep our membership engaged. President John Butler leads the two-hour meeting that includes interested Advisors and members. The meetings are held at Trinity United Methodist Church in Southport one week following our gathering at Hatch and begin at 10:00 am. If you wish to attend or have suggestions for the Board, please contact John at jlbutler2007@gmail.com.

Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

Generalship and Decision Making

The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table invites all members and friends to our December 12 meeting. Titled "Generalship: Theory and Substance," this audience-participation program will be presented by round table member John Weisz, a West Point graduate and retired U.S. Army officer.

John will describe the characteristics of successful generals in the Civil War. He will bring the audience into the study of campaigns through practical exercises. Teams will form and will be provided with the information needed by the commander and several options as to which maneuver to execute. The audience will not be provided with the identity of the generals and where the engagements were fought ahead of the exercise but, by the end, will surely be able to determine who and where.

December 12, 2024, 7:00 pm

St John's Episcopal Church
1219 Forest Hills Dr., Wilmington



Photograph of three of Grant's horses during the [Overland Campaign](#) (Cold Harbor, Virginia), from left to right: Egypt, Cincinnati, and Jeff Davis



Muster Notes and Notables

**The December BCWRT meeting is Tuesday, December 3, 2024.
Hatch Auditorium, NC Baptist Assembly, Fort Caswell, Oak Island, NC.
See page 2 for details to attend via Zoom.**

Registration begins at 6:15 pm and the meeting starts promptly at 7:00 pm.

Mail Dues Checks to: BCWRT, PO Box 10161, Southport, NC. 28461.
(Please include your current phone number, street address, and email.)

2024-2025 Officers, Directors, and Advisors

John Butler: President & Director
Ann Birdsall: VP & Director
Jim Dunn: VP & Director
Jennifer Chapman: Secretary & Director
Tom Kehoe: Treasurer & Director
Bruce Jordan: Director
Chuck Roedema: Director
Gar Dowell: Advisor
Charen Fink: Advisor

Chris Fonvielle: Advisor
Jim McKee: Advisor
Chris Mackowski: Advisor
Skip Maxwell: Advisor
Roy Pender: Advisor
Wally Rueckel: Advisor
Wade Sokolosky: Advisor
Robbin Smith: Advisor
John Wall: Advisor
Angela Zombek: Advisor

Connect with us



We Welcome Your Suggestions for our Speakers, Website, Meeting Procedures, Membership Retention, etc.

BCWRT is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization,
co-founded by Tom O'Donnell and Wally Rueckel and organized in May 2010.

Call to Arms Editor: Jennifer Chapman (jennifer.chapman3@icloud.com)

PURE CHAOS

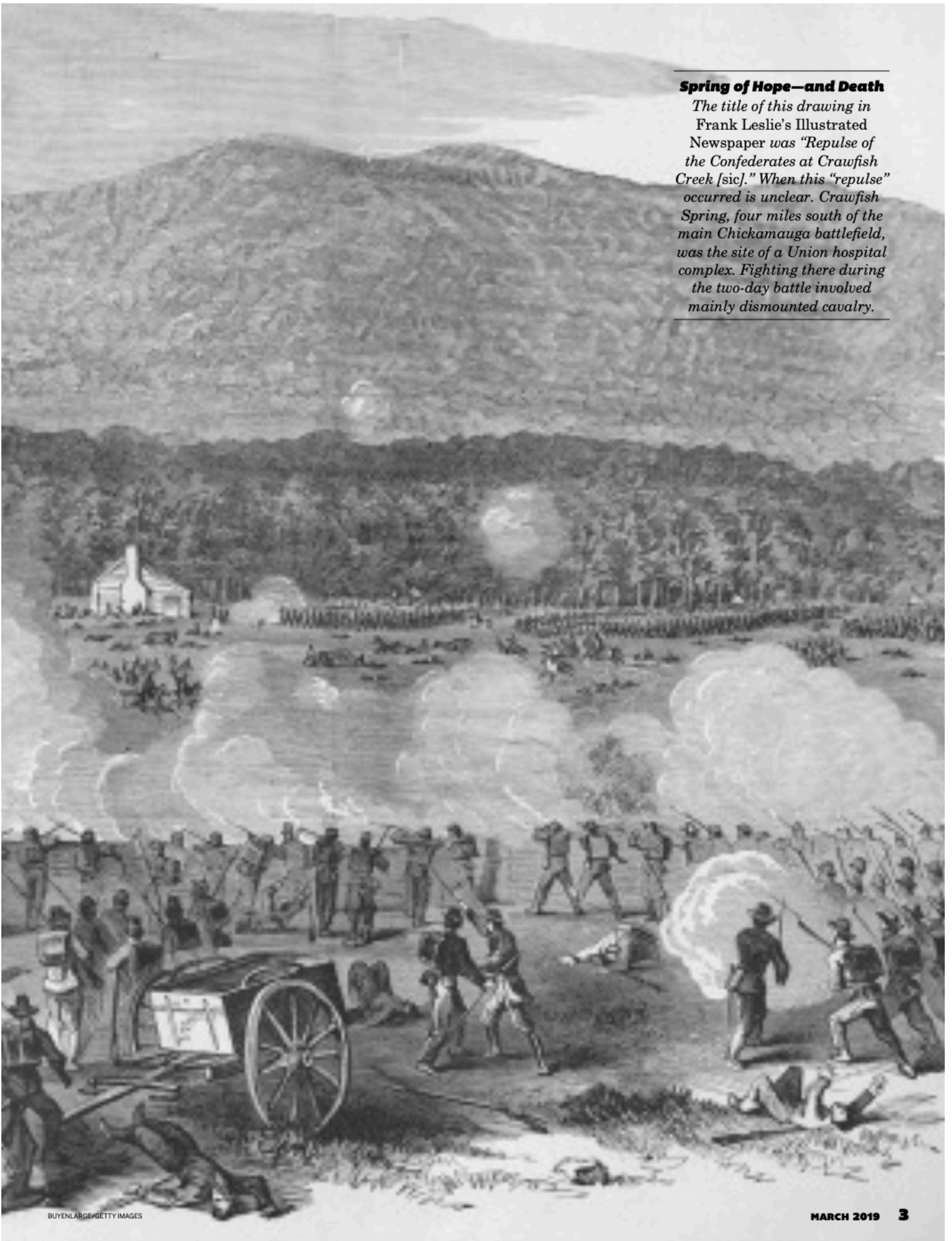
CANTANKEROUS BRAXTON BRAGG AND
HIS INSUBORDINATE SUBORDINATES
SNATCHED STRATEGIC DEFEAT FROM
THE JAWS OF VICTORY AT CHICKAMAUGA

By Edwin L. Kennedy Jr. and Jerry Morelock



Spring of Hope—and Death

The title of this drawing in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper was "Repulse of the Confederates at Crawfish Creek [sic]." When this "repulse" occurred is unclear. Crawfish Spring, four miles south of the main Chickamauga battlefield, was the site of a Union hospital complex. Fighting there during the two-day battle involved mainly dismounted cavalry.



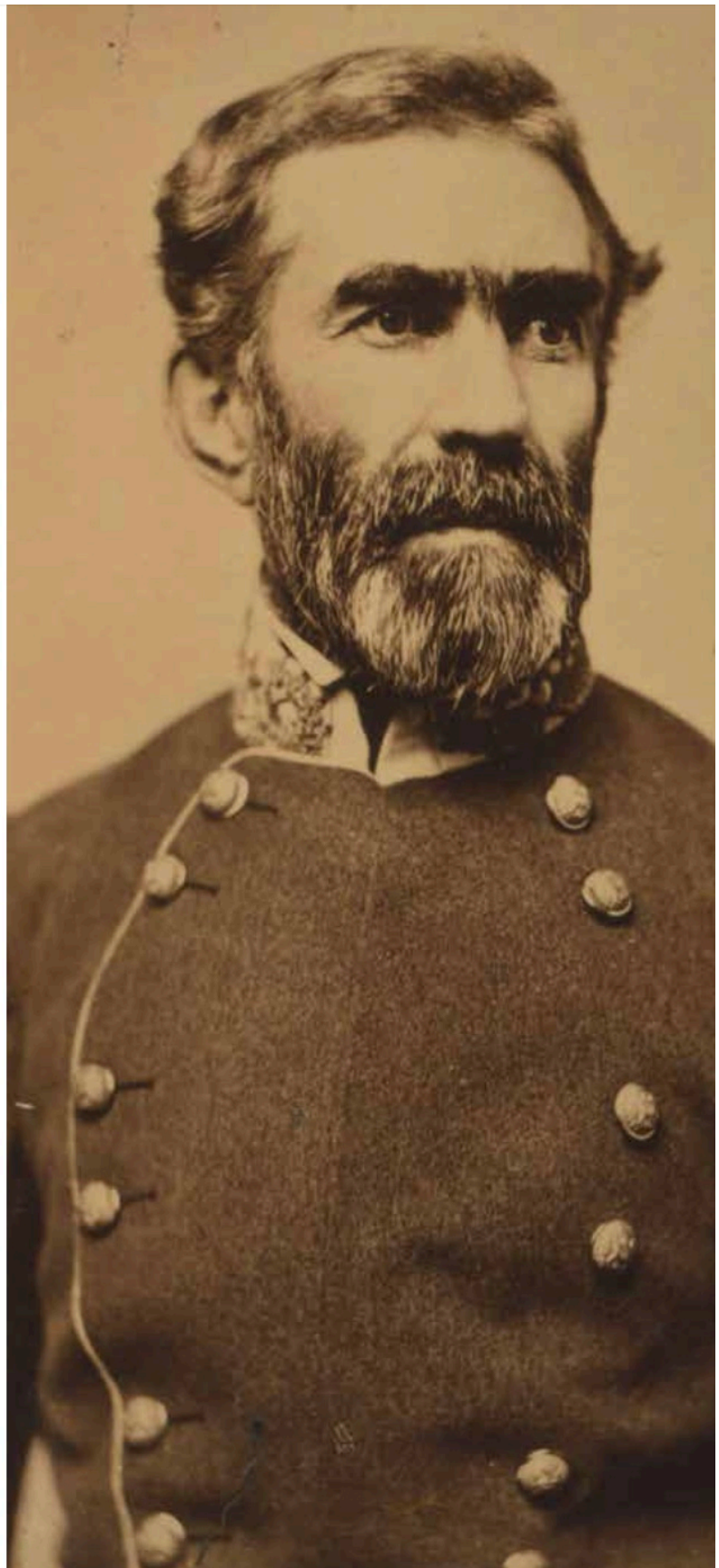
BUYENLARGE/GETTY IMAGES

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onfederate General Braxton Bragg was arguably the Civil War's most hated commander. Long afflicted by painful rheumatism, chronic stomach ailments, and severe migraines that helped fuel his unpleasant disposition, Bragg was short-tempered, aggressively argumentative, publicly critical of superiors, quick to berate subordinates, and exercised a strict-disciplinarian command style that alienated the Civil War's mostly volunteer soldiers. He generally was obnoxious to everyone, in fact. Even President Jefferson Davis, who gave him command of the principal field army in the war's Western Theater, didn't much like Bragg—and, perhaps more important, neither did Bragg's senior subordinates. Tellingly, in the wake of the Confederates' hard-won tactical victory at the Battle of Chickamauga on September 19-20, 1863, Bragg's major subordinates petitioned Davis to relieve their despised leader of his command. One of those subordinates—the South's brilliant, fiery “Wizard of the Saddle,” Nathan Bedford Forrest—reportedly even threatened to kill Bragg! ¶ Yet it is a military maxim that subordinates, whether they love or despise their commander, must do one all-important thing: promptly carry out legal orders. At Chickamauga, Bragg's senior subordinates ignored this basic leadership precept, thereby helping turn a much-needed tactical victory into a strategic disaster for the South when two months later, nearby Chattanooga, Tenn., was transformed from a starving, besieged Union enclave into the vital launching pad for Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's 1864 Atlanta Campaign and devastating March to the Sea. ¶ Bragg's principal subordinates—his army's “wing,” corps, and division commanders—must share responsibility with him for arguably losing the war in the West. Among those contributing to Bragg's strategic defeat (each of them to a greater or lesser degree) were: Lt. Gens. Leonidas Polk, Daniel Harvey Hill, and James Longstreet; as well as Maj. Gens. Simon Bolivar Buckner, Thomas C. Hindman, John Bell Hood, Alexander P. Stewart, W.H.T. Walker, and Joseph Wheeler. Although later historians tend to place full burden for strategic defeat on the easiest target, the much-despised Bragg—another military tenet, of course, is that the commander is ultimately responsible for all his unit does or fails to do—several of his subordinates' actions reveal that blame should not be borne solely by the Confederacy's most hated commander.

4 AMERICA'S CIVIL WAR



Elite Company

Braxton Bragg, only 16 when he entered West Point, graduated fifth in the reputable Class of 1837. Fellow cadets included future Civil War generals Joe Hooker, John Pemberton, John Sedgwick, and Jubal Early.

Opposite: General Albert Sidney Johnston rallies the 9th Arkansas at Shiloh, where Bragg served as a corps commander.

Born March 22, 1817, in Warrenton, N.C., the beetle-browed Braxton Bragg—who by 1863 sported large patches of gray in his dark hair and beard—had admirably finished fifth in his 50-member West Point Class of 1837. Classmates included Union Generals William H. French, John Sedgwick, and “Fighting Joe” Hooker, and Confederate Generals Jubal Early, John C. Pemberton, and W.H.T. Walker (as well as class dropouts Lewis A. Armistead and St. John R. Liddell).

Like many West Pointers, Bragg excelled during the 1846-48 Mexican War, winning three brevet promotions (no U.S. officer won more). Notably Bragg, 29 at the time, received well-deserved laurels as an artillery battery commander at the crucial 1847 Battle of Buena Vista. During that battle, Maj. Gen. Zachary Taylor famously exhorted Bragg to repel a dangerous Mexican assault by giving the enemy “a little more grape[shot], Captain Bragg!”—more likely, Taylor ordered, “Double-shot your guns [with anti-personnel canister], and give ‘em Hell!” Nevertheless, Bragg’s cannons turned a potentially disastrous defeat into a resounding victory, making him a national hero (he would be individually honored in New York, Washington, and New Orleans).

Following the Mexican War, Captain (Brevet Lt. Col.) Bragg endured routine duty at isolated frontier garrisons until, effective January 1856, he resigned from the Army. Not

DURING THE MEXICAN WAR, BRAGG WON THREE BREVET PROMOTIONS AND RECEIVED WELL-DESERVED LAURELS AFTER THE BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA.

quite 40, Bragg settled upon a slave-worked Louisiana sugar plantation, while also serving as a state militia colonel. After Louisiana seceded on January 26, 1861, Bragg (who opposed secession) was appointed by Governor Thomas O. Moore as a major general and commander of Louisiana’s military forces until March when he accepted a Confederate Army brigadier general’s commission. After training troops in Pensacola, Fla., and southern Alabama, Bragg was promoted to major general in September. Sent to the Western Theater in 1862, he creditably led a corps under General Albert Sidney Johnston at the April 6-7 Battle of Shiloh, was promoted to full general (effective April 6), and on June 17 given command of the Western Department (including the Army of Mississippi—renamed the Army of Tennessee in November).



OPPOSITE PAGE: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS; THIS PAGE: TROJANI, DON (B.1949) /PRIVATE COLLECTION /BRIDGEMAN IMAGES



'Old Rosy'
Union Maj. Gen. William Rosecrans (above) pulled out a victory at the December 31, 1862–January 3, 1863 Battle of Stones River (above right) when Braxton Bragg hesitated capitalizing on his army's successes and finally ordered a retreat.



Prior to the Battle of Chickamauga, Bragg led his army in two battles whose longterm outcomes revealed his and his principal subordinates' inability to turn tactical victories (or near-run "draws") into strategic success. After winning a narrow tactical victory over Union Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio at the October 8, 1862, Battle of Perryville in the key border state of Kentucky, Bragg withdrew all his forces to Tennessee, handing Buell a crucial strategic win. In what became an ominous pattern, several of Bragg's subordinates severely criticized his leadership, prompting Davis to summon him to Richmond to explain his actions, though ultimately retaining Bragg in command.

Bragg repeated his disappointing performance at the 1862-63 Battle of Stones River (Murfreesboro, Tenn.) against Union Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland—a tactically inconclusive draw that again found Bragg retreating. As at Perryville, Bragg was severely criticized by several subordinates in Stones River's wake, notably Lt. Gens. Polk and William Hardee, and Maj. Gens. John C. Breckinridge and Benjamin F. Cheatham. Polk petitioned Davis, a fellow West Pointer from the late 1820s, to remove Bragg. Davis reportedly wanted Joe Johnston to replace him, only to have Johnston decline. Hardee was sent away (missing Chickamauga), but Breckinridge, Cheatham, and especially Polk remained thorns in Bragg's side.

Not only did Bragg abandon Stones River to Rosecrans, he unaccountably left Union forces unmolested for six months, giving them time

to rest, reorganize, and resupply. When "Old Rosy" finally moved, he befuddled Bragg's off-balanced army during the stunning Tullahoma Campaign (June 24–July 3, 1863). By rapidly outmaneuvering Bragg's forces, Rosecrans suddenly had the Army of the Cumberland at Chattanooga's gates. Rosecrans' brilliant display of maneuver, flanking marches, and feints and deceptions quickly propelled his army 100 miles forward from Murfreesboro to Chattanooga. Caught off-guard, Bragg retreated into northern Georgia and Alabama. Moreover, Rosecrans' army was not the only Union force Bragg faced—Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's Army of the Ohio, then forming to threaten Knoxville and eastern Tennessee, forced Bragg to guess how best to meet the threats.

Bragg retreated south of the swift-flowing Tennessee River, which at places was more than a half-mile wide, thereby evacuating the campaign's strategic prize, Chattanooga, when Rosecrans' army managed to surge across the river uncontested. Eventually, Bragg concentrated his army near LaFayette, Ga.—30 miles south of Chattanooga. By early September, Rosecrans had maneuvered the enemy army out of Tennessee and, importantly, out of Chattanooga (though Buckner still had troops facing Burnside at Knoxville).

Yet Rosecrans made a potentially fatal error—sending his three corps across the rugged mountains west of Chattanooga over three widely separated roads. By September 10, those corps were spread out more than 40 miles southwest of Chattanooga, none within supporting distance of the other. Prompt coun-

FROM LEFT: MELISSA A. WINN COLLECTION; LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

terattacks by Bragg's army certainly could have defeated Rosecrans' force in detail.

Recognizing Rosecrans' predicament, the suddenly energized Bragg seized a "golden opportunity" on September 10 by ordering a coordinated attack on Rosecrans' most exposed unit: Maj. Gen. James Negley's 4,600-man division of Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas' centrally positioned 14th Corps (with Maj. Gen. Alexander M. McCook's 20th Corps to the south and Maj. Gen. Thomas L. Crittenden's 21st Corps north near Chattanooga). A half-day's march from support, Negley sat dangerously exposed at Davis' Crossroads.

Bragg ordered a two-division assault to annihilate Negley, with Maj. Gen. Thomas C. Hindman's Division (Polk's Corps) leading the attack, supported by Maj. Gen. Patrick Cleburne's Division (Hill's Corps). Attacking Negley from flank and front should have pushed the Union commander into a fatal cul-de-sac, but despite Bragg's explicit orders, nothing happened. Hill prevaricated, claiming Cleburne was ill and his approach road blocked by felled trees. Bragg ordered two divisions from Buckner's Corps to attack, but they took hours moving into position. Meanwhile, Hindman, not pressed by Polk to attack, got cold feet when Cleburne failed to appear. When an exasperated Bragg finally compelled his recalcitrant subordinates to move, Negley had been reinforced and had safely withdrawn from destruction.

Albeit belatedly, Negley's near-miss had alerted Rosecrans to the danger his widely spread corps faced. To concentrate his men, Rosecrans frantically ordered Thomas' and McCook's corps to rush northeast and Crittenden's southwest. Thus, Bragg's best chance to destroy Rosecrans was needlessly thrown away by his insubordinate subordinates.

As Rosecrans hurried to concentrate his

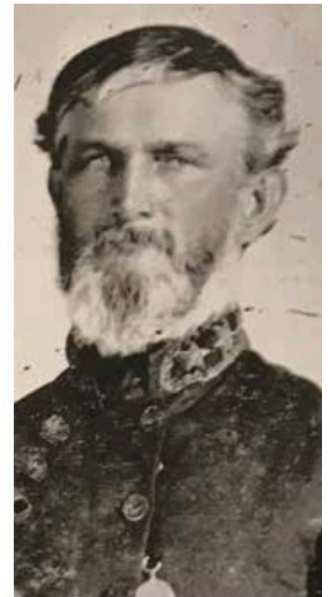
still-vulnerable corps southwest of Chattanooga, he gave Bragg another golden opportunity to strike a potentially fatal blow which, if successful, would regain control of all-important Chattanooga. At dawn on September 13, Bragg ordered Polk to lead a two-corps attack (his own and Walker's Corps) to destroy Crittenden's 21st Corps as Crittenden's exposed flank passed along Bragg's army's front. Once again, nothing happened. Hours after ordering Polk to attack, but hearing no battle sounds, an incensed Bragg rode to Polk's headquarters, discovering neither Polk nor Walker had made any attack preparations. By then it was too late. Crittenden's corps had safely passed.

Importantly, these failed efforts to seize golden opportunities reveal Bragg's recalcitrant subordinates had effectively rendered his hold on army command tenuous, at best.

The disputatious and authoritarian Bragg on September 15 uncharacteristically held a council of war with his principal subordinates. That conference accomplished two vital things. First, Bragg established the army's overall tactical plan (certainly the proper one) for defeating Rosecrans—cut his army off from Chattanooga, drive it southwest, and annihilate it. Second, Bragg secured the public concurrence of all his senior commanders, making it difficult for them to justify future recalcitrance, delay, or disobedience of his orders. Whether this second accomplishment was Bragg's principal intention cannot be known, but the council of war clearly had that effect (as Bragg's post-Chickamauga command house-cleaning would certainly show).

The Confederates' tactical victory at Chickamauga was due more to the valor of individual soldiers (and to Rosecrans' egregious mistake on September 20) than to Bragg's tactical brilliance. Indeed, the inability to get his wing, corps, and division commanders (principally Polk, but significantly others as well) to obey his orders promptly continued throughout the main battle. In fact, Bragg's subordinates undermined and frustrated his overall tactical plan, resulting in one of the war's most flawed "victories."

On September 18, combat erupted as the two armies faced off along both sides of the underbrush-choked West Chickamauga Creek. Bragg's army finally made multiple crossings of the creek in the face of determined resistance by Union units. Colonel John T. Wilder's mounted infantry "Lightning Brigade," armed with the excellent Spencer seven-shot repeat-



'The Fighting Bishop'

Bragg and Maj. Gen. Leonidas Polk (above) never saw eye to eye, but Polk was always popular with his troops and fellow generals. One soldier mourned his death at Marietta, Ga., in June 1864, writing "Second to Stonewall Jackson, his loss was the greatest the South ever sustained."

**BRAGG'S
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THE VALENTINE MUSEUM, RICHMOND

**BRAGG'S FAILURE TO
ACHIEVE A DECISIVE
BREAKTHROUGH
ON SEPTEMBER 19
WAS INEVITABLY
EXACERBATED BY HIS
FLAWED ORGANIZATION.**

ing rifles, turned back an attempt by Walker's Corps to cross at Alexander's Bridge. After a day of mostly inconclusive fighting, characterized by both sides fumbling in the dense woods searching for the other's flanks, neither side had gained much advantage, although Bragg did succeed in getting his army onto the creek's west side.

Bragg's plan for September 19 supported his tactically sound overall plan of flanking Rosecrans on the north (the Union left) and pushing him southwest away from Chattanooga. But Bragg had badly misjudged the Union army's northernmost positions, as Thomas' units already had reinforced Crittenden, seizing good defensive terrain. That resulted in locally fierce attacks that by sundown had pushed Union forces west, though they still held along a strong, generally north-south line about a mile west of the creek.

Cleburne's Division attacked shortly after sundown, gaining some ground. But no major Confederate breakthrough had been achieved.

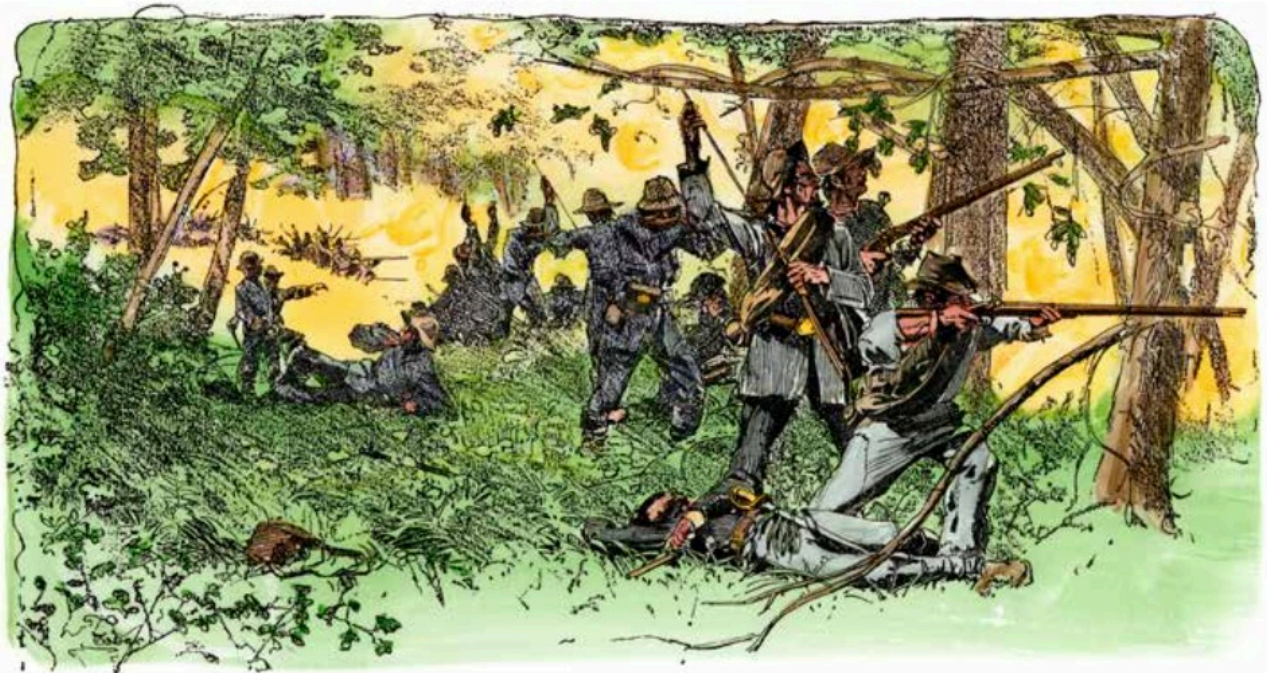
Combat ended that night in a standoff. Notably, Confederate attacks were piecemeal and none concentrated sufficient combat power to break Rosecrans' line.

Bragg's failure to concentrate and achieve a decisive breakthrough on September 19 was not caused simply by his misjudgment of the strength and position of Rosecrans' left flank; instead, it was inevitably exacerbated by his flawed organization. Bragg began that day's battle with eight subordinate corps and reserve units reporting directly to him—an impossibly large span of control to reasonably expect prompt execution, particularly given his subordinates' demonstrated reluctance to obey. Today, only three to five subordinate units are considered the maximum number any commander—regardless of competence—can effectively control (and today's orders are “instantly” transmitted via radio, computers, or electronics—whereas Bragg relied on junior officer couriers on horseback, hand-carrying written orders that frequently went astray, were misinterpreted, or were simply ignored by his subordinates).

Bragg, in an attempt to rectify this span of control problem, reorganized his army into two “wings” (Polk commanding the Right Wing, Longstreet the Left). Yet he failed to ensure that all of his corps commanders knew the changed command structure—for example, Hill belatedly learned he was now a subordinate in Polk's Right Wing at 6 a.m. on September 20, and Longstreet discovered he was Left

Well-Laid Plans

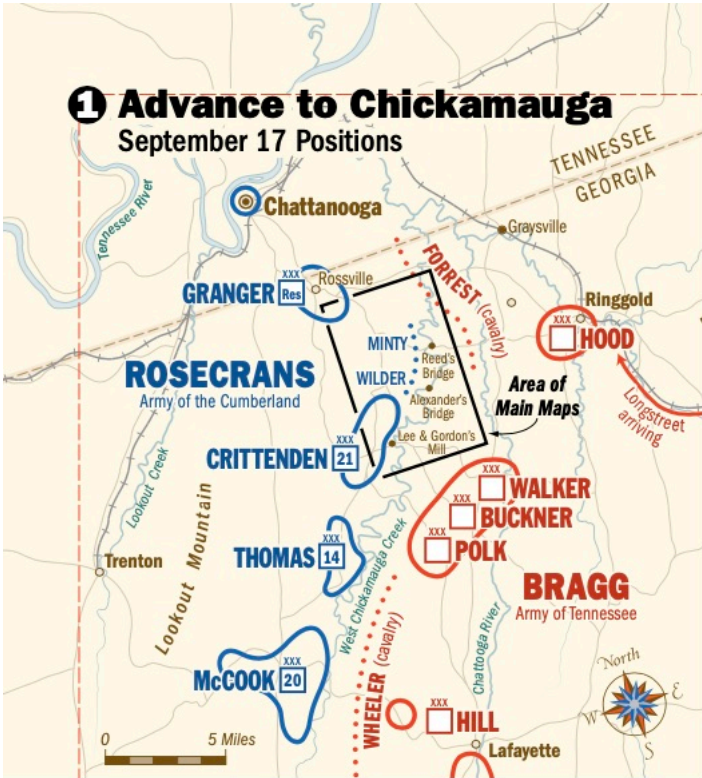
In the days leading up to the battle, Bragg tried to move his army between Rosecrans and Chattanooga, hoping to force the Federals to the southwest, where they could be attacked and destroyed. On September 18, the Rebels worked to push across West Chickamauga Creek at several points, resulting in sporadic fighting. The main battle broke out the following day. Below: Bragg's men fire away from a treeline during the battle.



NORTH WIND PICTURE ARCHIVE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

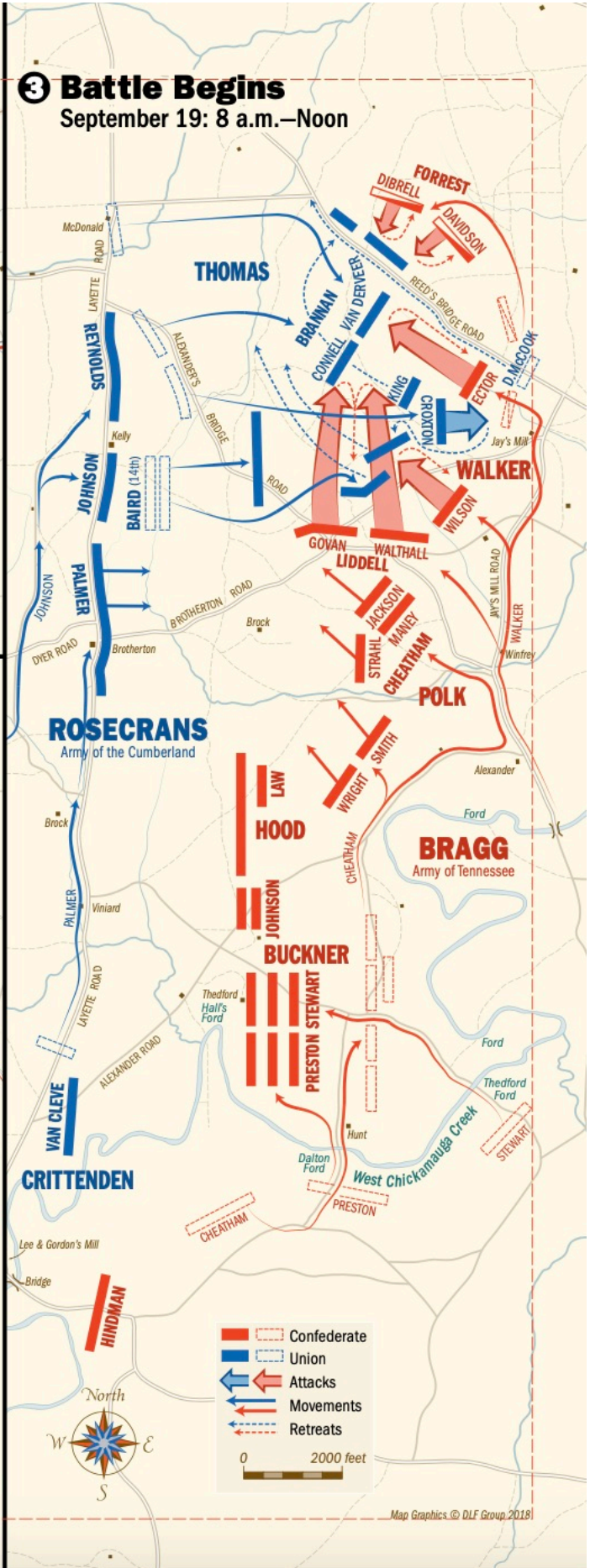
1 Advance to Chickamauga

September 17 Positions



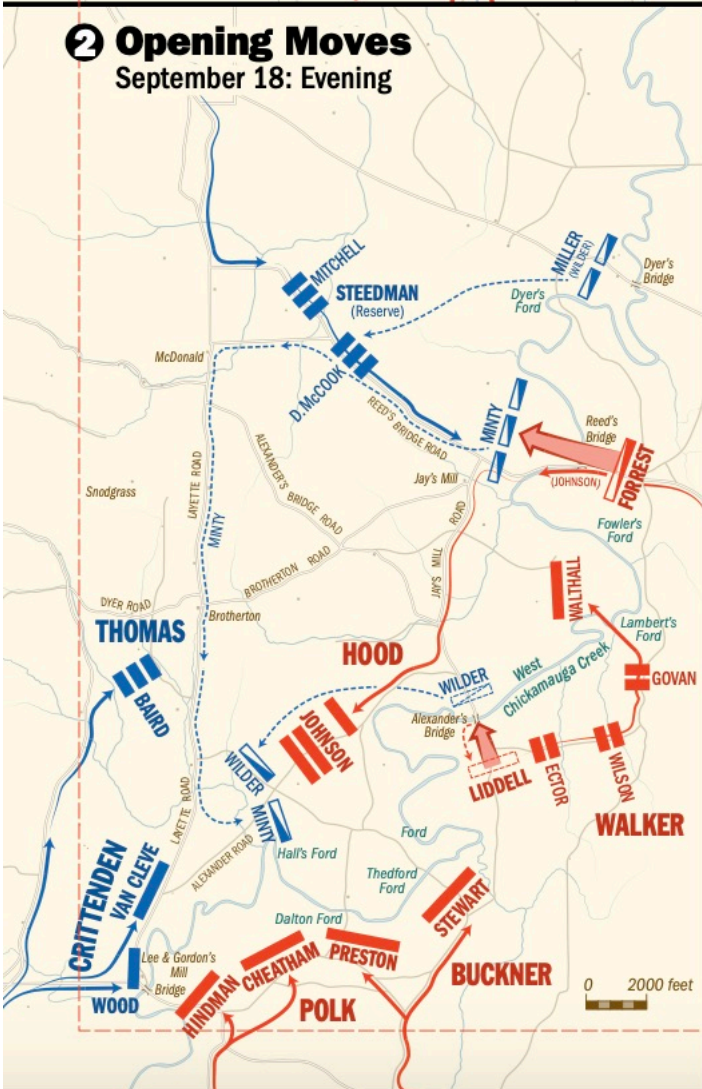
3 Battle Begins

September 19: 8 a.m.—Noon



2 Opening Moves

September 18: Evening



The Rout Is On

The Confederates kept Rosecrans' army on its heels throughout the afternoon fighting September 19 (Map 4) and used attacks by Generals Polk and Longstreet the next morning (Map 5) to bring Bragg to the brink of a complete rout. Maj. Gen. George Thomas' stand on Horseshoe Ridge (Map 6) gave the Federals enough time to allow many of Rosecrans' frantically retreating forces to reach safety in Chattanooga to the north.

Wing commander only upon his 11 p.m. arrival at Chickamauga on September 19. Although Bragg theoretically fixed his span of control problem, he failed to implement it properly. Adding another command layer inevitably introduced more delays in transmitting his orders to the divisions executing them.

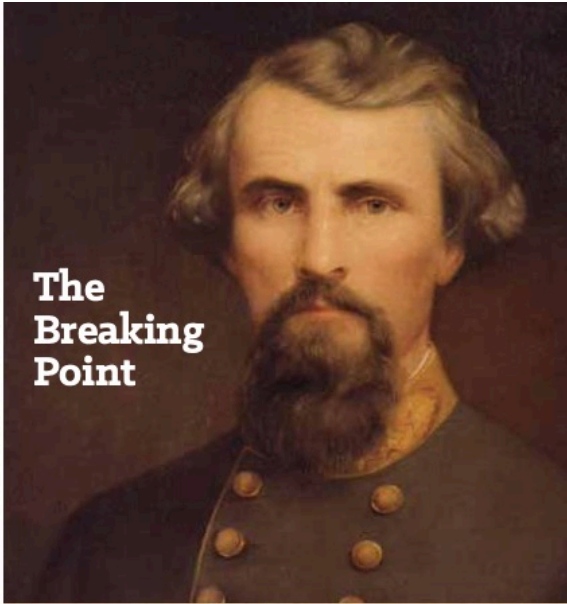
Fate, however, intervened to diminish Bragg's command failures.

Bragg's plan to win the battle on September 20 followed his tactically sound plan to push Rosecrans southwest and away from Chattanooga. He correctly ordered a strong daybreak attack on the Union left by Polk's Right Wing in which eight divisions were to step off en echelon. An attack by Longstreet's Left Wing was to follow. Understandably, Longstreet spent hours the morning of September 20 familiarizing himself with the battlefield, attempting to place his divisions in proper order, and preparing his units to attack. Yet Polk once again frustrated Bragg's intent by unaccountably delaying the Right Wing's attack. In fact, when Bragg rode to Polk's headquarters in late morning to find out why the attack had not been launched at dawn, as ordered, he found Polk calmly eating breakfast. With Longstreet still sorting out his own units, nothing in Bragg's plan was going right. That would change about 11 a.m.

Perceiving a dangerous—though nonexistent—"gap" in his front line, Rosecrans jumped the chain of command and directly ordered Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Wood of Crittenden's 21st Corps to withdraw his division from the front line and immediately reposition it farther north. Wood realized the order was a mistake, but complied—with disastrous consequences.

Finally prepared to attack, 10,000 men—led by Brig. Gen. Bushrod Johnson's Provisional Division, of Hood's Corps in Longstreet's Left Wing—advanced across the Brotherton Farm and hit the gap in the Union line just vacated by Wood's division. In that instant, Rosecrans lost the Battle of Chickamauga but not, as it turned out, the strategic prize of Chattanooga.

DESPITE POLK'S FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT ATTACK ORDERS, BRAGG'S ARMY HAD WON A STUNNING TACTICAL VICTORY.



The Breaking Point

None of Braxton Bragg's poor subordinate relations matched the one he had with the fiery Nathan Bedford Forrest. In the days or weeks after Chickamauga—when exactly has not been substantiated—Forrest reportedly confronted Bragg, angry that Bragg had halted pursuit of the beaten Federals at the end of the battle.

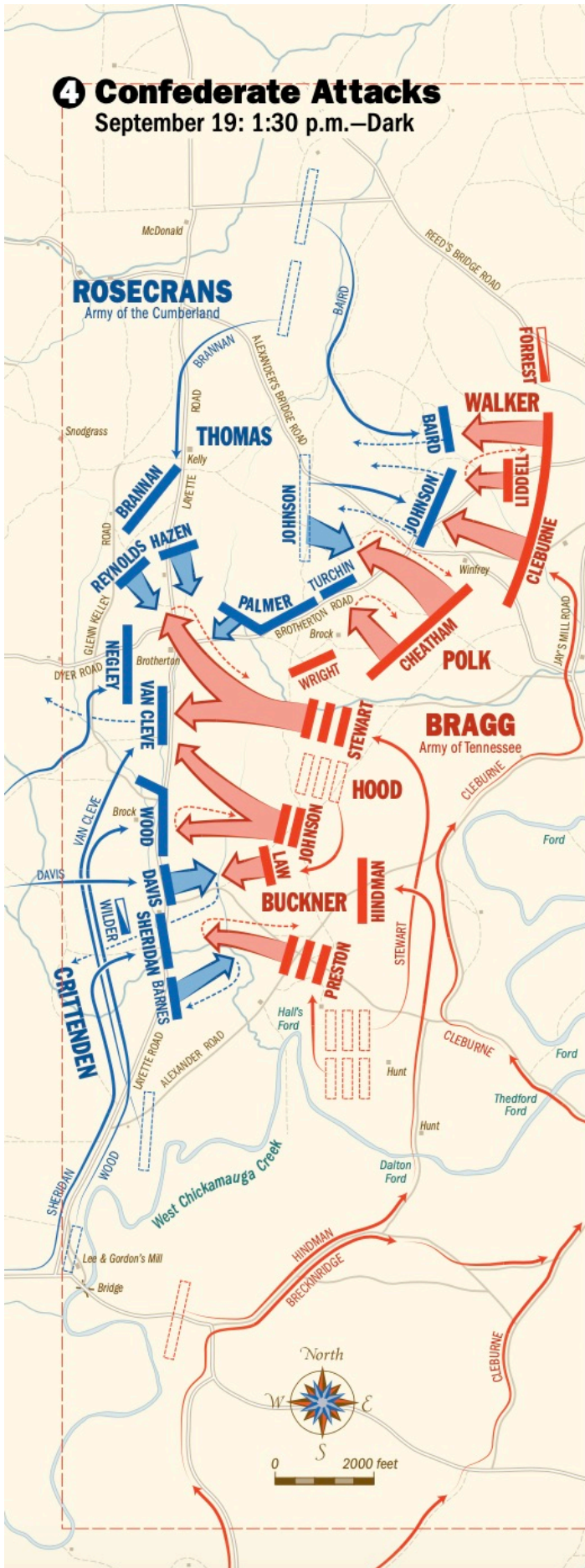
According to a possibly apocryphal story by regimental surgeon J.B. Cowan, Forrest snarled, "You...are a coward...You may as well not issue any orders to me, for I will not obey them....If you ever again try to interfere with me or cross my path it will be at the peril of your life."

Johnson's troops, followed closely by those of two other divisions, poured through the gap, fatally collapsing the Union line and nearly overrunning Rosecrans' headquarters. Fully one-third of Rosecrans' army fled toward Chattanooga as Bragg's Confederates swept them along in disarray. Yet letting the Yankees flee toward Chattanooga was the last thing Bragg wanted. Instead of cutting off Rosecrans' army from the strategic city and driving it to the southwest and utter destruction, Polk, by failing to attack vigorously on the north, produced the opposite result. Longstreet's dramatic breakthrough merely pushed Rosecrans' defeated army north to the safety of Chattanooga.

Despite Polk's failure to implement attack orders on the right flank, Bragg's army had won a stunning tactical victory. But again, due to Polk's abysmal failure, the victory proved incomplete as Thomas rallied his corps and other Union units in a last stand on Snodgrass Hill/Horseshoe Ridge that prevented the annihilation of the Federal army. Perhaps convinced that Johnson's breakthrough had

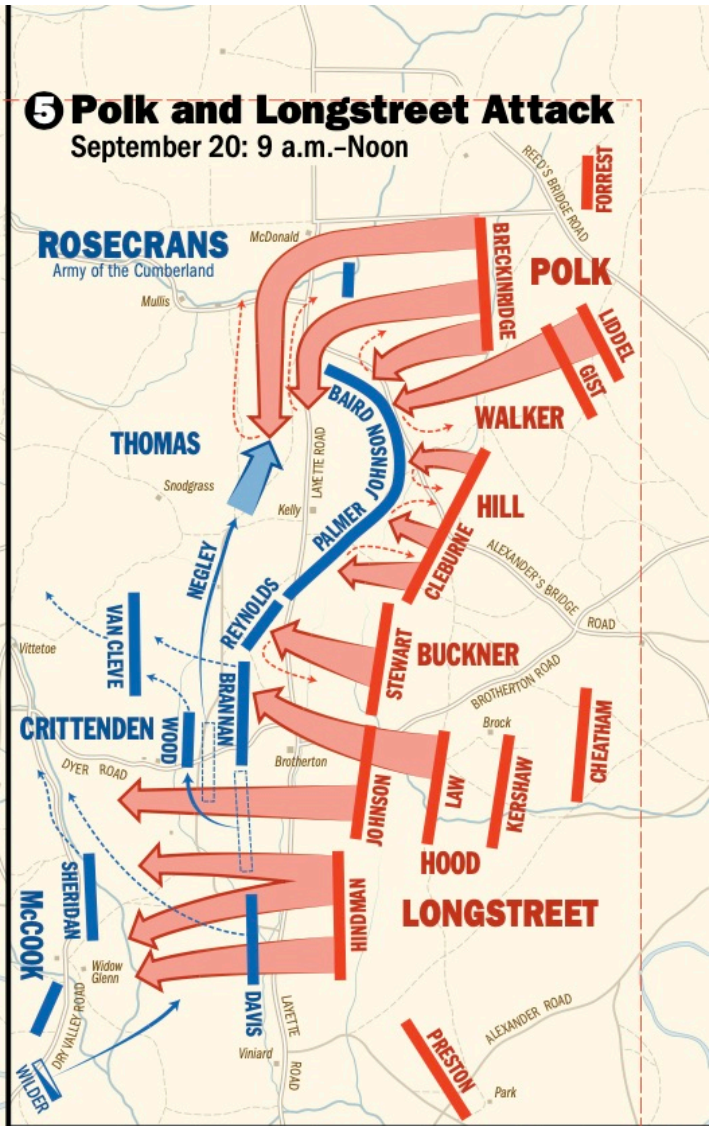
4 Confederate Attacks

September 19: 1:30 p.m.—Dark



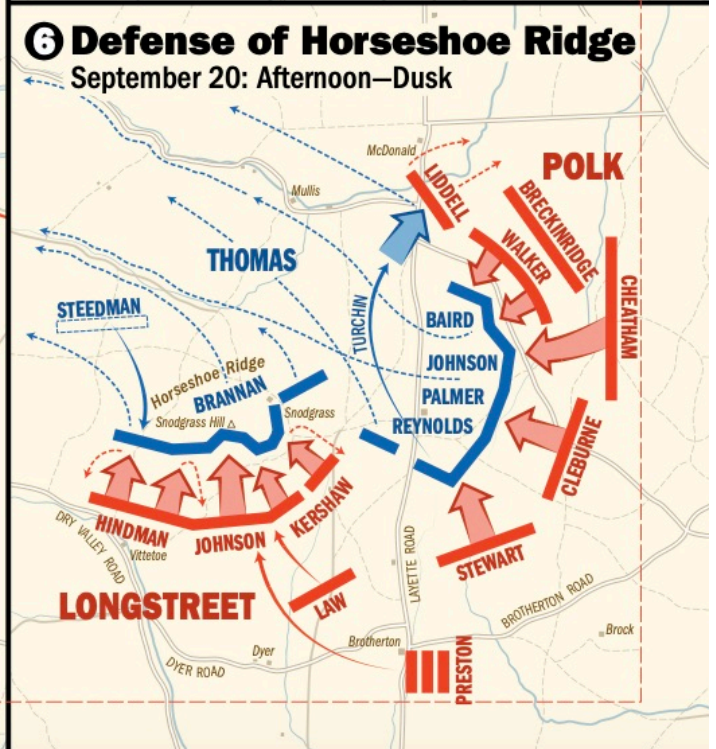
5 Polk and Longstreet Attack

September 20: 9 a.m.—Noon



6 Defense of Horseshoe Ridge

September 20: Afternoon—Dusk





Flash Point

Lee & Gordon's Mills was one of three key crossing points of West Chickamauga Creek. Rosecrans had Robert Mitchell's cavalry posted there on September 18 as the Rebels scouted potential openings in the Union defenses.

secured victory, Longstreet did not strongly press his advantage to destroy Thomas' Snodgrass Hill defense, leaving this significant roadblock in position.

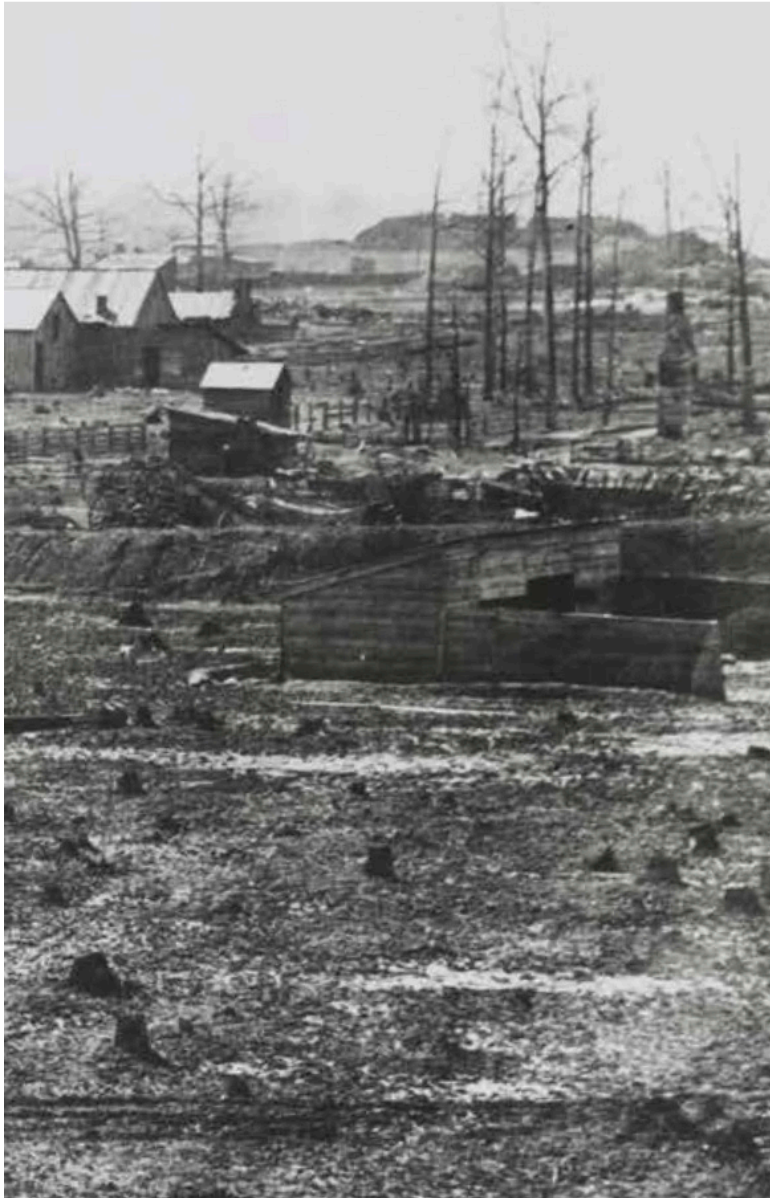
Seething that his overall plan was coming apart, Bragg summoned Longstreet to his headquarters and demanded action while also exclaiming in frustration at Polk's continued incompetence: "There is not a man in the right wing who has any fight in him!" Longstreet, found calmly eating a lunch of yams and bacon, was taken aback and belatedly turned his attention to Thomas' stubborn defense.

Longstreet reported launching 25 separate assaults on Thomas' Snodgrass Hill defenses on

September 20. Thomas' stand, which famously earned him the nickname "Rock of Chickamauga," saved Chattanooga for the Union. It allowed Rosecrans time to rally his defeated army inside the city's defenses while helping dissuade Bragg from launching a vigorous pursuit that could have cut off the Federals before they passed safely into the city. Had Polk not disobeyed Bragg's orders by unaccountably delaying his September 20 attack, Thomas' defense would never have materialized.

Only Nathan Bedford Forrest seemed eager to press Rosecrans' fleeing army and annihilate it, realizing that any tactical victory at Chickamauga was meaningless for Confederate for-

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tunes if Chattanooga remained in Union hands. After his cavalymen fought brilliantly as dismounted infantry on Bragg's northern flank, Forrest launched a vigorous pursuit, capturing hundreds of fleeing Federals while attempting to cut off Rosecrans' retreat. But Bragg, as he had done with other commanders at Perryville and at Stones River, proved unwilling to support Forrest. Claiming that the Army of Tennessee was "exhausted" and "lacked wagons and transport," Bragg exerted no effort to block the Union withdrawal (eliciting the disgusted Forrest's exclamation, "What does [Bragg] fight battles for?").

Frustrated time and again by his recalcitrant subordinates in his effort to win a decisive victory at Chickamauga—but himself unwilling to launch a spirited pursuit

**FRUSTRATED TIME
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CHATTANOOGA.**

once Rosecrans' army began to flee—Bragg settled for besieging Chattanooga. The command chaos plaguing the Army of Tennessee during the Chickamauga Campaign continued. On September 29, Bragg dismissed both Polk and Hindman. Next, on October 4, a dozen of his senior subordinates signed a letter to Davis (likely authored by Buckner) demanding Bragg's relief (Longstreet similarly wrote Secretary of War James Seddon). Davis arrived October 9 at army headquarters, interviewed Bragg's disgruntled subordinates, and again backed Bragg. Davis' support prompted Bragg to relieve three more subordinates who had signed the letter: Hill (effectively demoting him to major general) and both Walker and Buckner (each relegated to division command). Meanwhile, Longstreet and his corps departed for Knoxville to face Ambrose Burnside's Union army, and Forrest, at his own request, transferred to Mississippi.

Bragg's army command tenure finally ended after the Chattanooga debacle. On December 1, he asked to be relieved and this time his request was accepted. Bragg went east for the war's remainder, first as Davis'

military adviser (Bragg, predictably, quarreled with senior CSA officials) and later leading division-sized units during the Carolinas Campaign. After the war, Bragg found minor civilian success, briefly holding jobs in Louisiana, Alabama, and Texas but, inevitably, arguing with his bosses before moving on. On September 27, 1876, Bragg died, probably of a stroke, in Galveston, Texas. He was 59 years old. 🐼

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Comprehending Bragg



By Jack Trammell

Historians and medical researchers usually hesitate to diagnose historical figures with disabilities and disorders post hoc, but contemporary understanding of human behavior can actually inform our analysis of various Civil War successes and failures. Case in point: Braxton Bragg. By many accounts, Bragg has been recognized—by his contemporaries and ours—as possessing extraordinary intelligence, a superior memory, and a talent for drilling and organizing his men, yet almost all of the battles in which he engaged during the war ended in defeat, save for Chickamauga. Indeed, Bragg is often considered among the worst generals of the Civil War, even dubbed “the most hated man of the Confederacy” by his biographer

Earl Hess. It is possible to reconcile Bragg’s gifts with his failures, if we consider, as some have speculated, that Bragg may have been on what we know today as the autism spectrum.

The American Psychological Association definition of autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, in its simplest form describes it as a neuro-cognitive condition that “affects behavior, communication, and social functioning.” In fact, a list of common behaviors associated with ASD almost reads like a short biography of Bragg: difficulty with peer relationships; difficulty expressing emotions appropriately; failure to read body language and understand others; obsessive habits; inflexible adherence to routines; being prone to unexpected aggres-

KEVIN COLLECTOR/GETTY IMAGES

sion; and seeing everything in terms of black and white.

Some of the best-known anecdotes about Bragg seemingly illustrate these characteristics quite well. In his memoirs, Ulysses S. Grant recalls an episode from “the old army” in which Bragg, stationed at a post of several companies, each commanded by a field officer, was himself commanding one of the companies while also acting as post quartermaster and commissary officer.

“He was first lieutenant at the time, but his captain was detached on other duty. As commander of the company he made a requisition upon the quartermaster—himself—for something he wanted. As quartermaster he declined to fill the requisition, and endorsed on the back of it his reasons for so doing. As company commander he responded to this, urging that his requisition called for nothing but what he was entitled to, and that it was the duty of the quartermaster to fill it. As quartermaster he still persisted that he was right. In this condition of affairs Bragg referred the whole matter to the commanding officer of the post. The latter, when he saw the nature of the matter referred, exclaimed: ‘My God, Mr. Bragg, you have quarreled with every officer in the army, and now you are quarrelling with yourself!’”

Many historians have questioned whether this incident actually occurred, yet even if it is apocryphal, Grant added that the anecdote was “very characteristic of [Bragg’s] nature.” He was “thoroughly upright,” Grant wrote. “But he was possessed of an irascible temper, and he was naturally disputatious. A man of the highest moral character and the most correct habits, yet in the old army he was in frequent trouble. As a subordinate he was always on the lookout to catch his commanding officer infringing his prerogatives; as a post commander he was equally vigilant to detect the slightest neglect, even of the most trivial order.”

Another widely told anecdote supports the portrait of Bragg as obsessively rigid with military rules, even to absurdity. In this instance, during the Mexican War, he and his men were enduring an artillery barrage at Monterey when Bragg witnessed an American horse driver fall dead from his saddle. Bragg ordered his retreating men to halt, and ordered one of the other horsemen to dismount, turn around, and recover the dead man’s sword because it was public property that had been issued by the government. The horseman also took from the corpse a pocket knife, fearing that if he did not, Bragg would send him back for it.

Nearly every biographer has deemed Bragg “his own worst enemy” because of his lack of interpersonal skills, or his unusual obsession with organization and discipline. One of Bragg’s men, Samuel B. Church, admitted to placing a loaded and fused 12-pounder shell outside Bragg’s tent on August 26, 1847, attempting to kill him because he was such a strict disciplinarian. The explosion miraculously didn’t injure Bragg, which must have frustrated Church, because he tried again in October, only to fail again.

In his 1991 biography *Braxton Bragg and Confederate*

Defeat, Grady McWhiney noted that even at the United States Military Academy, Bragg “prided himself on being the ugliest man in the corps and expressed his opinions on all occasions and all subjects in a most tactless manner. This was his way; he would always be outspoken, never able to conceal or moderate his views. As a consequence, some cadets thought him uncouth, brusque, and rude.” This sort of social crudeness is emblematic of ASD individuals, likewise the poor personal relationships it breeds with others.

The inability to read or understand social cues, also a standard ASD attribute, is evident in Bragg’s handling of criticism from his commanders after his retreat from the Battle of Stones River (Murfreesboro) in January 1863—a move that drew sharp criticism from his subordinates, the press, and even the public. “Goaded by such denunciation,” McWhiney wrote, “Bragg decided to ask his subordinates what they really thought of his military ability.” According to McWhiney, on January 10, 1863, Bragg read to his staff an article from the *Chattanooga Rebel* opining that Bragg had “lost the confidence of his Army—that a change was necessary & that the retrograde movement from Murfreesboro was against the advice of his general officers.” Bragg asked his staff to consider the charges and informed them that if he “had lost the confidence of his Army...he would retire.” The staff met and did, in fact, conclude, to Bragg’s surprise, that he should ask to be relieved, which he did not.

A host of circumstances influenced Bragg’s campaign failures, and not least among them were his poor relationships with men at all levels of service in the Confederate Army. Indeed, uncooperative subordinates are often cited as contributing to Bragg’s defeats. Doubtless some of his commanders, such as Leonidas Polk and William Hardee, shared in the blame, but it’s possible to reexamine their response to Bragg in a new light if we consider him “on the spectrum” in current parlance.

Concluding that Bragg was on the spectrum does make sense. He was obviously quite intelligent; he was an effective administrator; he is even called a good soldier by many respectable contemporaries when you are able to dig into the less-biased records. There were no logical reasons for Bragg to fail in the ways he did given the advantages he should have had. Perhaps lack of charisma was actually impaired social functioning; his obsession with organization actually a desire to maintain comforting routines in response to disability; generals who criticized and quarreled with Bragg were perhaps responding to their own inability to understand him as much as to Bragg’s inability to communicate effectively and understand them. In other words, he was very likely on the spectrum, and we should consider reinterpreting his critics now since they had little idea with what they were dealing. Perhaps we do. 🐼

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