

OPPORTUNITIES LOST:
PRELUDE TO CHICKAMAUGA

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by
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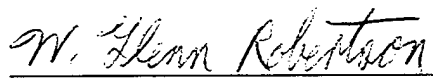
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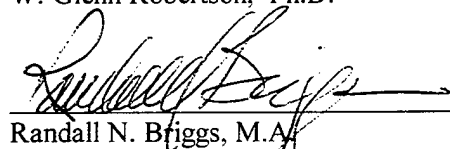
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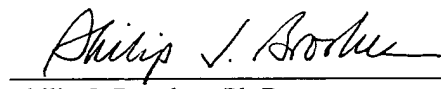
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ABSTRACT

OPPORTUNITIES LOST: PRELUDE TO CHICKAMAUGA by MAJ Mark A. Samson,
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This study investigates the history of the Confederate Army of Tennessee from formation under command of Braxton Bragg through the eve of Chickamauga. The specific question to be answered is whether the Army of Tennessee was presented opportunities to destroy the Union Army of the Cumberland prior to Chickamauga, and if so why they were not taken advantage of. Answering this question requires an examination of the history of the Army of Tennessee prior to September 1863, with emphasis on Braxton Bragg's personality and abilities.

Between September 9th and 10th 1863 Bragg had a concrete opportunity to destroy a large part of the Army of the Cumberland in McLemore's Cove, and over succeeding days he identified other favorable situations that might have led to successful attacks on isolated Union Corps. He was, however, unable to orchestrate a successful strike against the separated Federal units. A key contributor to the failures was the poor Confederate command climate that had developed in the Army of Tennessee over the preceding year. Bragg's Corps commanders and some Division commanders lacked confidence in Bragg's abilities. This led them to hesitate when prompt obedience was called for. Bragg himself grew frustrated by his inability to compel heartfelt cooperation from his principal subordinates and became unwilling to take bold risk when opportunity appeared.

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PREFACE

In the summer of 1863 the Confederacy was reeling from the loss of Vicksburg and the defeat at Gettysburg. Confederate President Davis decided that the best remaining hope for a military solution to the war lay with General Braxton Bragg's Army of the Tennessee and sent General Bragg reinforcements from the Army of Northern Virginia in hopes of ensuring a much needed victory. The Army of Tennessee was based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a principal southern rail hub and the gateway to Atlanta. Facing them across the Tennessee river was Union General Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland. Defeat of Bragg would open Georgia to the Union; southern victory would regain the initiative lost at Gettysburg and Vicksburg and perhaps return the Union to the defensive.

The Army of the Cumberland struck first. In August 1863 General Rosecrans maneuvered Bragg out of Chattanooga. Believing the Army of Tennessee to be fleeing south he launched an ill-conceived pursuit, dispersing the three Union Corps over fifty miles apart. Bragg's Army was not retreating, but was consolidating south of Chattanooga. As the three separated Union Corps emerged from mountain passes General Bragg was presented with an opportunity to defeat his enemy in detail. This was perhaps the Confederate Army's last great opportunity to deal a decisive blow to the Union in the West and turn the tide of the war. Bragg saw the opportunity and on 9 September 1863 issued orders to attack. The attack did not happen. Again on 12 September Bragg issued attack orders, and again it was not done.

General Bragg had recognized the opportunity, was ideally positioned with superior forces, twice issued orders for attack, and twice nothing happened. As a consequence General Rosecrans was given time to safely consolidate the Army of the Cumberland, and what should have been a

strategic masterstroke for the south instead became the inconclusive bloodbath of Chickamauga.

This thesis will explore why General Bragg's Army failed to take advantage of the divided Union Army of the Cumberland prior to the Battle of Chickamauga. The answers will prove relevant to the leaders of today's army. Now as then, victory depends on a commander's ability to transform his personal vision into the coordinated, concerted action of thousands. Lessons learned from Bragg's failures can assist today's commander turn his vision into victory. This thesis will also provide useful background information for those studying the battle of Chickamauga.

This thesis examines General Bragg's history in the Army of Tennessee and covers in detail the Chattanooga campaign from Rosecrans' initial movements in August 1863 through 13 September 1863. The battle of Chickamauga is not covered, and Union forces are only examined to the extent necessary to answer the thesis question.

Sources include published histories of the Civil War, the Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, and unpublished documents in the Command and General Staff College CSI department files.

CHAPTER 1

THE ROAD TO CHATTANOOGA

Strategic Overview: Summer 1863

As June 1863 began, the Confederacy was at its height of success and power. In the east General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia rested after its May victory over the Army of the Potomac and prepared for an invasion of the North. Along the Mississippi Lieutenant General John Pemberton's forces continued to thwart all of Union Major General U.S. Grant's attempts to take the river fortress of Vicksburg. In Tennessee General Bragg still controlled the vital rail town of Chattanooga. By August all fortune had deserted the Confederacy; the Confederate's only remaining hope of offensive victory over the Union was General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee.

War in the East

After his success at Chancellorsville in May 1863, General Robert E. Lee saw two clear courses of action in the East. He could take the offense with an invasion of the north or maintain his defensive positions and protect Richmond. The fruits of a successful invasion were alluring: encouragement to the northerners who desired to end the war on terms, possible recognition of the Confederacy by France and Great Britain, and bountiful provisions, courtesy of Pennsylvania farmers, for southern men and horses grown thin by three years of war. General Lee decided on invasion and in mid-May submitted his plan to Richmond for approval. Approval from President Davis and his cabinet was not immediate. Some saw the greatest threat in the West and recommended a concentration of forces against General Grant's forces in support of Vicksburg.

Under the force of Lee's personality these glimmerings of a national military strategy were set aside for the time being, and Lee was given permission to advance north. By 10 June 1863 the Army of Northern Virginia was moving towards Pennsylvania.¹

General Lee met the Union Army of the Potomac at Gettysburg 1 July 1863. On 14 July the trail units of his battered army limped across the Potomac, back into Virginia. The unsuccessful campaign had cost Lee over 20,000 casualties and gained nothing but honor. The Army of Northern Virginia would remain on the defensive for the rest of the war.²

War in the West

The fortress town of Vicksburg was critical to the Confederacy. With the Union controlling most of the Mississippi between New Orleans and Ohio, Vicksburg was the connection between the eastern Confederacy and the manpower and resources of Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Loss of Vicksburg would isolate these states, nearly one-half of Confederate territory and cut access to their recruits, provisions, and materiel. Abraham Lincoln recognized that the Confederate control of Vicksburg meant "hog and hominy without limit, fresh troops from all the states of the far south, and a cotton country where they can raise the staple without interference." The guns of Vicksburg also denied the Union freedom of navigation on the Mississippi River, preventing the movement of Union troops and ships between the northern states and the Gulf. With Vicksburg out of the way the Union would gain the advantage of strategic mobility in the West, allowing rapid massing and sustainment of forces anywhere along the Confederacy's Mississippi River flank.³

Since October 1862 Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton's forces had foiled all of Grant's efforts to take the city. On 30 April 1863 Grant finally succeeded in landing his force south of Vicksburg, and he boldly set out to attack the Vicksburg defenses from the landward side.⁴

As Grant moved closer to Vicksburg, Confederate strategic indecision prevented effective concentration against the threatening Union army. Pemberton's superior was General Joseph

Johnston. On 2 May he ordered Pemberton to move out of Vicksburg and unite with his own force for a coordinated strike against Grant. Pemberton, armed with differing instructions from Confederate President Davis, remained in Vicksburg. On 18 May, with Grant only a few miles from Vicksburg, Johnston ordered Pemberton to evacuate Vicksburg as the town was sure to be lost. Pemberton called a council of war with his subordinate commanders to discuss the order. The decision was to once again disregard orders and remain in the Vicksburg defenses.⁵

Pemberton's strategy was to hold until sufficient reinforcements arrived to raise the Union siege of Vicksburg. By early June troops from Tennessee, Georgia, and South Carolina raised Pemberton's strength to 31,000 men. Yet, bottled up in Vicksburg with dwindling supplies and no hope of relief from the outside, Pemberton eventually realized he must either evacuate Vicksburg or surrender. When the question was put to his division and brigade commanders on 1 July 1863 most agreed that the siege had physically worn the troops to the extent that breakout was not possible. On July 4th 1863 Pemberton surrendered Vicksburg and 30,000 men to Grant. The Confederacy had been split, and Confederate commanders would have to guard against Union efforts along a vastly increased front.⁶

The Fourth of July 1863 was a black day for the Confederacy. Within two days General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was defeated at Gettysburg and General Pemberton surrendered Vicksburg. The effect of this rapid change of fortune on the Southern nation was described by Colonel Josiah Gorgas, CSA:

Events have succeeded one another with disastrous rapidity. One brief month ago we were apparently at the point of success. Lee was in Pennsylvania threatening Harrisburg and even Philadelphia. Vicksburg seemed to laugh all Grant's efforts to scorn . . . All looked bright. Now the picture is just as somber as it was bright then. Lee failed at Gettysburg . . . Vicksburg and Port Hudson capitulated, surrendering 35,000 men and 45,000 arms. It seems incredible that human power could effect such a change in so brief a space. Yesterday we rode on the pinnacle of success, today absolute ruin seems to be our portion. The Confederacy totters on to its destruction.⁷

Tennessee

Though distressing, events were not necessarily as somber as Colonel Gorgas believed. General Braxton Bragg and his 45,000 men of the Army of Tennessee still held Chattanooga. Chattanooga was a southern rail town second in importance only to Atlanta. Along its tracks rolled provisions from Alabama, Tennessee, and north Georgia bound for Lee's army and the rest of the Confederacy. For these reasons Union General William S. Rosecrans' 85,000 man Army of the Cumberland was making preparations to march on Bragg, destroy his army and seize Chattanooga. Union success might well be the death knell for the Confederacy, but southern victory over the Army of the Cumberland could yet revive Confederate fortunes. If the Confederacy were to be saved it would be in Tennessee, and the savior would be General Braxton Bragg.

Braxton Bragg

Braxton Bragg entered West Point in 1833. The seventeen year-old cadet's classmates included Joseph Hooker, John Pemberton, and Jubal Early. The energetic and outgoing Cadet Bragg impressed some as opinionated and tactless, while others who perhaps knew him better held a different impression. Joseph Hooker recalled Bragg as "bright and energetic," and admired his "manliness, independence and unbending integrity." Braxton Bragg proved a good student, graduating fifth in his class. Hooker wrote that Bragg continually "developed in physical and intellectual strength and character," and considered Bragg's class standing "highly honorable, as his preparation had been limited and he had won his standing on the academic rolls without having been considered a laborious student." Well thought of by peers and instructors, and well prepared for active service, Lieutenant Bragg graduated in 1837 and received orders to report to Florida.⁸

In July 1837 Lieutenant Bragg reported to the Third Artillery Regiment in Florida. The unit was seriously understrength after two years of guerrilla war against the Seminoles and welcomed Bragg as a much needed replacement. Appointed commissary officer and adjutant, Bragg saw little fighting and became ill in the hostile environment. In the spring of 1838 he was

sent home to North Carolina to recuperate. This was the first indication that Braxton Bragg's physical constitution might not be suitable for arduous field service. The rest of his career would be marked by periodic episodes of sickness.⁹

Upon his recovery in 1840 Bragg was ordered to return to his unit, over his protests to the adjutant general. Over the next three years Lieutenant Bragg served as a battery and fort commander and gained a reputation as hardworking, strict, and concerned for his men's welfare. He also built a reputation as a young officer not afraid to quarrel with his superiors. Typical is a letter Bragg sent to the adjutant general in June, 1842:

About five weeks since I addressed you a communication on an official subject, an answer to which involves the correct discharge of my duties as an officer, and up to this time you have not condescended to notice me . . . why adopt so extraordinary a course towards a junior who has no redress for the insults thus offered him except in violation of official respect which the law requires him to maintain towards his superiors?¹⁰

The Adjutant General ensured General of the Army Winfield Scott saw the letter, then replied to Bragg with a stinging admonishment. Nonetheless Bragg continued to stand up to superiors when he felt he was right. Shortly after receiving his rebuke Lieutenant Bragg wrote another scathing letter to the Adjutant General concerning his soldiers' inadequate quarters. Ulysses S. Grant knew Bragg at the time, recalling him as "A remarkably intelligent and well informed man," with an "irascible temper, and was naturally disputatious . . . as a subordinate he was always on the look out to catch his commanding officer infringing on his prerogative, as a post commander he was equally vigilant to detect the slightest neglect."¹¹

In 1844 the Third Artillery left Florida for South Carolina, and Bragg continued to make his opinions known on what he saw as faults in the army. He wrote a series of anonymous articles advocating reforms in the Army's organization. Though Bragg claimed his purpose was the "correction of abuses which have crept into service," he also used the forum to conduct personal attacks on General Winfield Scott, calling him a "vain, petty, conniving man."¹²

Bragg soon had an opportunity to take direct action against General Scott. An ongoing feud had split the army between supporters of Scott and those of Major General Edmund P.

Gaines, who favored reforms. In March 1844, when Congress held hearings on the situation, Bragg happened to be in Washington on leave. There is no proof he was there to contribute to the feud, but he did have informal discussions on the issue with several congressmen. The Adjutant General promptly ordered Bragg to leave Washington and report back to his unit. While considering his next move Bragg was subpoenaed to testify before Congress and was unable to leave in accordance with his orders. In April Bragg was court-martialed and convicted on a charge of disrespect to his superiors and given a comparatively light sentence of two months suspension of rank.¹³

Much of the army was behind Bragg and agreed with his views. Buoyed by this support he continued to aggressively defend what he saw as his rights and the good of the army. Shortly after his court-martial Bragg entered a dispute with his regimental commander Lieutenant Colonel William Gates over Bragg's assigned quarters. Bragg felt his quarters intolerable and was offended when better quarters were assigned a newly arrived junior officer. In a letter to Lieutenant Colonel Gates, Bragg threatened to bring the issue to the attention of Major General John E. Wool, Lieutenant Colonel Gates' superior. Incensed, Gates accused Bragg of "indulging in a freedom of writing that is offensive from a junior to a senior, and of undertaking to dictate by a reference to the regulations what is my duty." Gates thought Bragg was trying to "make a serious matter of a trifle." The matter was eventually referred to Major General Wool for a Court of Inquiry, which in January 1845 found in Bragg's favor. Lieutenant Colonel Gates was publicly reprimanded for not adhering to regulations. Bragg, though exonerated, was censured by General Wool for the disrespectful tone of his letter.¹⁴

By the spring of 1845 Lieutenant Bragg had earned a reputation as the "most cantankerous man in the Army." Court-martialed, convicted, and censured, he was hated by the Commanding General of the Army and his own regimental commander. Yet his friends and supporters knew there was more to the man than a hot temper. Soon Bragg would have occasion to display his more

positive qualities to the army and the nation. In June 1845 Bragg and his battery were ordered to join Major General Zachary Taylor in the war against Mexico.¹⁵

Bragg and his light artillery battery reported to General Taylor at Corpus Christi, Texas, in July 1845. The following months were ones of boredom, sickness, and indiscipline as the volunteers and regulars waited out ongoing peace negotiations. Bragg surprisingly stayed well and drilled his men hours each day. One observer recorded his impressions of Bragg: "The tall, spare form . . . his large black eyes and heavy brows, and nervous, tremulous voice, attracted notice; and his industry, attention to duty and strict regard for discipline, ensured the efficiency and gallantry . . . subsequently displayed on the field of Buena Vista." When the army finally moved south in March 1846, Bragg's battery was ready.¹⁶

General Taylor constructed an earthen fort on the Rio Grande and left 500 men to defend it, including Bragg. On 3 May 1846 the Mexicans surrounded the fort, and Bragg got his first taste of combat as the Mexicans kept up a continuous bombardment. Bragg's guns responded smartly, and upon the lifting of the siege 9 May Bragg was promoted to brevet captain. During the following months Bragg continued his relentless drill and earned a reputation for attention to detail. A fellow officer reported "Bragg, a skillful and courageous officer, is . . . distinguished for his attention to the minutia of his profession; a merit to be esteemed no less than heroic daring, when it is remembered what disasters may result in critical moments from the most trifling casualties."¹⁷

Captain Bragg's next action came at Monterey in September. Over several days of furious combat in the restricted streets of the city, Bragg's well-drilled battery once again distinguished itself, and Bragg demonstrated personal gallantry throughout the fight. He also demonstrated his meticulous nature, stripping tack and harness off dead horses, under fire, to ensure the equipment would not be lost. One lieutenant was ordered to return to the still contested battlefield to see if any equipment had been left behind. On the way he met General Taylor who told him to forget about lost equipment, but the lieutenant never forgave Bragg for the "picayune" order. The next day, when a horse driver fell dead, Bragg ordered this officer to retrieve the dead man's sword: "I

did so . . . and took from his pocket a knife, for I thought I might be sent back if I did not retrieve that too." Bragg refused the knife because "it was not public property . . . I write down these little things, for they give instances of the observance of details, characteristic of this officer, not obtained from history." Monterey surrendered on 24 September 1846, and Bragg immediately began to rebuild his ravaged battery.¹⁸

In January 1847 General Scott stripped Taylor's army of most of its regular troops and advised General Taylor to remain on the defensive. Outraged at Scott's action, Taylor determined to take the offensive with his remaining force of 5,000 volunteers and a few regulars, including Bragg's artillery. On 23 February, 1847 Taylor's army met the Mexicans at Buena Vista. The action quickly became desperate as the poorly trained volunteers retreated from the Mexican attack. Time and again Bragg and his battery galloped to a threatened point, destroyed the attackers with well-placed canister, and moved to the next crisis. Finally, only Colonel Jefferson Davis' Mississippi volunteers stood between the Mexicans and victory. The Mississippians had just begun to break when Bragg arrived: "I am happy to believe . . . that my rapid fire, opened just in time, held the enemy in check until Colonel Davis could gain a position, and assume a stand." Colonel Davis took note of Bragg's courage, remarking that the battery, "though entirely unsupported, resolutely held its position." The Americans held, and during the night the Mexican Army departed the field.¹⁹

Braxton Bragg's initiative and gallantry were decisive factors in the victory. In his official report General Taylor stated that "Captain Bragg . . . saved the day." As important to the victory as Bragg's courage was his attention to detail and discipline. These traits had resulted in the well-trained and equipped gunners that delivered accurate volleys in the face of severe Mexican fire. General Taylor rewarded Bragg with a promotion to brevet lieutenant colonel.²⁰

General Taylor's army returned to Monterey, where once again Bragg undertook to rebuild his battery. By October 1847, despite attacks of fatigue and illness, he reported his battery in "better condition than it has been since I joined it." Because of his well-known ability to instill

discipline, he was given administrative control of the army camp at Monterey. Bragg quickly instituted order among the bored soldiers and lax officers. An observer later wrote that most regular officers considered Bragg "the best disciplinarian in the United States Army." Some thought his means too severe. Twice disgruntled soldiers made attempts on Bragg's life. Though most soldiers feared Bragg, many respected his willingness to defend their welfare. While in Monterey, Bragg contested the Adjutant General's order that the men must buy new uniforms, and at least once Bragg stood up for a deserter who he felt was rehabilitated.²¹

In June 1848 Bragg received orders to return to the States. During his three years in Mexico Bragg had built a reputation as a gallant officer and superb disciplinarian and had been promoted from lieutenant to brevet lieutenant colonel. Even the long-suffering Adjutant General admitted in 1849 that "Col. Bragg is one of our best artillery officers."²²

Bragg returned home a national hero. After the battle of Buena Vista, newspapers had printed a story concerning him and General Zachary Taylor. The story described a hard-pressed Bragg riding up to Taylor on the battlefield, reporting he was about to be overwhelmed and asking for instructions. Taylor's supposed reply was "Give them more grape, Captain Bragg." This much embellished version of the truth made Bragg a household name and "More Grape" a national slogan. Bragg was dined and celebrated everywhere he went, and the Army named a post in California after him. During this period Bragg learned his old battery was to be reassigned from Mexico to the frontier. Seething at what he saw as an injustice to his war-weary unit, Bragg went to the Secretary of War and had the orders changed to a more civilized destination, Fort Leavenworth.²³

While waiting for his battery to arrive, Bragg returned to his crusade to reform the army. His target was the older officers in the army, the "fogies." In a personal letter Bragg stated that the army must be purged of "old fogies who did nothing in the field without consulting and relying on

younger men." During a public speech in Mobile Bragg insisted that the soldiers and junior officers deserved "most of the credit, though it has been bestowed on those who accident, not merit, placed over them." Mexico had not mellowed Braxton Bragg.²⁴

In September 1849 Bragg, newly married, finally joined up with his battery in Jefferson Barracks, Saint Louis. He spent the next three years trying to accumulate the men, horses, and equipment to refit his unit. Many times Bragg wrote the Secretary of War to complain about the acute shortages, to no avail. Most vexing of all was an army decision to reorganize Bragg's battery of mounted "flying artillery" as a foot battery. In 1853 Bragg wrote an appeal to Secretary of War Jefferson Davis to restore horse artillery. Davis turned him down, and ordered Bragg's battery to frontier duty in Texas and the Indian Territory. Bragg was furious. His friend William T. Sherman observed "Bragg hated Davis bitterly" for sending him to the frontier to "chase Indians with 6 pounders."²⁵

In 1855, fed up with frontier duty and his inability to organize and equip his battery as he saw fit, Bragg requested and received leave. He went to Jefferson Davis to plead his case to have his unit transferred off the frontier. Davis insisted that it remain. Utterly frustrated, Bragg submitted his resignation on 31 December 1855. Davis accepted it.²⁶

Bragg wrote that he resigned "under a pressure of outward circumstances which I resisted until disgusted and worn down. Finding my command destroyed, my usefulness gone . . . I concluded to retire from the unequal contest."²⁷ Forty-year-old Braxton Bragg retired to a sugar plantation in Louisiana. Six years later Jefferson Davis would have need of him again.

By the time of his resignation Braxton Bragg's personal and professional qualities were well known and deeply ingrained. As an officer he possessed unquestioned physical courage, was industrious to the point of exhaustion, and had a passion for attending to the smallest detail. His style of leadership was effective in executing the relatively modest responsibilities of battery command but had not been tested in any position of great importance.

Bragg's own high standards, coupled with his natural outspokenness, made him quick

to criticize superiors he felt did not measure up. Bragg had learned he could attack his commanders with impunity in public forum and with political influence. Shortly after his court-martial in 1844, upon learning that his mentor Major General Gaines was trying to get him assigned to his division, Bragg wrote a friend "a post of honor for disobedience of orders, and contempt and disrespect to my commanding officer. This is a strange world."²⁸

Bragg did not offer automatic respect and obedience to his superiors; he would decide who was worthy of his obedience. He genuinely believed his acts of insubordination were for the good of the army, not personal gain. When these same tactics were later used against him, however, Bragg would not see the attackers as altruistic—they were disobedient subordinates attacking him personally.

Bragg also exhibited a trait rarely remarked upon, a sincere concern for the welfare of his soldiers. He fought for a decent posting for his men after the Mexican war and later would expend great effort organizing the best possible hospital system for his soldiers in the Army of Tennessee. Unfortunately, this side of him was only visible to those who knew him well enough to penetrate his publicly brusque and cold manner.

¹Edwin B. Coddington. The Gettysburg Campaign (New York : Scribner's Sons, 1968), 4-7.

²Coddington, 536, 570.

³ William C. Everhart, Vicksburg and the Opening of the Mississippi River, 1862-1863 (National Park Service, 1986); Excerpt reprinted in US Army Command and Staff College, C610, The Evolution of Modern Warfare (Fort Leavenworth : USACGSC, August 1996), 300; Edwin Cole Bearss, The Vicksburg Campaign 3 vols. (Dayton : Morningside, 1986), 3:1312.

⁴Everhart, 303.

⁵Everhart, 304-307.

⁶Everhart, 309-310.

⁷Everhart, 311.

⁸Joseph Hooker, "Recollections of Cadet Life." Army and Navy Journal, XXXIX (June 14, 1902). quoyed in Grady McWhiney, Braxton Bragg and the Confederate Defeat (New York : Columbia University Press, 1969), 10,24.

⁹McWhiney, 26.

¹⁰Bragg to Jones, 5 May 1842, Letters Recieved, AGO, quoted in McWhiney, 32.

¹¹Ullysse Grant, "Personal Memoirs" 2 vols. (New York : C.L. Webster and Co., 1885-1886), 2:68.

¹²A Subaltern. "Notes on Our Army," Southern Literary Messenger (1844), 86-88, quoted in McWhiney, 36.

¹³McWhiney, 39-44.

¹⁴Testimony and Verdict, Bragg Court of Inquiry (15 January 1845), National Archives; and Testimony of Henry B. Judd and Abraham Myers, Bragg Court of Inquiry (15 January 1845), National Archives, quoted in McWhiney, 47-50.

¹⁵Bragg to Jones, 18 June 1845, Letters Recieved, AGO, and Jones to Bragg, and Jones to William Gates, 18 June 1845, Letters Sent, AGO, quoted in McWhiney, 51.

¹⁶Cadmus Wilcox, History of the Mexican War (Washington : Church News Publishing, 1892), 118.

¹⁷Luther Giddings, Sketches of the Campaign in Northern Mexico (New York : George Putnam Co., 1853), 76; and McWhiney, 61.

¹⁸Samuel French, Two Wars: an Autobiography (Nashville, 1901), 62-64, quoted in McWhiney, 65; and McWhiney, 65-70; and Wilcox, 93-97; Justin H. Smith, The War with Mexico (New York : MacMillan, 1919), 251, 254.

¹⁹McWhiney, 76-85; and Wilcox, 234, 238; and Smith, 390 - 392.

²⁰McWhiney, 89.

²¹McWhiney, 97 - 100; and The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 128 Vols. (Washington : Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), series 1, volume 16, part 1, 348. (Cited hereafter as OR, and unless otherwise indicated all references are to series 1).

²²Jone's endorsement on Bragg to Jone's, 7 March 1849, Letters Recieved, AGO, quoted in McWhiney, 100.

²³McWhiney, 101-103; and Bragg to Hammond, 20 October 1848, Hammond Papers, quoted in McWhiney, 107.

²⁴Bragg to Hammond, 20 October 1848, Hammond Papers, quoted in McWhiney, 107.

²⁵William T Sherman, Memoirs of William T. Sherman (Westport : Greenwood Press, 1972), 162.

²⁶McWhiney, 120-136.

²⁷Bragg to (George Stuart?), 31 May 1856, George Hay Stuart Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in McWhiney, 107.

²⁸Bragg to Duncan, 16 June 1844, Duncan papers, United States Military Academy, quoted in McWhiney, 44.

CHAPTER 2

BRAGG IN COMMAND

Pensacola to Shiloh

Braxton Bragg and the lead elements of his 30,000-man Army of Mississippi arrived in Chattanooga on 29 July 1862. A full General, Bragg had earned his rank and position through outstanding service to the Confederacy in the preceding sixteen months. Appointed a Brigadier General by Jefferson Davis in March 1861, Bragg had continued to build on his pre-war reputation as gallant officer, able organizer, and strict disciplinarian.

As commander of Confederate forces at Pensacola, Florida, Bragg turned his 6,000 raw recruits into one of the best-trained forces in the South. Promoted to Major General and given command of west Florida and Alabama, he quickly reorganized factory production, recruit training, and transportation to more effectively support the war effort. In February 1862 he and his troops were ordered to join General Albert Sidney Johnston in Corinth, Mississippi, to help repel Union forces threatening western Tennessee.¹

Arriving in March 1862, Bragg was appalled at the indiscipline and disorganization of the 40,000 soldiers gathered at Corinth. Many of the raw volunteers lacked any military training, and looting and desertion were common. General Johnston, knowing Bragg's abilities, appointed him not only a corps commander, but also his chief of staff, charged with training and organizing the untried troops. Surveying his task, Bragg wrote his wife that "stern, dictatorial measures are necessary, and as far as my influence goes will be adopted." Among his first actions as chief of staff was to organize an army staff and publish an order directing the death penalty for plunderers

and deserters. But time to organize was short. On 3 April, 1862 Johnston moved the army north to confront Union forces reported near Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee.²

Bragg stayed in the thick of the action throughout the bitter fight at Shiloh on 6-7 April, personally directing assaults against the Hornet's Nest and having several horses shot out from under him. Withdrawing only after repeated orders from his superior General Beauregard, Bragg was one of the last Confederates off the battlefield. He covered the army's withdrawal to the last and did his best to organize the night time retreat back to Corinth. During the fight Bragg, like most of the other inexperienced Confederate commander's, stuck to the tactics learned in Mexico. Failing to properly coordinate the actions of his corps, he repeatedly committed regiments and brigades piecemeal against the strongest Union positions, without proper mass, coordination, and artillery support. Bragg never fully learned the lesson that well-coordinated, innovative tactics were required against the rifle musket. This was not the only lesson of Shiloh. Bragg's subordinates, shortly after the fight, were quick to learn that Bragg would not accept sole responsibility for his unit's failures. In his official report Bragg claimed the difficulties at the Hornet's Nest were due "entirely to want of proper handling" by his brigade and regimental commander's.³

Though the battle was a draw and many mistakes were made, the South needed heroes. Braxton Bragg's bravery and devotion to duty were recognized throughout the Confederacy. As in the days of "More grape, Captain Bragg," newspapers praised his valor and poems were published in his honor. On 12 April 1862 President Davis promoted him to full General, the fifth ranking officer of the Confederacy. By June the Confederates had completed their withdrawal to Tupelo, Mississippi, and Bragg had superseded the ailing Beauregard as commander of Confederate forces in the west.⁴

Building an Army

In Tupelo Bragg once again concentrated on what he did best, organizing and training his army. He readily risked his national popularity by taking the firm measures he felt were necessary

to prepare his troops and officers for future battlefields. Concerned at the low quality of his officers, Bragg instituted regimental promotion boards to confirm the competency of elected officers, despite political backlash from Richmond. Surveying his general officers, Bragg wrote Confederate Adjutant General Cooper in Richmond of his concerns:

Some general officers appointed or promoted without recommendations from this quarter are only encumbrances and would be better out of the way. Of all the Major Generals in this army . . . but one can now be regarded as a suitable commander of that grade. Could the department by any wholesome exercise of power or policy relieve this army from a part of this dead-weight it would surely give confidence to the troops and add much to our efficiency . . . the safety of our cause may depend on it.

Relieving generals was fraught with political peril, and no help was forthcoming from Jefferson Davis. Bragg promoted Hardee, the "suitable commander," to command of the Army of the Mississippi and removed Major General Leonidas Polk from command of his corps by appointing him second in command of Bragg's forces. Both would figure prominently in Bragg's future endeavors.⁵

Hardee

William J. Hardee graduated from West Point in 1838 and remained a career soldier. He distinguished himself in combat in the Mexican war and in actions against the Indians. Before the war Hardee had been a protege of Jefferson Davis. Directed by Secretary of War Davis to revise the army drill manual, then Major Hardee produced Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics, the drill primer for both sides in the Civil War. In 1856 Davis appointed him commandant of West Point, charged with indoctrinating the cadets in the new drill system. Hardee and Davis' close association resulted in a lifelong friendship. When Georgia seceded Hardee, then a Lieutenant Colonel, resigned from the regular army and accepted a commission as a Colonel in the Confederate Army. At Shiloh he was a Major General commanding a corps under Albert S. Johnston.⁶

Hardee was well respected as a sound tactician and superb drillmaster. His training abilities were crucial to Bragg during the rebuilding of the Army of Mississippi at Tupelo. As a

corps commander he would often offer Bragg valuable advice on terrain and tactics, advice that was not always taken.⁷

Polk

Leonidas Polk graduated from West Point in 1827 but six months later resigned his commission to enter the Episcopalian ministry. As Bishop of Louisiana and founder of the University of the South in Tennessee, he was well known and respected before the war. Polk's friend and fellow cadet Jefferson Davis offered the militarily inexperienced Polk a commission upon the outbreak of war. Major General Polk was the first commander of the Army of Mississippi, being superseded by Albert S. Johnston in late 1861.⁸

As a corps commander at Shiloh, he proved fairly competent considering his lack of military experience and exhibited great personal bravery. A natural leader of imposing and dignified appearance, Polk was well liked by his soldiers and fellow officers. As a bishop Polk was accustomed to occupying a position of prominence, and he continued to use his political and personal connections during the war to report conditions as he saw them in Bragg's command. Polk's relationship with Bragg got off to a bad start when, upon commenting on the disorder evident at Corinth Bragg identified Polk as one of the major offenders, calling Polk a "plunderer." Later difficulties on the approach to Shiloh contributed to Bragg's poor first impression. Nonetheless, Bragg would have to rely on the "Bishop" in the future.⁹

The health, discipline, and spirit of the troops rapidly improved under Bragg's regimen of intense daily drill and iron discipline. The soldiers would never love Bragg, but many acknowledged his effectiveness. Wrote one, after hearing of several executions: "So far as patriotism was concerned, we had forgotten all about that, and did not now love our country as much as we feared Bragg." Later on, the same soldier had to admit that the troops had "recovered their health and spirits."¹⁰

By July 1862 Bragg had his army ready to fight. Colonel William Preston Johnston, an inspector for Jefferson Davis, wrote the President on July 15:

The discipline of the army seems excellent. The ordinary forms of respect to officers seem cheerfully paid. The respect for private property is very creditable . . . The older regiments show great skill and promptness in drill and the progress of the new levies is satisfactory.¹¹

General Bragg himself was pleased with the state of his force. He wrote his wife in July:

The great changes of command and commanders here has well nigh overburdened me . . . I hope yet to mark the enemy before I break down. Since our arrival here great and marked improvement has taken place in the army, so that we are now in a high state of efficiency, health and tone. We shall be on the move very soon and you may expect to here from us before very long.¹²

With his army ready, Bragg had to decide where to move. Union forces under Grant, Sherman, and Rosecrans threatened Mississippi and Vicksburg, while another under Major General Buell was in north Alabama moving towards Chattanooga. Loss of Chattanooga would disrupt critical Confederate rail transportation, threaten Atlanta, and present the Union a route into the deep-south. Confederate Major General Kirby Smith, commanding in east Tennessee, felt he lacked sufficient forces to stop Buell, and sent frequent dispatches to Bragg and Richmond requesting reinforcements. Determining that the greatest threat lay to Chattanooga, Bragg decided in July to move the majority of his army there, and in conjunction with Kirby Smith "strike an effective blow through middle Tennessee, gaining the enemy's rear, cutting off his supplies and dividing his forces so as to encounter them in detail."¹³

On 23 July, 1862 Bragg began moving 30,000 men from Tupelo to Chattanooga. The 776-mile rail journey was typically well organized and disciplined. Upon joining Kirby Smith's force in Tennessee, Bragg had an army in position not just to threaten Buell, but also the supply lines of all the Union forces in Mississippi. A decisive Confederate drive north through middle Tennessee, more than just saving Chattanooga, could return the initiative in the west to the Confederates.¹⁴

Campaign in Kentucky

Upon his arrival in Chattanooga Bragg conferred with Kirby Smith on strategy. They agreed that Smith, now freed of responsibility for Chattanooga, would immediately move to retake

the Cumberland Gap from Federal forces. Once done, and upon the arrival and organization of all Bragg's troops, they would unite in a drive north through middle Tennessee to destroy Buell. If successful, they would continue the joint campaign and seize Kentucky for the Confederacy. Almost from the start Bragg's plans were frustrated by his lack of command authority over Smith. Bragg outranked him, but as commander of the independent department of East Tennessee Kirby Smith received his orders from President Davis. Any joint efforts would be effected through cooperation. Smith, after seizing the Cumberland Gap, decided to move immediately into Kentucky, leaving Bragg to move alone against Buell in middle Tennessee. To protect Smith's flank Bragg was forced to move quickly, aiming to destroy Buell in battle or maneuver him out of Tennessee.¹⁵ (See Figure 1.)

In Chattanooga Bragg organized his 30,000 man army into two corps of two divisions each. He was still not satisfied with some of his subordinate commanders. Bragg considered Major General Hardee very capable, but still believed the other corps commander, Major General Polk, unfit for command. Polk, politically powerful, could not be removed, but Bragg was able to relieve three generals and court-martial two others. Still, Bragg felt handicapped by incompetent officers and political appointees.¹⁶ He once again wrote President Davis seeking help:

I do not hesitate to assert that a fourth of our efficiency is lost for want of suitable Brigade and Division commanders . . . no appointing power can avoid errors through which in time each grade must become encumbered with some incapable and inefficient officers, who cannot be employed without material prejudice to the service.

Davis refused Bragg blanket permission to remove and promote officers as he saw fit, and Bragg continued to denounce those he could not remove from command.¹⁷

Bragg also reorganized his own staff. Surprisingly for one experienced in organization, Bragg selected some staff officers of questionable ability and decided to be his own chief of staff. Having thus increased his own burdens, distrustful of some of his officers and spurred on by Kirby Smith's unilateral change of plans, Bragg moved his army north out of Chattanooga on 28 August 1862.¹⁸

In three weeks of hard marching Bragg maneuvered Buell out of Tennessee and moved into Kentucky. On 17 September the Confederates defeated a small Union garrison at Munfordsville, Kentucky, and there awaited Buell's attack. Bragg realized his army was worn from the rapid advance and suspected Buell outnumbered him, so preferred to fight a defensive battle.

When Buell failed to press an attack, Bragg moved further north, seeking provisions and aiming to unite with Kirby Smith's command at Bardstown, Kentucky. Kirby Smith once again foiled Bragg's scheme to mass their forces against Buell. At Bardstown Bragg received a message from Smith saying his forces were fully occupied with other missions and unable to join Bragg. With Buell now safely in strong positions at Louisville, Bragg took the opportunity to rest his men at Bardstown.

Bragg was fatigued and frustrated by the failure of his plan to unite Confederate forces against Buell. Not only had Kirby Smith offered less than enthusiastic cooperation, but Confederate forces in Mississippi under Major Generals Van Dorn and Breckinridge had failed to join him as planned. Equally frustrating was the failure of Kentucky recruits to join his army. On 28 September Bragg went to confer with Kirby Smith and oversee the installation of a Confederate Kentucky governor. Major General Polk, who ranked Hardee, was left in command of the army at Bardstown.¹⁹

Battle of Perryville

On 2 October, while still in Lexington, Bragg received reports that Buell's main body was advancing on Kirby Smith at Frankfort, Kentucky. Bragg saw this as the opportunity to finally smash Buell in battle. His plan was for Smith to attack Buell head on and fix him in place while Polk moved north out of Bardstown and struck the Union army's flank. Bragg's orders to Polk were to prepare the army for an immediate march, and should Polk learn for certain that Buell was moving on Frankfort, "Strike without further orders." A few hours later Bragg sent additional instructions: "The enemy is certainly advancing on Frankfort. Put your whole available force in

motion . . . and strike him in flank and rear. If we can combine our movements he is certainly lost."²⁰

On 3 October, Bragg went to Frankfort, convinced the fight would be there and believing Polk was enroute. As intelligence updates came in, however, Bragg decided the move on Frankfort might be a feint. At 8 P.M. he sent Polk updated instructions: "I have sent you many dispatches since yesterday morning desiring you to move your force on the enemy, who was making a descent on this point. That move has proved to be only a feint and has ceased. You will act accordingly, but I desire you to hold your command ready for a junction at any moment."²¹

Polk, unknown to Bragg, had not yet moved. Polk believed that Buell's entire force was moving on him in Bardstown and that a move north would be disastrous. Polk did not share this assessment with Bragg. Instead, he called a council of his corps and division commanders who approved a decision to retreat west, to Danville, in defiance of Bragg's orders and intent.

Apparently only one officer, Brigadier General Patton Anderson, favored obeying Bragg's orders.

Months later Smith wrote Bragg on what transpired:

On the third of October I was present at General Polk's quarters at Bardstown. Your dispatch from Frankfurt of 1 p.m. Oct 2nd was read and after an interchange of views in regard to our military condition, as junior officer present, I was called upon by General Polk to give my views as to what was best to be done. I hesitated to do so, whereupon General Polk inquired as to the cause of my reluctance to advise a course which seemed so clear: and I replied, that your order just read did not seem to admit of any other course than that of compliance, and that if any other alternative than that of obedience to the order was adopted, it might involve you and the forces with you near Frankfort in great embarrassment if not defeat-that in your dispatch you distinctly stated that Genl. Kirby Smith would attack the enemy then in your front, and that we must move upon him...and strike him in flank and rear."²²

Polk had decided to retreat while Bragg thought him moving north in obedience to his last orders. On the evening of 3 October Polk informed Bragg of the decision:

The last 24 hours have developed a condition of things on my front and left flank which . . . makes compliance with this order not only eminently inexpedient, but impracticable. I have called a council of Wing and Division commanders, to who I have submitted the matter, and find that they . . . indorse my views. I shall therefore pursue a different course assured that when the facts are submitted to you will justify my decision."²³

Polk had failed to advise Bragg of his belief that Buell was massing at Bardstown, not Frankfort; had disobeyed Bragg's order to move north; and when informing Bragg of the decision to retreat failed to paint his commander a picture of the tactical situation making the move necessary. At the time Buell's forces were spread out between Frankfort and Bardstown, and it is likely Polk could have made it to Frankfort and linked up with Kirby Smith, unifying Bragg's forces.²⁴

Bragg's intelligence was still unclear on Buell's intentions. He knew both Smith and Polk had forces to their front, but did not know where the greatest threat lay. On 4 October he still believed the best strategy was for Polk to join with Smith and believed Polk was enroute. When he received word of Polk's decision to retreat, Bragg was forced to abandon his strategy, and he asked Smith to move south to join up with Polk at Harrodsburg, ten miles north of Danville.²⁵

Arriving at Harrodsburg the afternoon of 6 October, Bragg discovered Polk was still concentrating at Danville, not moving to linkup with Smith at Harrodsburg as ordered. Bragg's adjutant once again sent orders to Polk: "The General commanding instructs me to renew the directions . . . to you to concentrate your command at this point as rapidly as possible . . . he does not desire them to move to Danville."²⁶

Later that day Bragg received reports from his commanders indicating the main enemy force was threatening Smith, fifteen miles north of Harrodsburg at Versailles, and Polk was facing a smaller force. Smith was "begging for help," while Polk's message read "I have directed General Hardee to ascertain the strength of the enemy . . . I cannot think it large." Based on these reports Bragg sent two divisions north to aid Kirby Smith and directed Polk to move to Versailles as soon as possible. Bragg's order told Polk to "give the enemy battle immediately, rout him, then move to our support at Versailles...no time should be lost in these movements." Around midnight 7 October Bragg received a message from Hardee that caused him to reconsider. Hardee implied he was facing a large force, and that the Confederates in the south were in grave danger:

Permit me, from the friendly relations so long existing between us, to write you plainly. Do not scatter your forces. There is one rule in our profession which should never be

forgotten; it is to throw the masses of your troop on the fractions of the enemy. If it be your policy to strike the enemy at Versailles take your whole force with you and make the blow effective; if, on the contrary, you should decide to strike the enemy in front of me, first let it be done with a force which will make the success certain. Strike with your whole force first to the right then to the left. I could not sleep quietly tonight without giving expression to these views. If you wish my opinion, it is that in view of the position of your depots you ought to strike this force first.

Hardee was advising Bragg to concentrate his forces, the very thing he had been attempting since entering Kentucky. Still, Hardee's message had the desired effect of alerting Bragg that the threat might lie in the south. At dawn Bragg rode for Polk's headquarters at Perryville.²⁷

Bragg's belief that Polk was still obeying his orders of 7 October to "give the enemy battle immediately" was reinforced upon receiving a message from Polk, written at 6 A.M. 8 October, stating Polk's intent to "attack at daylight." Instead, Bragg found upon his arrival at 9:30 A.M. that Polk was in a defense, waiting for the Union forces to attack him. Once again Polk had consulted his subordinates and decided to disregard Bragg's orders and intent. This time Polk had not just failed to keep Bragg informed, he had told his commander he was going to attack while intending to defend. Bragg corrected deficiencies in Polk's dispositions and though still unsure of just exactly what he faced, launched an afternoon attack on the Federals.²⁸

The fight at Perryville was hard and bloody, with many veterans of Shiloh claiming Perryville was the worse of the two. By nightfall Bragg's army had pushed the 60,000 Union troops back two miles, and the fight stalled as the Federals took up strong defensive positions. Throughout the fight Bragg and his principal commanders stuck to the tactics that had worked in Mexico and cost so much at Shiloh, frontal attacks. All showed a tendency to piecemeal in regiments rather than massing them at a decisive point and time. Bragg achieved a tactical victory, but realizing he was outnumbered he determined to fall back the next day and join up with Kirby Smith. Polk and Hardee agreed with the move. Early on the ninth Bragg's army moved to Harrodsburg. The next day Smith's force joined him there.²⁹

On 12 October Bragg decided to leave Kentucky. Short of supplies and facing an enemy of increasing strength, the final straw was the defeat of Van Dorn's force at Corinth, Mississippi.

Van Dorn was to move north and cover Bragg's left flank; without him Bragg thought his position in Kentucky untenable. The Confederates retreated to east Tennessee.³⁰

Bragg's campaign had failed to claim Kentucky for the Confederacy or to inflict a crushing defeat on Buell, yet he still achieved some tactical success. Bragg pointed out in his official report that he had recovered north Alabama, much of Tennessee, and the Cumberland Gap; killed, wounded, or captured 25,000 of the enemy at the cost of 4,000 casualties, and captured much needed armaments and supplies, all the while living off the land. There were also lessons to be learned, if Bragg chose to do so. Principal among these were the importance of good reconnaissance, the need to act resolutely based on best available facts, and the difficulty of relying on subordinates who felt no compunction to obey the letter or intent of orders.³¹

Recriminations

Newspapers and politicians were quick to blame Bragg for the failures in Kentucky. Ironically, one of the most common charges was that he had scattered his forces at Perryville. The editor of the Richmond Dispatch wrote on 23 October:

Genl. Bragg is unquestionably an excellent disciplinarian, and a very brave man, but he seems to have been greatly deficient in some of the other qualities which constitute a great commander. No doubt, serving under some man of great military genius, he would have made an excellent subordinate. The talent of separate command, however, is very rare, and he at least does not seem to possess it.³²

This charge, that Bragg was an able organizer and disciplinarian, yet lacking those things which made a great commander, would be increasingly thrown at him in the ensuing months.

President Davis dismissed the public complaints against Bragg as uninformed or politically motivated, and called Bragg to Richmond to personally report on the Kentucky campaign. Bragg left Richmond with Davis' full support. Bragg's adjutant, Lieutenant Colonel Brent, reported "Genl. Bragg returned from Richmond. He brought the gratifying fact that his conduct in Kentucky had been approved of by the President."³³

President Davis was most concerned with the rumors that Bragg's army and commanders had lost faith in him. Indeed, Polk and Hardee had publicly disparaged Bragg. In a letter to Jefferson Davis' aide Hardee listed the mistakes he felt Bragg had made in Kentucky, concluding "Bragg has proved a failure, it is true, but . . . have we anybody who will do better?" Davis called Polk and Kirby Smith to Richmond, where both blamed Bragg for the Kentucky failures, claimed he had lost the confidence of his men, and requested he be replaced by General Joseph E. Johnston. Smith told Davis he refused to work again with Bragg.³⁴

Davis' reasons for retaining Bragg in command are best articulated in his October 29 letter to Kirby Smith:

I have had long and free conversations with Genl. Bragg. He has explained in a direct and frank manner the circumstances of his campaign and has evinced the most self denying temper in relation to his future position . . . That another Genl. might excite more enthusiasm is probable, but as all have their defects I have not seen how to make a change with advantage to the public service. His administrative capacity has been felt by the Army of Mississippi, his knowledge of the troops is intimate and a new man would not probably for a time with even greater ability be equally useful. Of all the Generals, Cooper is at the head of the Bureau, Lee is in command of the army in Virginia, Johnston still disabled by the wound received at Seven Pines, Beauregard was tried a commander of the army of the West and left it without leave, when the troops were demoralized and the country he was sent to protect was threatened with conquest. Bragg succeeded to the command and organized the army and marched to your support with efficient troops.³⁵

Bragg remained in command. Though Polk and Hardee had turned against him, many of his division and brigade commanders still offered support. One brigade commander, Brigadier General J. K. Jackson, wrote:

I still think he is as good a General as we have in the Confederacy. The newspapers and street corner warriors abuse everybody in relation to the conduct of the war, about which they know nothing. It is true the army was disappointed when we were ordered to fall back, but every man and officer is now satisfied that it was the very best thing that could have been done. The opinion of the army sustains General Bragg, he is the idol with them notwithstanding the censure of the newspapers.³⁶

Jackson may have overstated Bragg's support, but it was substantial. Still, Bragg had two corps commanders publicly against him, and a resurgent Union force to be defeated in Tennessee.

Murfreesboro

The western Confederacy was now threatened by two Union armies. Ulysses Grant's force was preparing to move south on Vicksburg, and the Union Army of the Cumberland, under its new commander William S. Rosecrans, had occupied Nashville. President Davis wanted Bragg and Kirby Smith to once again cooperate, this time against Nashville. Bragg seemed eager to attack, writing General Pemberton of his plans: "We are moving our available forces as rapidly as possible into middle Tennessee to resume the offensive . . . this throws us in the rear of your opponent and ought to create some diversion."³⁷

Within two weeks Bragg had changed his mind. Respectful of Rosecrans' powerful position at Nashville and concerned about his own army's reduced strength, he wrote Beauregard on 12 November that he would attack if the enemy left his positions. On 17 November Bragg conferred with his generals and decided against any immediate offensive. He wrote Adjutant General Cooper that an attack on Nashville would be an "Act of imprudence, to say the least . . . should the Department differ with me, however, I will undertake it."³⁸

On 24 November President Davis tried to unify operations in the West by appointing General Joseph E. Johnston commander of all Confederate forces between the Mississippi river and Blue Ridge mountains. An overall commander had long been sought by generals and politicians, and Johnston was well respected by his peers. Even Bragg claimed he asked President Davis to give Johnston the appointment during his October trip to Richmond.³⁹

Johnston's new position proved to have little real authority. His mission was to oversee the departments of Bragg, Kirby Smith, and Pemberton, but they still received their orders from Richmond. Orders would often bypass Johnston completely, going directly to his subordinates. This made it difficult, if not impossible, for Johnston to implement any kind of coordinated theater strategy.⁴⁰

Bragg spent November 1862 rebuilding his tired army at Murfreesboro, recruiting, reorganizing units, and seeking promotions for deserving officers. By early December 1862 his

newly renamed Army of Tennessee numbered 47,000 men. Polk, Hardee, and Kirby Smith commanded the three infantry corps, and Brigadier General Wheeler the 4,000-man cavalry corps. General Johnston arrived at Murfreesboro on 5 December on an inspection tour and reported "Bragg's troops are in fine condition, healthy looking and well clothed. In fine spirits too. I see no evidence of the want of confidence and dissatisfaction of which we heard so much in Richmond."⁴¹

President Davis visited Murfreesboro on 12 December, bringing instructions for Johnston and Bragg. Davis ordered Johnston and one of Bragg's divisions to Mississippi to operate against Grant. Both Johnston and Bragg protested the order, arguing that Bragg was already outnumbered by Rosecrans and any further reduction in strength was dangerous. Davis overruled his recently appointed theater commander and told Bragg that should Rosecrans advance "Fight if you can, and fall back behind the Tennessee."⁴²

Rosecrans advanced on 26 December 1862. Bragg elected to defend just north of Murfreesboro with Hardee's Corps on the left, Polk's on the right, and the fordable Stone's River between. One division of Kirby Smith's Corps was in reserve. Though it was not an ideal position, Bragg felt it was the only one that allowed him to cover all the roads from Nashville while protecting his supplies in Murfreesboro.⁴³

Rosecrans closed on the Confederate positions, but showed no haste to attack. Bragg decided to seize the initiative, and on the night of 30 December ordered Polk and Hardee to attack the Union left at daylight. Polk recommended the attack be against the right flank. Surprisingly, Bragg agreed to Polk's suggestion.⁴⁴

Bragg's plan was simple, in essence a frontal attack by two corps against the Union right. His orders read, in part, "In making your movement, the General desires that your attack shall be vigorous and persistent. In so doing, keep up the touch of elbows to the right in order that the line may be unbroken." Bragg was repeating the tactics.

of Shiloh and Perryville, despite the difficulty of staying aligned in battle and the high cost of frontal attacks.⁴⁵

The Confederate attack at 6 A.M. on 31 December caught the Federals by surprise and met with initial success. By 7 A.M. the Union forces, though pushed back, had consolidated their lines and began a bloody defense. By 10 A.M. Bragg realized his attack was losing momentum and ordered Major General Breckinridge to bring his reserve Division forward. It took Breckinridge three hours to reach the fight. Wary of Union forces reported to his front, he wrote Bragg at 10:10 A.M. that he could not advance. Bragg sent his messenger back with orders to "Tell General Breckinridge that unless he was certain the enemy was upon him to go ahead." Still worried about the enemy supposedly in his front, Breckinridge did not move to Bragg's aid until 11:30 A.M., after receiving another message from Bragg. The reports of enemy in Breckinridge's front proved false, and his brigades arrived too late to be thrown in at the critical point. He explained in his report that "about 10:30 I received, through Col. Johnson, a suggestion from the General commanding to move against the enemy . . . I find Col. Johnson regarded it as an order."⁴⁶

By 4 P.M. the Confederate attack had stalled, and Bragg was out of reserves. With darkness falling the exhausted troops of both sides slept on the battlefield. Bragg sent a message to Richmond claiming the Federals had been driven "from every position except his extreme left", and went to bed without inspecting his lines.⁴⁷

1 January 1863 passed with no serious fighting. On 2 January, Bragg ordered Breckinridge to attack a Union force that occupied an enfilading position. He did not consult Hardee, Breckinridge's commander. The bayonet assault was repulsed with great loss.⁴⁸

The soldiers had now been on the cold, wet battlefield for several days and were exhausted. At 2 A.M. on 3 January Bragg received a message advising retreat from Major Generals Withers and Cheatham, division commanders under Polk. Polk had endorsed the message, writing "I very greatly fear the consequences of another engagement at this place . . . we could now, perhaps, get off with some safety and credit if the affair is well managed. Should we fail in the meditated attack the consequences might be very disastrous." Bragg's response to the messenger was "Say to the General we shall maintain our position at every hazard."⁴⁹

By midmorning Bragg appeared to be changing his mind. Rosecrans was being reinforced, and the rising Stone's River threatened to separate Bragg's force. In addition captured documents implied the Union force was larger than Bragg had thought. Polk and Hardee were called to Bragg's headquarters and agreed that the army should withdraw. On 4 January 1863 the army began its retreat. Bragg had valid reasons to fall back, and his commanders had agreed with the decision. Still, the retreat allowed his enemies to claim that, just as at Perryville, Bragg had lost his nerve under stress.⁵⁰

Crisis of Confidence

The Army of Tennessee retreated thirty miles and established a defense near Tullahoma, Tennessee, along the Duck River. Almost immediately Bragg came under attack by the press and politicians for the conduct of the battle and retreat. The Richmond Examiner wrote "General Bragg has certainly retreated . . . from his victory at Murfreesboro, as he did last fall from his victory at Perryville." Bragg was said to have lost the confidence of the army. "It is quite manifest that there are deep quarrels in that army," wrote one official, "and that Bragg is cordially hated by a large number of his officers."⁵¹

Bragg was physically tired and frustrated by the renewed persecution. On 10 January 1863 he read an article charging he had lost the confidence of his army and that he had retreated against the advice of his Generals. He asked his staff whether his troops had indeed lost confidence in him, stating that if true he would retire. The staff concluded that "under the existing circumstances the general interest required that General Bragg should ask to be relieved." Bragg wrote in a personal letter the same day "It has become with me a serious question as to whether it would not be better for the president to send someone out to relieve me."⁵²

On January 11 Bragg took the extraordinary step of writing a letter to his corps and division commanders asking their opinion of his performance and requesting confirmation that they had advocated retreat at Murfreesboro:

Finding myself assailed in private and public, by the press . . . by officers and citizens. for the movement from Murfreesboro, which was resisted by me for some time after advised by my Division and Corps commanders . . . It becomes necessary for me to save my fair name, if I cannot stop the deluge of abuse, which will destroy my usefulness and demoralize the army . . . False or true, soldiers have no means of judging me rightly or getting the facts, and the effect on them will be the same-a loss of confidence and a consequent demoralization of the whole army . . . I desire that you will consult your subordinate commanders and be candid with me. If I have misunderstood your advice, and acted against your opinions, let me know it in justice to yourselves. If, on the contrary, I am the victim of unjust accusations, say so, and unite with me in staying the malignant slanders being propagated by men who have felt the sting of discipline. I shall retire without a regret if I find I have lost the good opinion of my generals, upon whom I have ever relied as upon a foundation of rock.⁵³

Hardee admitted he had counseled retreat, and expressed his command's lack of confidence in Bragg:

I feel that frankness compels me to say that the General officers . . . are unanimous in the opinion that a change in the command of this army is necessary. In this opinion I concur. I feel assured that this opinion is considerably formed, and with the highest respect for the purity of your motives, your energy, and your personal character; but they are convinced . . . that the peril of the country is superior to all personal considerations.⁵⁴

Polk was not as quick to reply, giving Bragg time to reconsider his action. When asked to clarify his intent, Bragg told Polk that he asked only whether his generals had advised retreat. The purpose of the letter was to verify the actions relating to the retreat, and to "relieve my mind of all doubt, while I secured in a form to be preserved the means of defense in the future when discussion might be proper." The "paragraph relating to my supersedure was only an expression of the feeling with which I should receive your replies, should they prove I had been misled in my construction of your opinion and advice."⁵⁵

Polk never gave a candid reply to Bragg, but on 4 February he forwarded the correspondence to President Davis, along with his opinion of General Bragg:

I feel it a duty to say to you that had I and my Division commanders answered, our replies would have coincided with those of the officers of the other Corps. You have known my opinion on this since my visit to Richmond. I have only to add, if he were Napoleon or the great Frederick he could serve our cause at some other points better than here. My opinion is he had better be transferred. I remember you having said . . . "I can make good use of him here in Richmond." I have thought that the best disposition for him and the . . . army that could be made. His capacity for organization and discipline, which has not been equaled among us, could be used by you at headquarters with infinite advantage to the whole army. I

think . . . the best thing to be done . . . would be to give his command to General Joseph E. Johnston. He will cure all discontent and inspire the army with new life and confidence.⁵⁶

By the end of January Bragg seemed to resign himself to remaining and making the best of the situation. On 27 January he wrote to one of his supporters Brigadier General J.K.

Jackson: "With so little support, my aching head rebels against the heart, and cries for relief; still, I shall die in the traces."⁵⁷

Jefferson Davis was concerned and mystified when he heard of Bragg's letter and sent General Johnston to investigate. Davis' instructions to Johnston read in part: "Though my confidence in General Bragg is unshaken, it cannot be doubted that if he is distrusted . . . a disaster may result, which, but for that cause, would have been avoided . . . give me the advice I need . . . As that army is part of your command, no order will be necessary to give you authority there."⁵⁸

Johnston found no reason to remove Bragg. On 12 February he wrote President Davis his findings:

I have seen the whole army. Its appearance is very encouraging, and gives positive evidence of General Bragg's capacity to command. It is well clothed, healthy, and in good spirits. My object has been to ascertain if the confidence of the troops in the ability of the army to beat the enemy is at all impaired. I find no indication that it is less than when you were in its camp. While this feeling exists, and you regard General Bragg as brave and skillful, the fact that some or all of the General officers of the army, and many of the subordinates, think that you might give them a commander with fewer defects, cannot, I think, greatly diminish his value. To me it seems that the operations of this army . . . have been conducted admirably. I can find no record of more effective fighting in modern battles than of this army in December, evincing skill in the commander and courage in the troops.

General Johnston then continued, warning Davis that, as a matter of personal honor, he would not accept the command if offered:

I have been told by Generals Polk and Hardee that they have advised you to remove General Bragg and place me in command . . . I am sure you would agree with me that the part I have borne in this investigation would render it inconsistent with my personal honor to occupy that position. I believe, however, that General Bragg should not be removed.⁵⁹

Johnston was not Bragg's sole supporter. Of Bragg's generals, Jackson, Wheeler,

Withers, and Chalmers publicly voiced their confidence, and several congressmen wrote Bragg letters of support. Congressman Lyons wrote him, "It is the fate of leading men in times of excitement and revolution to encounter occasional abuse and misrepresentation-but those things are only temporary and justice will prevail."⁶⁰

By the end of February Bragg felt the furor was dying down. On the 27th he expressed optimism in a note to a friend on General Johnston's staff:

I am very happy to say that all seems to be subsiding into quiet satisfaction. And the only dissatisfaction that ever existed was fomented by a few disappointed Generals who supposed they could cover their tracks and rise on my downfall. They have failed, mainly owing to the discrimination of your noble chief, who saw at a glance the whole bearing. An expression of regret, now almost universal, reaches me constantly-but I pay no heed and pursue the even turn of my way.⁶¹

As Bragg's confidence returned, the President's diminished. Davis had decided to remove Bragg, but was restrained by Johnston's reluctance to accept the command. On 19 February the President wrote Johnston:

It is not given to all men of ability to excite enthusiasm and win affection of their troops, and it is only the few who are thus endowed who can overcome the distrust, and alienation, of their principal officers. . . . You limit the selection of a new man, and . . . object to being yourself the immediate commander . . . I do not think your personal honor is involved, as you could have nothing to gain by the removal of General Bragg.⁶²

Still, Davis promised not to force any action on Johnston that would wound his "sensibility or views of professional propriety."⁶³

The Confederate Secretary of War, James Seddon, also urged Johnston to remove Bragg. On 23 March he wrote Johnston that though Bragg "may have been harshly judged, you certainly do not realize the popular distrust and discontent unfortunately pervading all ranks of the army toward him." Seddon suggested that Johnson keep his headquarters with the Army of Tennessee, overseeing operations and using Bragg as his organizer and administrator.⁶⁴ Johnson refused, believing that no army could have two commanders.

Meanwhile, Bragg's report on the Battle of Murfreesboro had reached Richmond. He had criticized some of his Generals, including Breckinridge and Cheatham, enraging their supporters in congress. This, together with Johnston's reluctance to relieve Bragg, finally drove President Davis to order Johnston to assume command of the Army of Tennessee and send Bragg to Richmond. Johnston, still not desiring Bragg's command, stalled. On 19 March he wrote Davis that Bragg's wife was sick, and the time was not right to relieve Bragg. By the time Mrs. Bragg was better, Johnston was bedridden. He wrote Davis on 10 April that "I am not now able to serve in the field. General Bragg is therefore necessary here." Davis did not pursue the issue. If Johnston did not take the command, the only other option was General Beauregard, who Davis despised. Preferring the status quo to Beauregard, Davis left Bragg in command of the Army of Tennessee.⁶⁵

The Western Theater

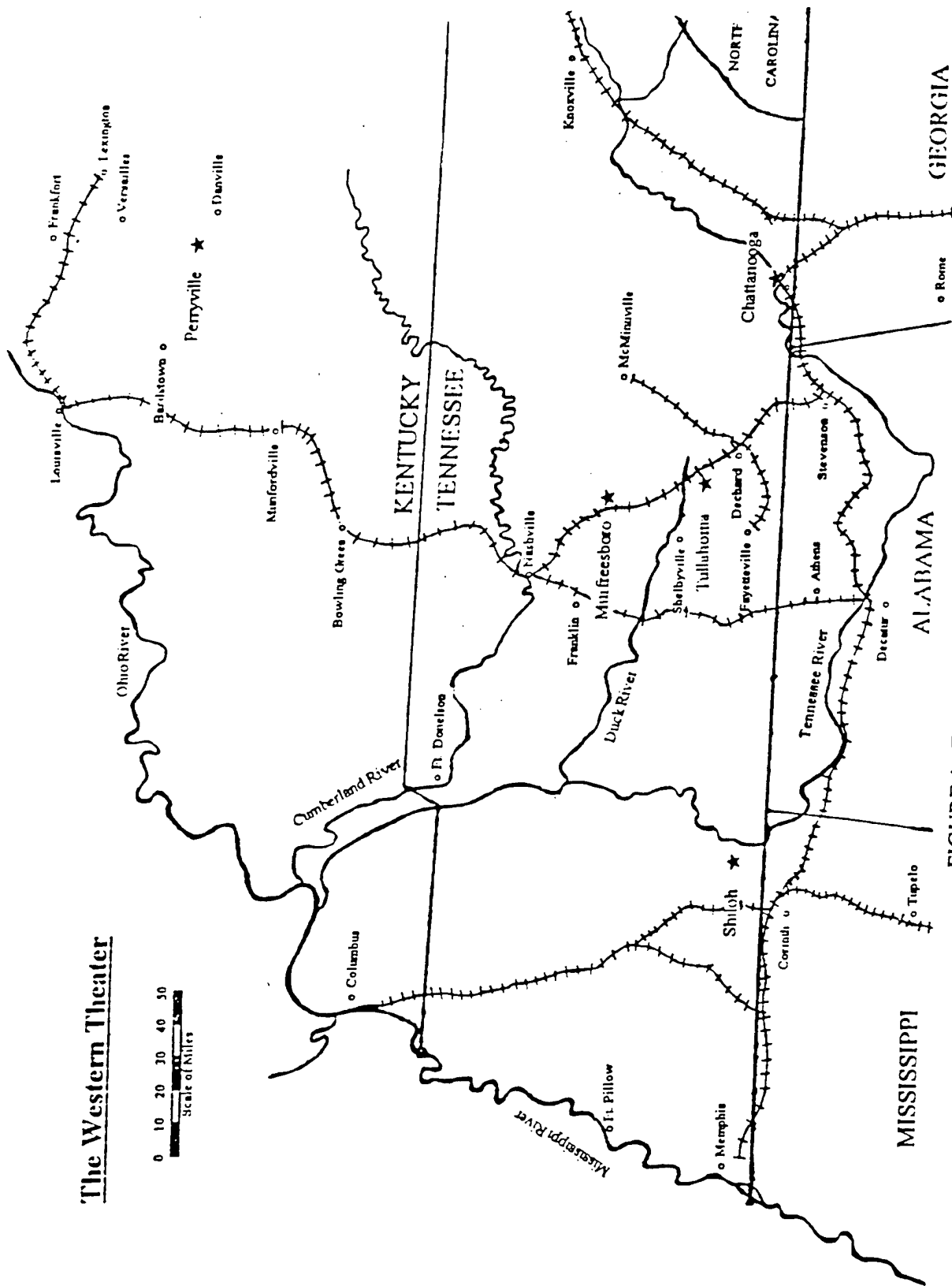
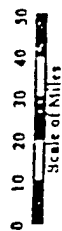


FIGURE 1. THE WESTERN THEATER

¹Grady McWhiney, Braxton Bragg and the Confederate Defeat (New York : Columbia University Press, 1969), 157-203.

²The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies 128 vols. (Washington : Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, volume 10, part 2, p.338, 371,373 (hereafter cited as OR, and unless otherwise indicated all references are to Series 1); and Bragg to Wife, 25 March 1862, Bixby collection of Bragg papers, quoted in McWhiney, 215; and McWhiney, 157-203; and Nathaniel C. Hughes, General William Hardee, Old Reliable (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 99; and James Lee McDonough, Shiloh, in Hell Before Night (Knoxville : University of Tennessee Press, 1977) 16.

³McWhiney, 235-245; and Hughes, 99, 109, 114; and McDonough, 138-139, 148-150, 169-170; and OR, 10 (part 1),466.

⁴McWhiney, 253-260; and OR, 17 (part 2),627.

⁵OR, 10 (part 1),781; and OR, 17 (part 2),628, 636.

⁶Richard J. Brewer, "The Tullahoma Campaign" (MMAS Thesis, U.S. Army Command and Staff College, 1991), 46; and Thomas Lawrence Connelly, Autumn of Glory (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 21; and McDonough, 70; and Hughes, 99.

⁷Brewer, 47.

⁸Brewer, 44; and McDonough, 70.

⁹Brewer, 45; and McDonough, 79; and OR, 10 (part 2), 339-340.

¹⁰Sam Watkins, Co. Aytch (New York: Collier, 1962), 56-58.

¹¹OR, 10 (part 1),781.

¹²Bragg to Wife, 22 July 1862, Bixby collection of Bragg papers, quoted in McWhiney, 266.

¹³OR, 16 (part 2), 680,695,701,709; and OR, 17 (part 2), 656; and Hughes, 121.

¹⁴OR, 52 (part 2), 330; and McWhiney, 268-271; and Hughes, 120.

¹⁵McWhiney, 272-273.

¹⁶OR, 17 (part 2), 627-628, 654-55, 673; and McWhiney, 275, 278.

¹⁷OR, 17 (part 2), 667 -668.

¹⁸McWhiney, 281.

- ¹⁹McWhiney, 290-295; and Hughes 123-124.
- ²⁰OR, 16 (part 2), 896-897; and McWhiney, 300.
- ²¹OR, 16 (part 2), 896-897; and McWhiney, 301-302.
- ²²Anderson to Bragg, 15 April 1863, Palmer Collection of Bragg Papers, quoted in McWhiney, 306; and Hughes, 124-125.
- ²³OR, 16 (part 1), 1094-1095.
- ²⁴Connelly, 88; and McWhiney, 307.
- ²⁵McWhiney, 305.
- ²⁶OR, 16 (part 2), 912.
- ²⁷Col. Brent's Memoranda, 6 October 1862, quoted in McWhiney, 309; and McWhiney, 312; and OR, 16 (part 1), 1095-1099; and Hughes, 126-128.
- ²⁸OR, 16 (part 1), 1095; and McWhiney, 312; and Hughes, 128.
- ²⁹McWhiney, 319-320; and Hughes, 131, 133.
- ³⁰McWhiney, 323-325; and Hughes, 135.
- ³¹OR, 16 (part 1), 1094.
- ³²McWhiney, 334.
- ³³Brent Diary, 2 November 1862, quoted in McWhiney, 326.
- ³⁴Connelly, 22-23; and McWhiney, 327; and Hardee to W. P. Johnston, 19 November 1862, quoted in Hughes, 134.
- ³⁵Davis to Smith, 29 October 1862, E. Kirby Smith Papers, Duke University, quoted in McWhiney, 328.
- ³⁶Jackson to "Dear Frank", 7 November 1862, Charles Colock Jones papers, Duke University, quoted in McWhiney, 331.
- ³⁷OR, 20 (part 2), 394; and McWhiney, 337.
- ³⁸Connelly, 23; and OR, 20 (part 2), 422; and McWhiney, 338.
- ³⁹Connelly, 32; and McWhiney, 339.
- ⁴⁰McWhiney, 340.

⁴¹Johnson to Wigfall, 15 December 1862, Wigfall Family Papers, University of Texas, quoted in McWhiney, 344.

⁴²OR, 20 (part 2), 441,493; and McWhiney, 345.

⁴³Connelly, 47; and OR, 20 (part 1), 663; and McWhiney, 347; and Hughes, 140.

⁴⁴Connelly, 52; and Brent's Diary, 30 December 1862, quoted in McWhiney, 349.

⁴⁵OR, 20 (part 2), 469.

⁴⁶Connelly, 54-56, 59; and OR, 20 (part 1), 783; and McWhiney, 358-359; and Hughes, 144.

⁴⁷Connelly, 62; and McWhiney, 362.

⁴⁸Hughes, 145.

⁴⁹OR, 20 (part 1), 700.

⁵⁰Connelly, 67; and OR, 20 (part 1), 682,683; and McWhiney, 371; and Hughes, 145.

⁵¹Richmond Examiner, 6 January 1863, Younger,ed., Kean Diary. p.38-42, quoted in McWhiney, 375.

⁵²Connelly, 79; and Brent's Diary, 10 January 1863, quoted in McWhiney, 376; and Bragg to Clay, 10 January 1863, Clement Claiburne Clay Papers, Duke University, quoted in McWhiney, 376.

⁵³OR, 20 (part 1), 699.

⁵⁴OR, 20 (part 1), 683; and Hughes, 147-148.

⁵⁵Connelly, 75-76; and OR, 20 (part 1), 701.

⁵⁶OR, 20 (part 1), 698.

⁵⁷Bragg to Jackson, 24 January 1863, Jackson-Mckinney Papers , Southern Historical Collection,University of North Carolina, quoted in McWhiney, 376.

⁵⁸Connelly, 77; and OR, 23 (part 2), 613-614.

⁵⁹Connelly, 79-80; and OR, 23 (part 2), 633-634.

⁶⁰Connelly, 73; and McWhiney, 382.

⁶¹Connelly, 80; and Bragg to Ewell, February 27,1863, Benjamin S. Ewell Papers ,

Henry E. Huntington Library, quoted in McWhiney, 384.

⁶²OR, 23 (part 2), 640-641.

⁶³OR, 23 (part 2), 640-641.

⁶⁴OR, 23 (part 2), 627; and McWhiney, 385.

⁶⁵Connelly, 80-86; and OR, 23 (part 2), 708, 745; and McWhiney, 387.

CHAPTER 3

JUNE-SEPTEMBER 1863

Tullahoma

June 1863 saw the Army of Tennessee in the Duck River defenses they had occupied after the battle at Murfreesboro. Believing himself badly outnumbered by Major General Rosecrans' Union forces, Bragg had decided against an offensive and awaited the enemy's next move. Bragg's position was not strong. In January Hardee had warned him that "from the nature of the country, our flanks can be turned . . . I see no advantages in this position which can compensate for superiority of numbers." This advice was sound, but with the Tennessee River was only forty miles to his rear Bragg had a limited amount of space in which to choose a defensive position. The Tullahoma positions allowed him to keep his army between Rosecrans and Chattanooga, astride the main avenue of approach.¹

The Confederates were spread out over fifty miles in an attempt to block all the Union approaches to Chattanooga. Fifteen miles north of the Confederate Duck River line Rosecrans' 82,000 men held Murfreesboro. Between the two armies ran high ground with a series of gaps through which the Union troops would have to move in an attack, and through which ran the principal roads and railroads connecting Chattanooga and Murfreesboro. Ten miles to the rear of Bragg's line ran the Elk River. Bragg's center was in Tullahoma, midway between the two rivers and astride the main pike and railway from Chattanooga.² (See Figure 2.)

The terrain offered Rosecrans many routes to flank or bypass the Confederate defenses. The Confederate right flank was McMinnville. An advance on the Murfreesboro-McMinnville pike, then south to Jasper on the Tennessee River, would completely bypass Bragg's right flank and cut the Confederates off from Chattanooga. More threatening was the route from Murfreesboro

through Hoover's Gap or Liberty Gap to Manchester on the Confederate right center. From Manchester, ten miles east of Tullahoma and south of the Duck River, Rosecrans could move directly on Bragg's base at Tullahoma, continue south to Jasper, or seize the crossroads towns of Decherd and Cowan ten miles to the Confederate rear. Any of these moves would isolate Bragg from Chattanooga and the Tennessee River. Bragg's left center was anchored on Shelbyville and faced Guy's and Bellbuckle Gaps. A Union sortie there would threaten to turn the Confederate left. Further left the Union had the option of bypassing the high ground and gaps completely by moving in a wide envelopment through Columbia, the Confederate far left flank and principal forage area. Thus, in order to protect the rail and road connections with Chattanooga, Bragg was forced to guard against Union flanking maneuvers along an extended front, while concentrating his main force in the center against the most dangerous approaches via Guy's, Bellbuckle, Liberty and Hoover's Gaps.³

Bragg assigned his far left wing to Bedford Forrest's cavalry. Leonidas Polk's Corps defended the left center from entrenched positions at Shelbyville. Brigadier General Martin's Cavalry Division of Wheeler's Corps guarded Guy's Gap two miles north of Polk. In the right center, at Tullahoma and Wartrace, Hardee's Corps prepared entrenchments at Tullahoma astride the approaches from Manchester and Wartrace. Wharton's Cavalry Division covered Liberty and Hoover's Gaps, to Hardee's right front. The Confederate far right at McMinnville was picketed by two cavalry divisions under Wheeler. Bragg had a total of 38,000 effectives manning his line.⁴

Johnston and Bragg had agreed that the enemy's most likely course of action was to advance through Manchester or McMinnville, exposing his flank to attack from the army at Tullahoma. Colonel Johnston, aide to Jefferson Davis, was told in March by General Johnston that it was not the intent to await attack in Tullahoma: "They believe that Rosecrans will attempt to pass our flank, most probably our right flank; in which case we could go out and attack him." Colonel Johnston also noted that though the attack was expected on the right, the greater part of the Army of Tennessee was on the left.

Bragg envisioned Hardee holding the main Union attack from the Tullahoma positions while Polk attacked an exposed Union flank. Hardee appeared to understand the plan, though in January, preferring a position further south at Decherd, he had advised Bragg that the plan was unwise, as Rosecrans could easily flank Tullahoma on the right and gain the Confederate rear. By June Hardee's understanding was that he was not to contest an advance on Manchester and the Confederate right through Hoover's Gap but was to fall back to Tullahoma, and he insured all his division commanders had reconnoitered and prepared routes to Tullahoma. He therefore guarded Hoover's Gap with a single cavalry regiment. The nearest infantry was a brigade from Stewart's Division three miles south. On 5 June Hardee reported to Bragg that he was not planning to conduct a stubborn defense of Hoover's Gap: "The dispositions of my forces were made with the belief we should fight at Tullahoma . . . If it is your intention to fight elsewhere, other dispositions should be made." Polk, as events would show, was apparently unaware of his role in the plan.⁵

Throughout the spring Bragg was uncertain of Rosecrans' intentions. Reports from Confederate scouts were confusing, some indicating that Union troops were leaving Murfreesboro enroute to Grant at Vicksburg, while others reported that the Union forces were preparing to advance. On 2 June Bragg ordered a reconnaissance in force by both corps in order to gain accurate information. Once again results proved puzzling. Hardee reported that twenty-four Union regiments had departed Murfreesboro, while Forrest reported forty carloads of reinforcements arriving. By 6 June, however, prisoners had confirmed that Rosecrans was preparing to advance, and Polk and Hardee returned to their positions. This pullback, coupled with weak Confederate cavalry, broke contact with the Union forces and Bragg was once again left with no solid intelligence on Rosecrans' movements. Bragg maintained his focus on the center, relying on Wheeler's cavalry to guard the approaches to his right via Hoover's Gap and McMinnville.⁶

Bragg had been unwell since May. On 22 June he wrote Johnston in Mississippi :

Since parting with you I have at no time been well enough until now to say I was fit for duty . . . those boils, instead of indicating returning health, was only the precursor of a general breakdown. Indeed, the long-continued excitement of mind and

body to which . . . I have been subjected, on private as well as public subjects, well nigh prostrated me . . . but I am well again.⁷

Rosecrans Attacks

On 22 June Wheeler left Hoover's Gap in search of enemy reported further left at Liberty Gap, leaving one cavalry regiment at Hoover's. On the rainy morning of 24 June Federal forces surged into Hoover's Gap. Stewart unsuccessfully counterattacked with his forward brigade, but by evening Union troops held the gap and were poised to push on to Manchester. That evening Hardee, based on his understanding of Bragg's plan, ordered Stewart not to contest a Union advance on Manchester, but if hard pressed to fall back to the rest of the corps at Wartrace. By midday 26 June Stewart had fallen back, and on the morning of 27 June Rosecrans had seized Manchester and outflanked Bragg's Duck River line.⁸

Bragg, at Shelbyville, knew little of this. He received few communications from Stewart or Hardee, and Wheeler's reports from north of Liberty Gap led him to believe the main Union thrust would be directed against the left at Shelbyville. One of Bragg's staff officers was with Stewart, but chose to stay and fight at Hoover's Gap rather than return to his general with a report. On 25 June Liddell's brigade was attacked at Liberty Gap, to the front of Shelbyville. With no news from Hardee on his right flank, this confirmed Bragg's reading of the threat at Shelbyville. On the afternoon of 26 June Bragg ordered Polk to execute his flank attack, moving through Guy's Gap and striking the flank and rear of the Federal force at Liberty Gap. Polk protested that the terrain was a "man trap" and the plan unworkable, but was overruled.⁹

By late afternoon on the 26th Bragg finally heard from Stewart and learned of the grave danger to his right flank. Stewart reported that a corps sized Union force had penetrated Hoover's Gap and threatened Wartrace and Manchester. Realizing that the Union flanking maneuver around the right threatened his forces north of the Duck River, Bragg canceled Polk's attack at 11 P.M. and ordered both corps to move south of the Duck and occupy the defenses at Tullahoma. The continuing rain and mud slowed the Confederate withdrawal and Union pursuit, and most of

the Confederate infantry safely closed on Tullahoma by the morning of 28 June. Bragg wired Richmond: "the line of Shelbyville being too long to be held successfully by my force, I today resumed my position in my entrenchments at this place to await the full developments."¹⁰

That night Brigadier General Liddell, having withdrawn to Tullahoma, went to see Bragg. Bragg was unwell, suffering from diarrhea, but determined to fight at Tullahoma. Liddell pointed out the disadvantages of the position and recommended a withdrawal to the mountains. Struck by Bragg's determination to fight, Liddell returned to camp and related the conversation to one of his subordinates, Colonel Govan. Govan replied, "No, General, he will not fight here." Liddell repeated that Bragg had "positively asserted" that he would fight. When Liddell was ordered to withdraw two days later, he was "so astonished that I could hardly be made to believe it. Yet it was true. What all this indecision of Bragg meant I could hardly understand."¹¹

By 29 June the Army of Tennessee was in serious trouble. The Elk River to the rear was rising and unfordable. Of the three bridges across the Elk, one was in Union hands and two were in danger of being seized. On 28 June Federal cavalry had raided Decherd south of the Elk, damaging the main Chattanooga rail line and temporarily cutting Bragg off from Chattanooga.¹²

That morning Bragg informed Polk that he intended to stay and fight from Tullahoma. Polk disagreed, arguing that to stay and fight from a flanked position would be disastrous. At 3 P.M. Polk returned with Hardee and continued to argue for a retreat. Polk insisted that Bragg could not protect his line of communication with Chattanooga, and being cut off would necessitate a circuitous retreat, without provisions, and result in Union seizure of Chattanooga. Polk recommended immediate retreat to avoid being cut off. Bragg continued to insist on fighting from Tullahoma and claimed Wheeler's cavalry would protect the line of communication. Hardee listened, and upon learning that the railroad at Decherd was not seriously damaged, stated he thought it was too early to retreat. The Confederates remained that night at Tullahoma.¹³

Throughout the evening of 29 June and morning of the 30th Bragg received reports of strong Union forces along his right flank and in his rear. Threatened with loss of his bridges Bragg

finally ordered a retreat south of the Elk river. By 1 July the Confederates were in defensive positions along the south bank of the Elk.¹⁴

With the Elk river now falling, Bragg realized it was only a matter of days until Rosecrans could once again pass the Confederate right flank and cut off the avenue of retreat at Decherd or Cowan. Yet Bragg reported to Richmond that the Elk was a stronger position than Tullahoma and that he had lost "nothing of importance" in the retreat.¹⁵

Seemingly unsure what to do, Bragg on 1 July asked his corps commander's opinions on further retreat. Polk recommended further retreat to Cowan, where the Army could make a stand with its back to the mountains. Hardee, prior to receiving Bragg's request for advice, wrote Polk of his anxiety:

I have been thinking seriously of the condition of affairs with this army. I deeply regret to see General Bragg in his present enfeebled state of health. If we have a fight, he is evidently unable to either examine and determine his line of battle or to take command on the field. What shall we do? What is best to save this army and its honor? I think we should counsel together. . . . When can we meet?

Later, after receiving and answering Bragg's request for advice, Hardee once again wrote Polk:

I have answered unhesitatingly, "Let us fight at the mountain." This decision will render unnecessary the meeting which I sought tonight; we can talk about the matter tomorrow. I do not desire that anyone but yourself and Buckner should know my anxiety. My mind is in part relieved by the decision, which I have no doubt will be made, to fight at the mountain.

On 2 July Bragg ordered the move to Cowan. That afternoon, as his Corps were preparing line of battle at the foot of the mountains, Bragg ordered further retreat back to Chattanooga-without consulting his corps commanders.¹⁶

Bragg's report to Richmond on 3 July was short: "Unable to obtain a general engagement without sacrificing my communications, I have, after a series of skirmishes, withdrawn the army to this river. It is now coming down the mountains. I hear of no formidable pursuit." He laid out his reasons for retreating across the Tennessee in a longer letter to Johnston. After describing how he was flanked out of Tullahoma, Bragg described the situation at Cowan:

We were now back against the mountains, in a country affording us nothing, with a long line of railroad to protect and half a dozen passes on the right and left by which our rear could

be gained. In this position it was perfectly practicable for the enemy to destroy our means of crossing the Tennessee, and thus secure our ultimate destruction without a battle . . . I reluctantly yielded to the necessity imposed by my position and inferior strength, and put the army in motion for the Tennessee River."¹⁷

In little more than a week Rosecrans had maneuvered Bragg out of Tennessee. The physical damage to both armies was light, and Bragg had managed to get most of his troops and equipment over the river. Despite his earlier recommendation to fight at Cowan, Polk reported to Jefferson Davis that he had supported Bragg's decision: "Of our falling back to this place I have to say I thought it judicious, and advised it. It was accomplished in good order, and without loss." Bragg's opinion was that the movement had been accomplished with "trifling loss of men and materials."¹⁸

Chattanooga

Rosecrans halted his pursuit at Decherd, north of the Tennessee River, and the Army of the Tennessee took up new positions around Chattanooga. Bragg faced a formidable tactical problem. Chattanooga was the logistics hub of the Army of Tennessee, and through it passed trains loaded with supplies needed throughout the Confederacy. From the west ran the main rail line to north Alabama, and to the east ran the line connecting Chattanooga to Atlanta, East Tennessee, and Virginia. Loss of Chattanooga would cut Confederate access to the copper, saltpeter and grain of Tennessee, the nitre mines of Alabama, and threaten the munitions factories of Georgia. Bragg's task was to retain control of this lifeline while dealing a blow to the Federal army. Rosecrans' task was to deceive Bragg long enough to gain a strong foothold south of the river.¹⁹

Holding Chattanooga would be difficult. Though the Union army lay north of the broad Tennessee River, there were numerous crossing sites. The terrain on both sides of the river was complex, consisting of a series of long mountains running southwest to northeast with interspersed ridges, creeks and valleys. The ground allowed Rosecrans to shield his movements north of the river and forced Bragg to stand watch along an extended front.

North of the Tennessee River, to the Confederate front and right, ran Walden's Ridge, paralleled by a stretch of the Cumberland Mountains several miles to the west. They formed a dual barrier of 2400 foot ridges between the two armies. Between these mountains and running to the Tennessee River at Jasper lay the Sequatchie River valley. Any Union approach here would have to cross these wide and barren ridges, a task made more difficult by the scarce roads. Once across the river, however, the terrain on the Confederate right promised easy going west to Chattanooga or south towards Rome.

The terrain on the Confederate left promised an easier approach to the Tennessee River, but south of the river the Union forces would have to contend with a series of ridges and valleys that would favor energetic defenders. Just west of Chattanooga was Lookout Mountain, rising from the river at Lookout Point and running eighty miles to the southwest. Batteries at Lookout Point could dominate any attempt to cross immediately in front of Chattanooga, and the ridge formed a barrier to any attempt at flanking Chattanooga from the west. Fifteen miles west of Lookout Mountain lay the Sand/Raccoon Mountain range, running for Fifty miles along the south bank of the river and separated from Lookout Mountain by Lookout Valley. This ground, with rugged ridges and few roads, promised slow and difficult movement for an attacking force. It was excellent defensive terrain, if the Confederates were able to identify a crossing here in time to mass their force. Should Rosecrans pass the Raccoon/Sand Mountains undetected, however, he could move quickly down Lookout and Will's Valley towards Rome and the Confederate rear, leaving Bragg's army isolated in Chattanooga.

All told, the armies faced each other along a hundred and fifty mile front, containing over twenty-five possible river crossing sites. To be successful Bragg would have to anticipate Rosecrans' movement in time to collect adequate combat power from his extended front and concentrate it at the decisive point.²⁰

Defense of Chattanooga

Bragg kept Polk's Corps concentrated in Chattanooga, and spread out Hill's Corps and the cavalry to watch the river. On the right flank Forrest's Cavalry Corps and Hill's infantry covered the river north of Chattanooga, extended along the south bank to Loudon and tasked with watching almost 100 miles of river front. Wheeler's two Cavalry Divisions covered the left flank west of Chattanooga. Ordered to guard the fords west of town, by late August Wheeler had sent his badly depleted divisions seventy miles south to refit and recruit, leaving only two regiments to watch over the river south of Chattanooga. The only infantry on the left flank was a single brigade of Polk's Corps at Bridgeport, watching the crossings opposite Raccoon Mountain. Buckner remained well northeast at Knoxville, Tennessee guarding against a move by Major General Burnside's 35,000 federal troops.²¹

Bragg positioned no significant force north of the Tennessee River, though he had noted in July that a small force on Walden's Ridge could bombard the defenders out of Chattanooga. With no force north of the river to report on Union movement and a weak left flank the Army of Tennessee awaited Rosecrans' advance. In July Polk had proposed an alternative course of action to a receptive Jefferson Davis, recommending troops be sent from Johnston and Buckner for a concentrated attack on Rosecrans, under Johnston's command. On 5 August Bragg reported to Davis that even with reinforcements from Johnston and Buckner he would not have sufficient force to move against the enemy in middle Tennessee, but "whenever he shall be present on this side of the mountains the problem will be solved." Davis backed off, remarking to the secretary of war that "however desirable a movement may be, it is never safe to do more than suggest it to a commanding general, and it would be unwise to order its execution by one who foretold failure."²²

Reorganization

July and August saw significant changes in the leadership of the Army of Tennessee. Hardee was ordered by Richmond to relinquish command of Second Corps and report to General Johnston in Mississippi. This move deprived Bragg of his best corps commander. Hardee, unlike

Polk. was a professional soldier and had built a disciplined, well trained corps. He was popular with his men, and despite his personal and professional opinions of Bragg had never failed to give his best effort in combat.²³

On 18 July Lieutenant General Daniel Harvey Hill arrived at Chattanooga to replace Hardee as Second Corps commander. D. H. Hill had served in Mexico with Bragg, and fought for General Lee in the first two years of the war. In Virginia Hill had proven a capable and brave officer, but his propensity to clash with his superiors and fellow officers had led to a falling out with Lee. Hill's character mirrored Bragg's: temperamental, sometimes gloomy, irritable and quick to point out flaws in his fellow officers. Not surprisingly relations between Hill and Bragg steadily deteriorated, though Hill, years later, claimed he arrived at Chattanooga determined to fully support his commander: "My sympathies had all been with Bragg. I knew of the carping criticisms of his subordinates and the cold looks of his soldiers, and knew that these were the natural results of reverses, whether the blame lay with the commander or otherwise." As a pre-war acquaintance of Bragg and a veteran of the eastern army, Hill's opinion of conditions in the Army of Tennessee are revealing, though perhaps colored by later disputes between the men:

My interview with General Bragg at Chattanooga was not satisfactory. He was silent and seemed gloomy and despondent. He had grown prematurely old since I saw him last, and showed much nervousness . . . the want of information at General Bragg's headquarters was in striking contrast with the minute knowledge General Lee had of every operation in his front, and I was most painfully impressed with the feeling that it was to be a hap-hazard campaign on our part.²⁴

Hill's division commanders were Cleburne and, by late August, Breckinridge. Both had been "Anti-Bragg" men in the spring. Thus, Second Corps had division commanders who wished to see Bragg replaced and a new commander so disagreeable that he had been unable to maintain an amicable relationship even with General Lee.²⁵

Polk retained First Corps, but lost one of his experienced division commanders, Major General Withers, and on 13 August was assigned Major General Thomas C. Hindman as a replacement. Hindman was an ex-congressman from Arkansas with political ties to Jefferson Davis and a reputation for a fiery temper. A fellow congressman noted Hindman seemed

"perpetually ready to have a duel." The thirty-five-year-old Hindman had served in Mexico, and as a brigade commander under Hardee in the Trans-Mississippi department and at Shiloh. Hindman had acquitted himself well at Shiloh, and was wounded on the first day. Upon recovery from his wound he was assigned to Arkansas, where he became unpopular with many citizens and conscripts due to his stern measures in support of the war effort. After a mediocre effort as commander at the battle of Prairie Grove in late 1862 he was at his request assigned administrative duties. With a penchant for ruffled shirts and patent leather boots the 5 foot 1 inch Hindman cut a flamboyant figure. One of his closest friends was Patrick Cleburne, who in 1856 was wounded defending Hindman in a political brawl. Under Cleburne's influence Hindman quickly fell in with the anti-Bragg group.²⁶

In early August Major General Simon Bolivar Buckner, commander of the Department of East Tennessee was assigned as Bragg's Third Corps commander. Relations between Bragg and Buckner had been on the decline due to a continuing and confusing series of departmental reorganizations. On 25 July the War Department had merged Buckner's Department of East Tennessee with Bragg's Department of Tennessee, and both Buckner and Bragg were unclear on who maintained administrative control of Buckner's department and troops. Richmond failed to clarify the matter, abolishing and then reestablishing Buckner's department, and allowing Buckner to communicate directly with Richmond while subordinate to Bragg.²⁷

On 11 August Buckner wrote the War Department, asking that he either be relieved of administrative duties and allowed to concentrate on being a corps commander, or be recognized as a department commander. Richmond failed to clarify matters when on 28 August it reestablished Buckner's department and his administrative responsibilities, while subordinating him to Bragg for strategic operations. Despite the fact that Buckner had agreed in May that a "single mind" should control both departments, the lack of a clear division of responsibility caused increasing friction. In late August Bragg exercised what he saw as his right as army commander to reorganize some of Buckner's units. Buckner held that since he was required to retain administrative responsibilities

only he had authority over his East Tennessee troops. Over the next few months this disagreement over authority would grow into a personal feud between Buckner and Bragg.²⁸

Buckner arrived in Georgia with a single small division, commanded by Major General William Preston. Preston had served under Breckinridge in the spring and shared his animosity towards Bragg. Months later Preston wrote a friend of his dissatisfaction at once again being in Bragg's army: "I have a dull future before me with Bragg-no approval or praise if I win, ruin and censure if I lose. I intend to get away if I can." On 1 September Buckner received a second division, that of A. P. Stewart from Second Corps.²⁹

Bragg was still not in good health. On July 22 he wrote General R.E. Lee:

For two months my health has been anything but good. Long continued and excessive labor of mind and body have produced its natural result on a frame not robust at best. Were it possible I would seek some repose, but at present I see no hope. Should affairs here allow it, I propose spending a part of my time at Ringold, Ga., 20 miles off . . . where there is mineral water highly recommended for me.

Bragg did spend some time at Ringold, resting and visiting his wife, also unwell. He returned to Chattanooga on the day Rosecrans struck.³⁰

Maneuvered out of Chattanooga

21 August 1863 was designated a Confederate day of prayer. At 9 A.M. the services in Chattanooga were interrupted by a surprise Union bombardment from across the river. By evening Bragg had received numerous reports of Union movement on his left, including a pontoon bridge and troops at Jasper, a brigade of infantry across the river from Raccoon Mountain and others opposite Lookout Point. Bragg sent a message to Johnston, in Mississippi, requesting reinforcements and indicating the threat seemed to be to his left: "Rosecrans' and Burnside both moving on us in force. Artillery fired on the town today across the river; preparing to cross below. If able to assist do so promptly." Johnston dispatched the divisions of Breckinridge and Walker, reminding Bragg "This is a loan to be promptly returned."³¹

Over the next two days Union activity was reported on the right, along with continuing action on the left. Federal brigades were reported north of the river opposite Hiwassee Creek, thirty miles north of Chattanooga. On 22 August, with the enemy's plan still unclear, Bragg's chief of staff W. W. Mackall informed Hill of Bragg's intentions:

General plan is to await developments of the enemy and when his point of attack is ascertained, to neglect all smaller affairs and fall on him with our whole force . . . he further instructs me to say that he hopes you will at all times, in person or by letter, give him any suggestion that may occur to you . . . you cannot, general, offend even by importunity.³²

Buckner, still facing Burnside at Knoxville, was in need of similar instructions. On 21 August he had written Mackall in search of orders:

I have not been advised of any point of concentration, any plan of operation, or of any line of march or of conduct to pursue with a view to sustaining a general attack. Am I to infer . . . that I am not to look to any concerted action with the rest of the army, but am thrown entirely on my own resources to defend this portion of the department without reference to combined efforts? . . . Please answer.³³

Buckner was not the only one seeking information. On 22 August Jefferson Davis had asked Bragg his plan. Bragg's reply on 23 August was not reassuring: "We have batteries in all suitable positions, but cannot save this town."³⁴ Bragg would not risk another Vicksburg. Concentrating against Rosecrans' attack would necessitate the temporary evacuation of Chattanooga.

On 23 August Buckner provided Bragg with much needed information on Rosecrans' movements. Buckner reported that his scouts had learned Rosecrans would cross the Tennessee river above Hiwassee, on Bragg's right, and that Burnside would join Rosecrans' left wing at Loudon. Buckner proposed a course of action: "By cooperating with you we may effect something against Rosecrans before junction of their armies. I will endeavor to hold my troops in position to do this, and if facts develop as I now believe I will constitute the right of your army."³⁵

Armed with Buckner's information, by the evening of 23 August Bragg had determined Rosecrans planned to cross north of Chattanooga, against the Confederate right. Hill, Polk, and Buckner agreed, and Bragg took moves to concentrate his front. Bragg ordered Buckner to fall

back to Loudon, south of the river, and Polk's infantry on the left was ordered to pull back to Wauhatchie, just west of Lookout Point, and picket the river from there to Chattanooga. Wheeler's weakened cavalry retained responsibility for all crossings west of Wauhatchie. By 25 August Union activity virtually ceased. It appeared Rosecrans was waiting for Burnside's arrival.³⁶

On 28 August reports of Federal movements increased. A citizen reported to Bragg that Rosecrans had his headquarters at Jasper, opposite the Confederate left, but was moving his army up the Sequatchie valley to cross Walden's Ridge. With no crossings reported below Chattanooga, this appeared to indicate a move against the right. Bragg maintained his strategy of concentrating his forces in preparation for an attack on the main enemy force. On 29 August he instructed Hill to make disposition of the arriving divisions of Breckinridge and Walker. "keeping in view a concentration at the earliest moment at such point as the enemy may cross."³⁷

On 30 August word reached Bragg that Wheeler's pickets on the left had been driven in and an undetermined number of Union troops were approaching Trenton, in Lookout Valley. At the same time Bragg received information from Hill detailing the location of all three of Rosecrans' corps, still indicating that the Union effort would be against Bragg's right. According to Hill, Crittenden's Corps was reported on Walden's Ridge moving towards Hiwassee, Thomas' Corps had been at Bridgeport but was now following Crittenden, and McCook's Corps was spread out to the west of Chattanooga. This seemed to explain away the reports of activity on the left, and Bragg and his commanders continued to believe that the threat was on the right. Mindful of reports from the left but expecting the main attack on his right, Bragg further concentrated his forces, pulling Buckner and Forrest back to Hiwassee, placing Hill between Hiwassee and Chattanooga, and leaving Polk in Chattanooga. The left flank remained virtually unguarded.³⁸

On 30 August Bragg cabled his assessment of the situation to Richmond: "Enemy's forces are apparently moving for a union or within supporting distance on the other side of the river. Against this we can not possibly hold our long line . . . We shall accordingly concentrate as far as necessary in front of our supplies."³⁹

On the evening of 31 August a citizen found Bragg and reported that a large Federal force had crossed the Tennessee River at Caperton's Ferry on the Confederate left, moved across Sand Mountain and entered Lookout Valley. Wheeler, who was just getting his cavalry back into position on the left, confirmed that Rosecrans had moved across Sand Mountain, reached Trenton on the 30th, and that there was a large force of Union cavalry in Lookout Valley. By 1 September it was clear that a large Union force had crossed the Tennessee west of Chattanooga. Mackall informed Polk "Enemy reported to have crossed to Trenton from Caperton's ferry," and ordered Wheeler to verify the size and location of the enemy force.⁴⁰

Bragg held his position over the next few days, trying to sort out the movements. On 2 September he sent a situation report to Secretary of War Seddon:

Rosecrans' main force has crossed the Tennessee below Bridgeport opposite Stevenson. He is 60 miles from us, with two ranges of barren mountains interposed. Unable to hold so long a line, without sacrificing my force in detail, Buckner has been drawn this way as to insure a junction at any time. Burnside was 60 miles from Knoxville at last accounts. We shall assail either party, or both, whenever practicable.⁴¹

Bragg knew he had a large force moving on his left, but Wheeler's cavalry had not been able to confirm the size and movements. On 2 September Mackall chided Wheeler for his ineffectiveness: "I am uneasy about the state of affairs. It is so vitally important that the general should have full information . . . The passage at Caperton's ferry broke the line and a week has passed and we dont know whether or not an army has passed." Wheeler responded by ordering Wharton's Cavalry Division to picket the passes through Lookout Mountain and sending one brigade to Alpine to guard the main road from Caperton's Ferry where it exited Lookout Mountain. He sent Martin's division to Dalton, away from the enemy, to seek forage. On 3 September Wheeler reported that an estimated 40,000 Union infantry had crossed Sand Mountain.⁴²

Hill believed Rosecrans planned to move northeast against Chattanooga, then join with Burnside. On 3 September he took Bragg up on his earlier request for advice, and offered an assessment of the Union intent, along with a plea for action:

If the Yankees have really crossed in force at Caperton's, it seems to me plain that the movement is for Chattanooga, in order to secure the railroad . . . They will work their way up Will's Valley until they get in position to drive us from Chattanooga. They have evidently spared Chattanooga with the view of using it hereafter; otherwise they would destroy the town and depot.

I cannot but think that Burnside will be left in some secure place above with his infantry, while his cavalry hold the railroad until Rosecrans secures his end of it. They will then be in condition to hold the country, bring in their supplies, operate among the disloyal portions of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. This is, I think, the programme. The great object is East Tennessee. I have no idea that a movement of infantry will be made against Atlanta. The mounted men will be put upon that work. Rosecrans will avoid battle till Grant is ready to move. The whole Yankee policy for some time has been that of combined movement. They have had one controlling mind, while we have had no combinations whatever. If we cannot get a fight from Rosecrans before Grant shall move, Johnston will want help and another retreat becomes inevitable.

I know the country too imperfectly and have too little confidence in my own judgment to counsel any particular course of action, but I have felt so uneasy about the delay that I cannot refrain from expressing my anxiety. If we wait until the meshes be thrown around, we may find it hard to break through. If it ever becomes practicable for us to take the initiative at any time, we would thereby as effectually frustrate Rosecrans as you did at Murfreesborough by the same course.⁴³

By 4 September Bragg had a report from his spies that shed light on Rosecrans' intentions. According to newspaper reports taken from Rosecrans' headquarters, the Union plan was for Crittenden to cross thirty miles north of Chattanooga, take the town, and in conjunction with Burnside's force entrap Buckner's Corps, preventing his junction with Bragg. McCook's and Thomas' Corps were to move south down Lookout and Will's Valleys to cut Bragg's communications at Rome, Georgia. The reports also indicated that Rosecrans believed the Confederates to be widely dispersed, with Buckner northeast of Chattanooga, Bragg near Rome and expected to move south to join Johnston in Mississippi, and only a brigade and militia manning Chattanooga. Bragg placed great confidence in this report, as it matched his own intelligence. He forwarded copies of the stories to Richmond on the 5th, adding "The movements of Buckner have frustrated one part of their plan. We shall now turn it to our advantage."⁴⁴

On 4 September Bragg ordered a brigade of Walker's newly arrived Mississippi division to Rome and answered Hill's letter of advice:

There is no doubt of the enemy's position now; one corps opposite you and two this side of the river from Shellmound by Bridgeport to Caperton's, the point of first crossing. A part of the latter are reported moving down Will's Valley toward Gadsen or perhaps Rome; Wheeler is gone to develop them and Walker goes by railroad to Rome to head them off from our communications.

Bragg followed this update with a proposal to Hill for an attack on Crittenden's Corps opposite Chattanooga:

If you can cross the river, now is our time to crush the corps opposite. What say you? Or if we could draw the enemy over. We must do something and that soon . . . The crushing of this corps would give us a great victory and redeem Tennessee. Can you be the instrument to do it? Consult Cleburne. He is cool, full of resources, and ever alive to a success. Then give me your views, or call with Cleburne and see what our resources are.⁴⁵

Cleburne agreed that "we should crush the corps opposite if we can", but questioned whether sufficient force could be gotten across the river. These practical considerations, along with a growing concern with the Union force in Lookout Valley, ended any further consideration of attacking Crittenden across the river. Liddell claims to have been present at a council of war sometime in August where Hill recommended crossing the river and moving back into Tennessee, whereupon Bragg denounced the idea as "absurd." Whether this occurred before or after Bragg suggested that very movement, it could not have improved Hill's opinion of his superior.⁴⁶

Bragg needed to know what McCook and Thomas were doing on his left; it was known a large force was moving south down Lookout and Will's Valley, but were the remaining Federals following or moving north to Chattanooga? On the evening of 5 September Wheeler, watching the Federal movements from atop Lookout Mountain, was ordered to "Without delay, move into the valley with your command, drive in the enemy's pickets, and assail him so as to develop his design, strength and position." This was to be done even at "the sacrifice of troops...the general expects a rapid movement and a prompt report."⁴⁷

Wheeler did not move "without delay", in fact he did not move at all. He responded to Bragg with a list of considerations of why the movement was not practicable, concluding that there was nothing he would find out that he could not already see from atop Lookout Mountain: "Though I conceive it to be the duty of officers generally to obey the orders to the letter, I feel that

it is also their duty to carry out the intentions of their commander, even though a departure from the strict letter of the instruction be involved." Wheeler chose to accomplish what he saw as his assigned purpose from atop the mountain, ignoring Bragg's clear intent that it be done quickly and aggressively.⁴⁸

Bragg was considering abandoning Chattanooga, and Wheeler's failure deprived him of much needed information. He was still concerned the Federal move to Rome might be a ruse to make him evacuate Chattanooga, allowing Rosecrans to take the city and join Burnside. Reports confirmed this possibility. Burnside was thought to be approaching Hiwassee on the right, and outposts at Lookout Point reported strong Union pressure from the Valley. On 6 September Bragg made his decision and ordered the Army of the Tennessee to move "immediately" south towards Rome "in order to meet the enemy and strike him." At 8p.m. however, with the concurrence of Hill and Polk, Bragg postponed the movement to Rome to await further developments, and because his units were having difficulty getting organized for the move.⁴⁹

On 7 September pressure continued against Lookout Point, and Chattanooga was once again shelled from across the river. Bragg continued to ponder whether the flanking movement in Lookout Valley was a threat or a ruse. By the evening he had made his decision: The Army of Tennessee would evacuate Chattanooga the night of 7 September, move south towards Rome, and engage Rosecrans.⁵⁰

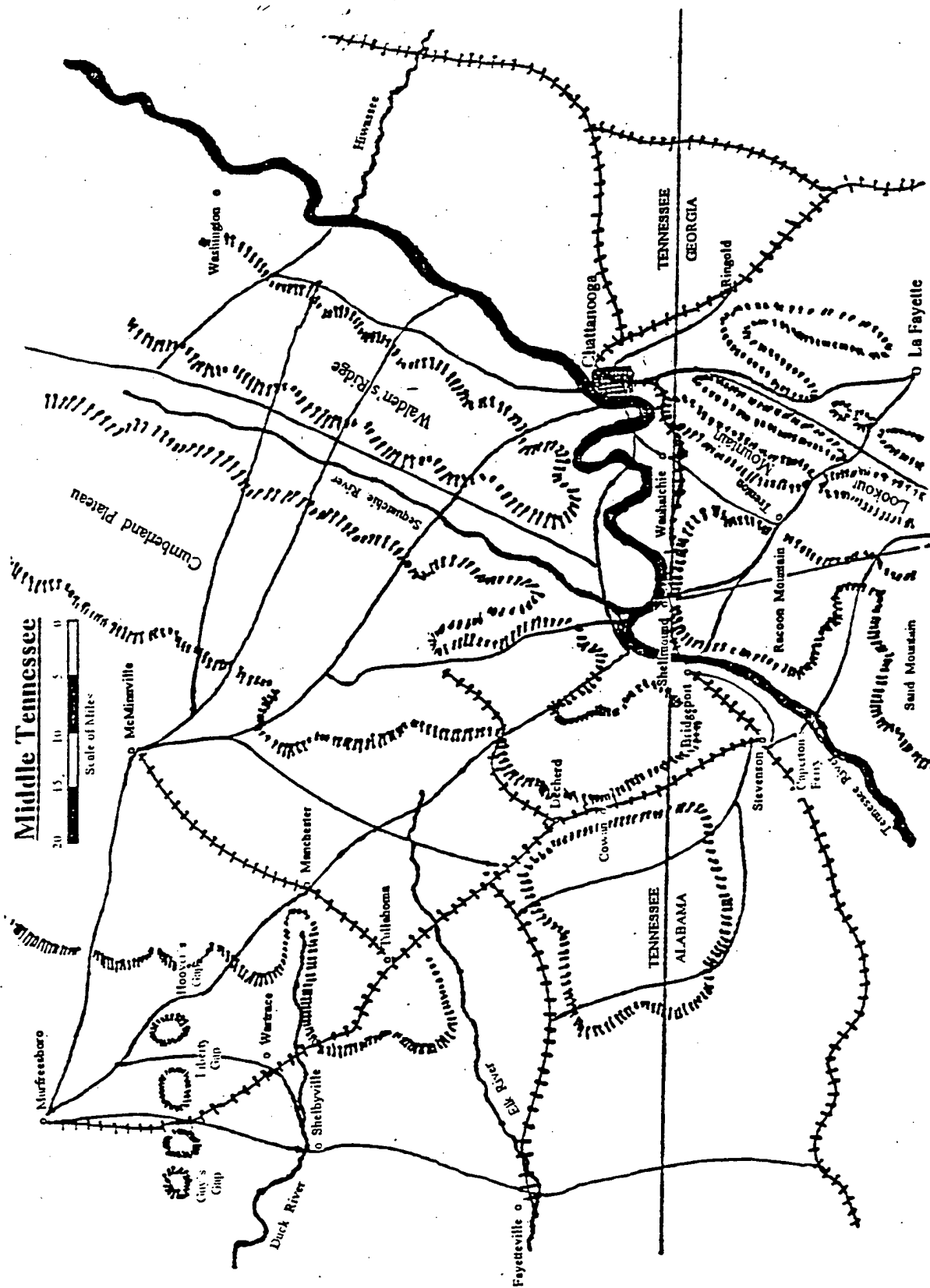


FIGURE 2. MIDDLE TENNESSEE

¹The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies 128 vols. (Washington : Government Printing Office, 1880-1901). Series 1, volume 23, part 2, p.717-618 (hereafter cited as OR, and unless otherwise indicated all references are to Series 1); and Nathaniel C. Hughes, General William Hardee, Old Reliable (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 156; and Richard J. Brewer, "The Tullahoma Campaign", (MMAS Thesis. U.S. Army Command and Staff College, 1991), 60.

²Brewer, 19.

³Thomas Lawrence Connelly, Autumn of Glory (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 112-114.

⁴OR 23 (part 2), 760; and Connelly, 116; and Brewer, 15.

⁵Mackall to Polk. 26 June 1863, Polk Papers, Sewanee, quoted in Connelly, 117; and OR 23 (part 2), 724, 760, 787-797, 827, 862; and Brewer, 61-63.

⁶Connelly, 121; and OR 52 (part 2), 491, 495; and OR 23 (part 2), 857, 866; and Brewer, 80-82.

⁷OR 52 (part 2), 499.

⁸OR 23 (part 1), 425, 456, 459, 611, 614; and Connelly, 127.

⁹Connelly, 127-128; and OR 23 (part 1), 586-591, 618; and Brewer, 88, 93, 97.

¹⁰Connelly, 128-129; and OR 23 (part 1), 583, 618; and Brewer, 98-99.

¹¹St. John Richardson Liddell, Liddell's Record ed. Nathaniel C. Hughes (Dayton : Morningside, 1985), 128-131.

¹²Connelly, 130; and Brewer, 118-119.

¹³OR 23 (part 1), 621-622; and Connelly, 131; and Brewer, 126-127.

¹⁴Connelly, 131; and OR, 23 (part 1), 624; and Brewer, 133.

¹⁵OR, 23 (part 1), 583-584.

¹⁶OR, 23 (part 1), 623-625; and Connelly, 132; and Hughes, 156-157; and Brewer, 139-140.

¹⁷Connelly, 133; and OR, 23 (part 1), 584.

¹⁸OR, 23 (part 2), 932; and OR 23 (part 1), 584; Polk to Raynor, 14 Aug 1863, Leonidas Polk Papers. University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.

¹⁹Connelly,138.

²⁰Connelly,139-146.

²¹OR, 30 (part 4), 519, 523, 557, 561; and OR 23 (part 2), 940; and Connelly,163-165; and Brent Diary, 21 August 1863, in Bragg Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

²²Connelly,164; and OR, 23 (part 2), 933, 937, 952-953.

²³Connelly,154.

²⁴Robert U. Johnson, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War 4 vols. (New York : Century,1887-1888) 3:638-640. (Cited hereafter as BL); and Connelly,155 ; and OR, 23 (part 2), 908, 938.

²⁵Connelly, 154; and OR, 52 (part 2), 745; and Howell Purdue, Pat Cleburne, Confederate General (Hillsboro, Tx : Hill Jr.College Press, 1973), 207.

²⁶OR, 30 (part 4),557; and Michael B. Dougan, "Thomas C. Hindman: Arkansas Politician and General", Rank and File, 22, 24-25, 29-31; and Hughes, 99; and Glenn Tucker, Chickamauga: Bloody Battle in the West (Dayton : Morningside, 1976), 69; and Judith Lee Hallock, Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat 2 vols. (Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press, 1991), 2:56; and Connelly,154.

²⁷OR, 30 (part 4),592; and OR 23 (part 2), 843.

²⁸OR, 30 (part 4), 512, 522, 561; and OR 23 (part 2), 924, 954, 962-963; and OR 31 (part 3), 656-666; and Connelly, 157-158.

²⁹ William Preston to William Preston Johnston, 3 October 1863, Barret Collection, Tulane, quoted in Connelly, 159.

³⁰OR, 23 (part 2), 925, 938; and Brent Diary, 21 August 1863.

³¹OR, 30 (part 4), 503, 524-525,529, 541, 547; and BL 3:640; and Brent Diary, 21 August 1863; Taylor Beatty Diary, 21-22 August 1863, Southern Historical Collection (#54), University of North Carolina.

³²OR, 30 (part 4), 531-532, 534; and Brent Diary, 22 August 1863.

³³OR, 30 (part 4), 526-527.

³⁴OR, 52 (part 2), 517.

³⁵OR, 30 (part 4), 540.

³⁶OR. 30 (part 4), 544, 547; and Brent Diary, 23-24, 26 August 1863; and Connelly, 166-168; and Polk to Wife, 25, 27 August 1863, Leonidas Polk Papers, University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.

³⁷OR. 30 (part 4), 561; and OR 23 (part 2), 925-926, 930; and Taylor Beatty Diary, 6 September 1863; and Report of B. J. Hill, 29 August 1863, Palmer Collection of Bragg Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

³⁸OR. 30 (part 4), 510, 520, 561, 563, 566; and Brent Diary, 30 August 1863; and Connelly, 169.

³⁹OR. 30 (part 4), 566; Brent Diary, 29 August 1863.

⁴⁰Tucker, 26; OR. 30 (part 4), 574, 579-580; and Brent Diary, 1 September 1863.

⁴¹OR. 30 (part 4), 583.

⁴²OR. 30 (part 4), 584, 588; and Brent Diary, 5 September 1863.

⁴³OR. 30 (part 4), 588; and Brent Diary, 4 September 1863.

⁴⁴OR. 30 (part 4), 594, 599-600.

⁴⁵OR. 30 (part 4), 599; and Purdue, 207.

⁴⁶OR. 23 (part 2), 952-953; and OR 30 (part 4), 601; and Liddell, 135-136.

⁴⁷OR. 30 (part 4), 602; and Brent Diary, 3, 6 September 1863.

⁴⁸OR. 30 (part 4), 614-615; and Brent Diary, 7 September 1863.

⁴⁹Connelly, 172-173; and OR. 30 (part 4), 610-613; and OR 52 (part 2), 522

⁵⁰OR. 30 (part 4), 621; and Connelly, 173; and Brent Diary, 7 September 1863; and Beatty 7-8 September 1863.

CHAPTER 4

OPPORTUNITIES LOST

Withdrawal from Chattanooga

Hill's Corps left Chattanooga the night of 7 September, heading towards Rome on the dusty LaFayette road. Buckner's Corps and a new Reserve Corps under Walker took a parallel road to the east which joined Hill's route at LaFayette, twenty-two miles south of Chattanooga. Polk's Corps, Bragg, and army headquarters followed Hill on the morning of 8 September, leaving one brigade in Chattanooga. By nightfall of the 8th Hill had reached LaFayette, Polk halted ten miles north at Crawfish Springs, and Buckner trailed to the northeast. Wheeler's cavalry was stretched thin guarding the passes through Lookout Mountain, while Forrest's troopers brought up the army's rear.¹

Bragg was still unsure of the Union dispositions. He had moved out of Chattanooga knowing there was one Federal corps north of Chattanooga, and two more south of the Tennessee River behind Lookout Mountain, possibly threatening his communications to the south via Rome. Lookout Mountain separated the two armies, offering Rosecrans three avenues of approach on the Confederates: moving north around Lookout Point and converging on Chattanooga; going over the center of the mountain twenty miles south of Chattanooga at Stevens Gap to strike the Confederates in flank and rear as they marched south; or going another twenty-five miles south to pass through the mountain at Winston's Gap, through the town of Alpine and then southwest towards Rome or north to LaFayette. (See Figure 3.)

The terrain between Lookout Mountain and LaFayette was dominated by two parallel ranges, Missionary Ridge and Pigeon Mountain. The center of Pigeon Mountain, just west of LaFayette, was pierced by two passes, Dug and Catlett's Gaps. To the southwest of Dug Gap the

area between Pigeon Mountain and the south end of Missionary Ridge formed a small valley, McLemore's Cove.

The direct road from LaFayette over Lookout Mountain ran west through Dug Gap and McLemore's Cove, then over the mountain at Stevens Gap. From LaFayette also ran the main roads south to Alpine and north to Chattanooga. Thus, from a central position behind Pigeon Mountain at LaFayette the Army of Tennessee had direct routes to counter Union movements north around Chattanooga, east through Stevens Gap, or south at Alpine. Rosecrans, hidden behind Lookout Mountain, could cut off the Confederates from the south, pursue from the north, strike from due west, or execute a combination of all three.

Earlier in the campaign Bragg had described the dangers of defending mountainous terrain: "Mountains hide your foe from you, while they are full of gaps through which he can pounce on you at any time. A mountain is like the wall of a house full of rat-holes. The rat lies hidden in his hole, ready to pop out when no one is watching. Who can tell what lies hidden behind that wall?" What Bragg needed on 8 September was solid intelligence of what Rosecrans was doing behind the wall of Lookout Mountain. With good intelligence Bragg himself might become the rat, popping out from behind Pigeon Mountain to strike an unsuspecting Rosecrans.²

By the night of 8 September reports began to indicate that Rosecrans might not be moving south on Rome. That evening Bragg received a message from Brigadier General Will Martin, commanding a division of Wheeler's cavalry, stating that his pickets had been driven out of Stevens Gap that morning, across McLemore's Cove to Pigeon Mountain, and warning that Federals were entering McLemore's Cove. By the morning of 9 September further reports indicated that a Union force of up to 8,000 men was already in the Cove. With this possible threat to his flank Bragg halted the movement to Rome and anxiously sought more information. His cavalry was spread from Chattanooga to Alpine, and accurate information was slow in coming. By noon he learned that Crittenden's Corps had driven the Confederate rear guard out of Chattanooga and threatened to move on LaFayette from the north. By the evening of 9 September it appeared that one Union

corps, under McCook, was in Will's valley west of Lookout Mountain moving south towards Winston's Gap, Crittenden's Corps was definitely moving south from Chattanooga, and several thousand troops from Thomas's Corps had passed through Stevens Gap and were moving towards McLemore's Cove, Dug Gap and LaFayette. Faced with the prospect of attacking or being attacked by Union corps from the north, west and south Bragg decided to attack the smallest and most immediate threat, the force in McLemore's Cove.³

McLemore's Cove

Bragg decided to have Hindman's Division of Polk's Corps move through a gap in the north end of Pigeon Mountain, then south into McLemore's Cove. At the same time Cleburne's Division of Hill's Corps would move west through Dug Gap. The two divisions would join in front of Dug Gap at Davis' Crossroads, and together attack the Union force believed to be at Stevens Gap.⁴

Late on the 9 September Hindman was called to Bragg's headquarters near Lee and Gordon's Mill and briefed on the plan. Neither Cleburne nor the corps commanders were present. Hindman received the following written orders, dated 11:45 p.m. 9 September:

You will move with your division immediately to Davis' crossroads, on the road from LaFayette to Stevens Gap. At this point you will put yourself in communication with the column of General Hill, ordered to move to the same point, and take command of the joint forces, or report to the officer commanding Hill's column according to rank. If in command you will move upon the enemy, reported to be 4,000 or 5,000 strong, encamped at the foot of Lookout Mountain at Stevens Gap. Another column of the enemy is reported to be at Cooper's Gap, to the right of Stevens Gap; number not known.⁵

A written copy of the orders was sent to Hill at LaFayette, with the following addition:

General Bragg directs that you send or take, as your judgment dictates, Cleburne's division to unite with General Hindman at Davis' Cross-roads tomorrow morning. . . . The commander of the column thus united will move upon the enemy encamped at the foot of Stevens Gap, said to be 4,000 or 5,000. If unforeseen circumstances should prevent your movement, notify Hindman. . . . Open communications with Hindman with your cavalry in advance of the junction.⁶

Hindman moved quickly, and by 6 A.M. 10 September his division was in McLemore's Cove four miles north of Davis' crossroads, at Morgan's house. There he halted. Having heard nothing from Hill, and with reports of one Union division already at the crossroads and another on the way, Hindman realized that the situation no longer supported Bragg's plan to unite with Cleburne, move across McLemore's Cove and strike the Federals at Stevens Gap. Hindman had only three brigades, and suspecting that Cleburne was not yet ready to cooperate, was concerned about being outnumbered if he attacked the Federals at Dug Gap unaided.⁷ Upon his arrival at Morgan's house Hindman sent Hill a message:

I expected you would open communications with me by the time I reached this place, but as yet hear nothing from you. If it be true, as I learn it is, that the road from LaFayette to Davis' crossroads is blockaded, I fear it will be impossible to effect the desired junction. Your better information will enable you to decide as to that. There are rumors here that a Federal division is at and near Davis' crossroads and another at Baily's crossroads. Colonel Russell, commanding a cavalry regiment of Martin's brigade, has gone forward to ascertain the facts. I deem it inexpedient to move beyond this place till I learn that you are in motion and that we can safely unite.

Hindman sent a copy of this message to Bragg at Lee and Gordon's Mill, with the following attachment: "I forward a copy of a dispatch just started by me to General Hill. It will explain, as fully as I now can, my situation and prospects. Some four hours must elapse before I can get an answer. I am very apprehensive that the obstructions put in the road by our cavalry will defeat the intended junction. If so, please instruct me what to do."⁸

Hindman's fears proved well founded. Bragg's orders, dispatched at midnight, had taken almost five hours to reach Hill. It was not until 4:30 A.M. that Hill learned of the operation. He immediately replied to Bragg that it was not possible for Cleburne to attack: Dug and Catlett's Gaps were obstructed and would take hours to clear, and Cleburne himself was sick. Bragg received this message at 8 A.M., but Hindman did not receive word of the delay until almost noon, when he received the following from Hill:

General Bragg's order did not reach me till 5 o'clock this morning. It directed Cleburne's division to co-operate with you. That officer was sick, and four of his best regiments were absent . . . The road across Dug Gap is strongly blockaded, and if Cleburne had started he could not have gotten to you till after night. Under the discretionary orders received from

General Bragg, I therefore decided not to move Cleburne. I immediately wrote to him to that effect, but have heard nothing as yet. General Wheeler reports that the Yankees are moving on Summerville in force. If that be so, this division of Negley's is sent out as bait to draw us off from below. When it is pressed, (unless he has a strong supporting force), he will fall back in the gap, and there the matter will end.

Attached to this message was word that Bragg was sending reinforcements. Buckner, whose two divisions were on the north end of Pigeon Mountain between Polk and Hill, was ordered to follow and join Hindman as a substitute for Cleburne.⁹

In the meantime Hindman did little to develop the situation. In the early afternoon he received a note from Hill stating that Federals had crossed the cove and were skirmishing with the defenders at Dug Gap, a fact confirmed by Hindman's own scouts. This note from Hill encouraged Hindman to attack the rear of the Federals, trapping them against Cleburne's men who were now at the Gap. Hill added that the information was for Hindman's "Information and guidance." Hindman waited for Buckner, believing he was to attack only if the Federals attacked Cleburne first.¹⁰

Bragg was anxious to force the issue in the Cove, and at 6 P.M. he ordered Hindman to complete the mission "as rapidly as possible," repeating the order at 7:30 P.M.: "The enemy is now divided. Our force at or near LaFayette is superior to the enemy. It is important now to move vigorously and crush him."¹¹

Bragg's insistence was due to his growing belief that the army was threatened by both Crittenden in the north and McCook from the south. Portions of Crittenden's Corps were known to be moving directly on Polk at Lee and Gordon's Mill, while the remainder were moving a short distance to the east along a road that would intersect the LaFayette road several miles south of Lee and Gordon's at Rock Spring Church. Polk, left with only Cheatham's Division, was in danger of being trapped. At 7:30 P.M. Bragg ordered Cheatham's Division south to Anderson's, between Lee and Gordon's and Rock Spring Church, where both Crittenden's avenues of approach could be guarded. In the south Wheeler's cavalry reported that McCook had advanced to within seven miles of LaFayette, "moving with heavy force toward LaFayette with cavalry, infantry, and artillery."¹²

Hindman did not attack on 10 September. At 7 P.M. he sent Bragg a situation report indicating that he was not confident in the prospects of an attack the next morning:

General Buckner reported with his command at 4:45 p.m., too late for an attack this evening, as it would have been dark by the time we could reach the enemy. I have sent out tonight small parties of scouts, under reliable guides, to ascertain what force of the enemy, if any, may assail my flank or rear while I attack the column moving toward Dug Gap. I have also dispatched a courier to General Hill at LaFayette, and to his commanding officer at Dug Gap, to concert a plan of operations, &c. Unless something unforeseen prevents, I expect to make the attack at daylight. My impression is that the force to my front is thrown out merely to mask the movement of the main body toward Alpine, and that the force in front of General Hill is intended to accomplish the same purpose. Whether the main body has moved or not I am yet unable to determine, but hope to learn tonight. If it has, our attack ought and will be made. If it has not, my force will probably be insufficient, and I will be attacked in rear from Stevens Gap while attacking the column going east. If anything important is ascertained, I will report promptly.¹³

Hindman called a council of his commanders to discuss the situation. He was reluctant to attack because he was not sure what force was to his front in McLemore's Cove, and believed additional Federal troops issuing from Stevens Gap would attack his rear as he attacked towards Dug Gap. At 8 P.M., as the meeting was in progress, Hindman sent a staff officer and message to Hill, seeking to coordinate their efforts next morning:

I send Major Nocquet, of General Buckner's staff, to confer with you as to our operations. He understands the situation here as fully as I do. The question which I am trying to solve tonight is: What force of the enemy is at or about Stevens Gap to attack me in rear while cooperating with you? Probably the greater part of that force would be drawn toward Dug Gap at the sound of your artillery, thus enabling me to move by way of Davis' cross roads without too great risk. Can you at an early hour tomorrow make a real attack on the head of the enemy's column, so as to induce him to mass his forces while I strike him in rear? In this connection, can you force your way through them and effect junction with me about Davis' crossroads, while I force my column to the same point? Please answer these questions specifically. It may be that the enemy is in such force at Stevens Gap that I may find it imprudent to expose my rear to their attacks.¹⁴

Shortly thereafter the council reached a decision to attack in the morning, the time and method to be determined after Nocquet's coordination with Hill and receipt of the latest scout reports. At 10:15 P.M. Hindman sent Bragg a second message, implying he would not attack at all unless Hill provided satisfactory answers to the earlier questions:

I forward herewith a copy of a letter addressed by me tonight to General Hill. It was submitted to and approved by the general officers of this command, who also agree that if General Hill responds negatively to the questions propounded to him, or if the enemy on our flank prove to be of such force as to render it too hazardous, our true policy is, instead of going to Davis' crossroads, to move rapidly against Crittenden, Cheatham cooperating, and Hill if possible, and thus crush that corps of the enemy. This last operation would destroy one-third the enemy's force, and leave all our own united to contend against the balance on his line of communication.¹⁵

By this time a Bragg had left Lee and Gordon's Mill for LaFayette, closer to the threatened Confederate left and the action in McLemore's Cove. Bragg reached Hill's headquarters at LaFayette about 11:30 P.M. 10 September. Armed with a fresh report from Martin that McCook's and Thomas's Corps were separated and that at least 11,000 of Thomas' troops were in McLemore's Cove, Bragg was determined to attack in the morning. Awaiting him at Hill's headquarters was Major Nocquet. Hindman made a poor choice of emissary. Nocquet was a French military engineer of dubious ability and loyalty, with a poor command of the English language. Bragg had fired him as army engineer some months prior. Nocquet relayed Hindman's belief that the force in the Cove was a ruse, and the attack should be called off. Bragg then called in Martin, who repeated his earlier report that Thomas was in the Cove, not united with McCook. Angry, Bragg then ordered Nocquet to report only hard facts, and Nocquet quickly admitted that he had none. Bragg informed Nocquet that his information "amounted to nothing," and the orders to Hindman to attack stood, "even if he lost his command in carrying out the order." Hindman would attack towards Dug Gap at daylight 11 September to cut the enemy off from Stevens Gap. Hill would attack from the east as soon as he heard Hindman's guns, trapping the Federals between two converging forces. Following this stormy interview Nocquet departed to return to Hindman, followed at midnight by a courier with written orders:

Crittenden's corps is advancing on us from Chattanooga. A large force from the south has advanced to within 7 miles of this place. Polk is left at Anderson's to cover your rear. General Bragg orders you to attack and force your way through the enemy to this point at the earliest hour you can see him in the morning. Cleburne will attack in front the moment your guns are heard.¹⁶

Bragg ordered Hill to be ready to attack with Cleburne's Division at first light, upon hearing Hindman's guns, and directed Walker to move his Reserve Corps to Dug Gap and unite with Cleburne in the attack. Breckinridge's Division of Hill's Corps would remain south of LaFayette to guard against McCook.

That night Cleburne's men cleared the obstructions from Dug Gap, taking only three hours, and Cleburne established a courier line north along Pigeon Mountain to relay word of Hindman's attack. Early on the morning of 11 September Bragg and Hill joined Cleburne at the Gap to await the sound of Hindman's guns. It proved a long wait.¹⁷

Hindman received Bragg's written order at 4:20 A.M. but chose to await Nocquet's report before committing to an attack. Nocquet finally arrived about 6:30 A.M. and informed Hindman that he was to attack first, and Hill would cooperate. Hindman later claimed that Nocquet said Bragg's instructions were to use his own discretion, quite different from Bragg's actual order to attack "even if he lost his command." It is plausible that Nocquet garbled the message. By this time Hindman's own scouts had confirmed that the main body of the enemy was between Davis' crossroads and Dug Gap, perfectly set up for Bragg's plan.¹⁸

At 7 A.M. Hindman ordered his force forward, warning Buckner "not to hazard an engagement until some reliable information was obtained of the strength and position of the force to be encountered." The advance was slow and cautious. By 9 A.M. Hindman and Buckner had covered only one and a half of the four miles to Dug Gap. Hindman's advance elements and scouts continued to report that the enemy had reached Davis' crossroads and were pushing on to Dug Gap. In the early afternoon Hindman received a dispatch, written at 11 A.M., from Bragg's chief of staff W. W. Mackall that seemed to advise caution and reinforce Hindman's belief that he could exercise discretion in deciding to attack or retreat: "If you find the enemy in such force as to make an attack imprudent, fall back at once on LaFayette by Catlett's Gap from which obstructions have now been removed. Send your determination at once and act as promptly." Hindman replied that he had not yet decided upon his course of action.¹⁹

As Hindman dallied, Bragg grew angry. From his position on Pigeon Mountain Bragg could see the Union line, centered on Davis' crossroads. An observer noted that Bragg's "impatience at not hearing Hindman's guns was manifested by his restless walking back and forth on the top of the hill overlooking the enemy in the Cove, and occasionally he would stop and irritably dig his spurs in the ground." At 11:00 A.M. Bragg ordered Cleburne and Walker to initiate the attack, only to halt the advance as the skirmishers came into contact, probably to await Hindman's movement to attack the enemy rear. Bragg paced, and continued to send couriers to Hindman urging the attack.²⁰

Sometime before 2 P.M. Hindman received another staff officer from Mackall, inquiring whether Hindman felt certain he could retire through Catlett's Gap. Hindman replied that he could, but had just given the order to continue the advance. Shortly afterwards Hindman received yet another dispatch: "The enemy, estimated at 12,000 or 15,000, is forming line in front of this place . . . the general is most anxious and wishes to hear from you by couriers once an hour. A line is now established from your headquarters to ours. The enemy are advancing from Graysville to LaFayette."²¹

The Confederates still outnumbered the Federals with Hindman and Buckner's 15 - 20,000 and Hill's 20,000 men, but the estimated size of the Union force alarmed Hindman. His response was to call another council of officers. During this discussion Hindman stated that he personally believed the Union force to number between twenty and thirty thousand, and he informed his generals that he had "received a note from the commanding general in which it was left discretionary with him whether he would attack or retire through Catlett's Gap."²² By 2:45 P.M. the decision was made: retreat. Hindman, within one mile of Davis' crossroads, informed Bragg of his decision:

Since my last dispatch I have received certain information that a large force of the enemy moved from Stevens Gap toward Davis' crossroads last night and this morning. The strength of this force is put by citizens at 11,000. I have previously reported a similar movement of a considerable force.

My information is still imperfect as to the strength of the enemy on the road to Dug Gap, but I believe it is superior to mine. In this opinion Generals Buckner and Anderson concur, and they also agree with me that any further advance would be imprudent. Our judgment is influenced also by the apprehension that our rear is unsecure upon information derived from you. I shall therefore retire by Catlett's Gap to LaFayette. The orders are now given.²³

At some point after this Hindman received a message from Bragg, dispatched at 3 P.M., before Bragg knew of Hindman's decision to retreat. The message expressed Bragg's intent that Hindman attack immediately, yet the wording still allowed a timid commander to use his discretion: "Time is precious. The enemy presses from the north. We must unite or both must retire. The enemy in small force is in line of battle in our front, and we only wait for your attack." Not surprisingly, Hindman's decision remained to retreat. The messenger, Colonel Taylor Beatty of Hill's Corps, had a conversation with Hindman: "He gave as a reason for not attacking in the morning: that discretion was left with him and that his information was of so various a character that he had vacillated." Once again a commander had acted based on his own assessment of the situation, not in accordance with Bragg's orders and intent.²⁴

Around 5 P.M., prior to moving back, Hindman learned that the Union troops had realized their dangerous position and were withdrawing to Stevens Gap. Hindman finally ordered an attack. It was too late. Cleburne advanced at the sound of the guns and joined his line with Hindman's near Davis' crossroads, to find the enemy had successfully withdrawn to strong positions in front of Stevens Gap.²⁵

About 6 P.M. a furious Bragg met Hindman and Buckner at Davis' crossroads. "Indignant and excited", Bragg accused Hindman of utter disregard of his orders. The soldiers were as frustrated as their commander. Hill's men were "In ecstasies of grief. Men and officers swore, some were almost in tears." Chagrined at the unexpected failure of an "Attack so easily to have been made and so nearly successful," Bragg declared "we can't stay here" and ordered his force out of McLemore's Cove and back behind Pigeon Mountain.²⁶

That night Bragg returned to his headquarters at LaFayette still unsure of where Thomas' and McCook's Corps were. Reports indicated that the force that had escaped in the cove might be only two brigades of Thomas' Corps. Hill had reported a strong Union force moving on LaFayette

from the south. Bragg did not know whether this was McCook, McCook and Thomas combined, or some smaller force. He considered the threat from McCook serious enough that during the day he had ordered Polk, with Cheatham's Division, to move south from Anderson's to LaFayette. Upon Polk's departure from Anderson's Forrest had taken up the fight in the north to slow and develop Crittenden.

The Confederate cavalry continued to provide little useful information from the south. Martin's Division of Wheeler's Cavalry Corps had been in McLemore's Cove with Hindman and Buckner, leaving only Wharton's Division to scout to the south of LaFayette. Throughout 10 and 11 September Wheeler sent indefinite reports of McCook's progress, indicating first that McCook was moving on LaFayette, then Rome, and finally that McCook's Corps was at Summerville, fifteen miles south of LaFayette, preparing to move north. By the night of the 11 September Wheeler concluded he was not sure what McCook was doing.²⁷

What Bragg knew for sure on the night of 11 September was that Thomas and McCook were west and south of LaFayette, possibly joining forces, and that Crittenden's Corps was to the north moving towards Lee and Gordon's Mill. One Federal division had almost certainly reached the mill that afternoon, and another force was advancing from Ringgold, pushing back the cavalry pickets on the Pea Vine road towards Rock Spring Church. Bragg decided to make another attempt to mass on Rosecrans' divided army, this time a strike at Crittenden's Corps.²⁸

Another Golden Opportunity

At 3 A.M. on 12 September Bragg ordered Polk to return north to Rock Spring Church. Later that day he ordered Hindman's Division and Walker's Reserve Corps to join Polk.²⁹ By the afternoon it looked as if Bragg had his second opportunity. Pegram, of Forrest's Cavalry Corps, reported that the Federal division advancing down Pea Vine road had stopped at Pea Vine Church, two miles from Rock Spring Church. Seizing the opportunity to attack one division with a corps, Bragg at 6 P.M. sent a message to Polk recommending an attack:

I enclose you a dispatch from General Pegram. This presents you a fine opportunity of striking Crittenden in detail, and I hope you will avail yourself of it at daylight tomorrow. This division crushed, and the others are yours. We can then turn again on the force in the cove. Wheeler's cavalry will move on Wilder, so as to cover your right. I shall be delighted to hear of your success".³⁰

Polk arrived at Rock Spring Church in the early evening. Cheatham's Division was there, and Walker arrived at 8 P.M. Hindman, who had started late, was not expected until early morning. Polk's own reconnaissance indicated there were three, not one, Federal divisions within several miles of Rock Spring Church: one in the vicinity of Lee and Gordon's Mill, one on the Ringgold road, and the one on Pea Vine road, all on routes that converged at Rock Spring Church.³¹ At 8 P.M. he dispatched his assessment to Bragg:

I arrived here as soon as anticipated, and have just finished reconnoitering the ground on which my engineers and General Cheatham have formed my line of battle. . . . There are three roads converging on the spring (Rock Spring Church). A is the Gordon's Mills road; B is the Pea Vine Church road, and C is the LaFayette and Ringgold road. From A to B, at the point where my line is, is three-quarters of a mile; from B to C is 1 3/4 miles. On this line Cheatham's division is extended: it is too much drawn out and has no reserves of its own. It will take 10,000 men to fill the line as it should be. Since my arrival I find I have the whole of Crittenden's corps and Wilder's cavalry brigade to my front, to wit, Van Cleve on road A, with his advance encamping 1 1/2 miles to my front, Palmer on road B, with his advance about the same distance, and Wood's on road C, with his advance on a line with the other two. It will thus be perceived I have the whole of Crittenden's corps, with Wilder's cavalry brigade, confronting me and moving in line of battle. How much more of the enemy's force is behind this line as a reserve there is no means of determining; but there is reason to believe that he has received a considerable accession of force from Chattanooga, and it is not to be believed that he will omit to send them forward. I am, therefore, clearly of the opinion that you should send to me additional force, so as to make failure impossible, and great success here would be of incalculable benefit to our cause. I think I should have, so as to make success sure, the force under General S.B. Buckner. That will leave General Hill's corps intact for any contingency in your quarter. In this opinion I find all the General officers with me agree, and I am myself so profoundly convinced of this that I beg leave, most respectfully and urgently, to press this upon your attention. It would not only insure success, if there were no other troops present with the enemy as a reserve, but prevent failure if there should be. The enemy is moving with steady step upon my position-it is a strong one-and will no doubt attack early in the morning. My troops I cannot get into position in time to attack myself at so early an hour as day-dawn. If I find he is not going to attack me I will attack him without delay.³²

As Polk was penning this message Bragg, perhaps with Hindman's inaction in mind, dispatched a firm order to attack: "I now give you the orders of the commanding general, viz, to

attack at day-dawn tomorrow. The infantry column reported in said dispatch at three quarters of a mile beyond Pea Vine Church, on the road to Graysville from LaFayette."³³

Bragg, at LaFayette, received Polk's pessimistic message by 11 P.M. 12 September.

Bragg responded shortly after midnight :

I have your dispatch giving me your position and the disposition of the enemy opposed to you. Your position seems to be a strong one for defense, but I hope will not be held unless the enemy attacks early. We must force him to fight at the earliest moment and before his combinations can be carried out. Your Generals who advise the concentration of the larger portion of the army with you know only of Crittenden's corps being opposed to you, and do not know of the advance again of a heavy infantry force in the Cove upon this place, and of another from the south, preceded by a very large cavalry force. However, to avoid all danger, I shall put Buckner in motion in the morning and run the risk here. You must not delay attack for his arrival, or another golden opportunity may be lost by the withdrawal of our game. Had you and the Generals with you had the information in my possession at the date of your dispatch your conclusions might have varied. But I trust that the cavalry sent south may hold the enemy in check until you can finish the job entrusted to you. Action, prompt and decided, is all that can save us. The troops are ready to respond.³⁴

Bragg's response diluted the direct, perfunctory language of his earlier order, and neither suggested an alternate plan to account for the unexpected Union dispositions nor granted Polk permission to act as he saw fit. Bragg ordered Buckner's Corps to move to Polk next morning, and at 12:30 P.M. dispatched a final message to Polk: "The enemy is approaching from the south, and it is highly important that your attack in the morning should be quick and decided. Let no time be lost."³⁵

Early on the morning of 13 September Bragg rode to join Polk, arriving at Rock Spring Church by 9 A.M. He found that instead of attacking, Polk had placed his divisions in a long defensive line covering all three approaches to Rock Spring Church. Cavalry reports received about the same time indicated that the Federals on Pea Vine road were gone, and that Crittenden appeared to be concentrating his three divisions at Lee and Gordon's Mill.³⁶

Polk determined to develop the enemy by moving a brigade along each of the three roads. By midday Cheatham began a movement towards Lee and Gordon's Mill, stopping the advance when light contact was made. At 2 P.M. Walker began moving down the Pea Vine road, but once again it was too late. The cavalry reported that the Federals that had been on the road were gone,

probably moving cross-country to Lee and Gordon's. This report was confirmed by a civilian who claimed that the previous night he had guided the division to Lee and Gordon's Mill. The weak Confederate efforts made little impression on Crittenden's commanders-their official reports record no significant activity on 13 September. Bragg, present on the field, did nothing to alter Polk's scheme of maneuver. Though he had Polk's Corps, most of Buckner's Corps, and Walker's Reserve Corps, a total of 26,000 men, concentrated within five miles of Crittenden, and Hill to the south to watch Thomas and McCook, Bragg apparently never seriously considered an attack towards Lee and Gordon's Mill. In the afternoon Bragg received reports from Hill that McCook was advancing on LaFayette and ordered Buckner to return there to meet the threat. Polk was ordered to remain at Rock Spring Church. Bragg left for LaFayette before dark³⁷

Two times Bragg's vision of massing on isolated Union forces had miscarried. On the evening of 13 September additional opportunities still existed. Rosecrans' army remained divided. Most of Crittenden's Corps was around Lee and Gordon's Mill, Thomas's units at Stevens Gap were ten miles south, and McCook's Corps at least thirty miles away. Bragg, however, decided against further attempts, and on the morning of 14 September ordered his army back to the defense at LaFayette.³⁸

Analysis

McLemore's cove

Of the opportunities to strike Rosecrans' divided corps, McLemore's Cove certainly promised the best chance of success. Throughout 10 September only one division of Thomas' Corps, Negley's, had been in the cove. Negley had advanced towards Dug Gap not expecting to encounter any significant Confederate force. Upon realizing that Dug Gap was defended and that Hindman threatened his flank Negley, outnumbered, assumed a hasty defense, and urgently requested reinforcements. All day on 10 September Negley lay exposed, encumbered with over four hundred supply wagons, sure prey to an overwhelming attack that never came.³⁹

Hindman was in position to attack on the morning of 10 September, but sensed that he was alone and too weak to attack unaided. By the time Buckner joined him it was too late in the day to attack. Determined action from Hill in clearing Dug Gap and moving forces forward would have enabled a concentrated attack by midday on 10 September, but Hill, believing the real threat lay south of LaFayette, took advantage of the discretionary language in Bragg's initial order to avoid meaningful action on 10 September. Hill's failure to take aggressive action on the 10th demonstrates a reluctance to trust Bragg's estimate of the situation. Hill acted based on his personal assessment that the force in the cove was a ruse, and the actual threat came from south of LaFayette.⁴⁰

Hindman's decisions on 10 September can be defended as tactically sound; his failure on the 11th indicates an unwillingness to risk the safety of his force to Bragg's judgment. Hindman believed Bragg had put him in a trap, and he took advantage of poorly worded orders to avoid attacking. Though Baird's Division of Thomas' Corps reached Negley on the morning of 11 September, Confederate success was still likely. Bragg's force continued to outnumber the two Federal divisions in the Cove, and the rest of Thomas' Corps remained west of Lookout Mountain, too far away to influence the fight. An aggressive attack by Hindman early on 11 September would have yielded positive, though perhaps incomplete, results. A leader with faith in his commander's judgment and respect for his commander's authority would have attacked, confident that his superior would properly orchestrate the supporting attack.

Hindman did not have this kind of confidence in Bragg. New to the army, his estimate of Bragg was based largely on the opinions of his friend Cleburne and his peers in Polk's Corps, none Bragg supporters. Instead of focusing on executing his portion of the overall battle plan, Hindman believed the attack in the cove was a mistake that would expose his divisions to destruction and the army to the real danger in the south. Hindman seized upon the "discretion" implied in some of his orders, and pleaded imperfect knowledge of the enemy, to justify ignoring Bragg's clearly stated desire for a spirited attack. Hindman's lack of urgency is exemplified in one observer's claim that

from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M. Hindman "Sat down upon a long oak log, and waited until 4 P.M. when a courier returned with an order to attack at once." Buckner, reported as sitting on the same log, must share some blame for willingly complying with Hindman's actions. Though technically junior to Hindman he was much more experienced, commanded the larger force, and could have exerted an aggressive influence.⁴¹

Brigadier General Martin remained with Hindman all day on 11 September, and claimed that "Certainly an attack could have been made . . . by 11 o'clock, and probably sooner. He halted within cannon shot of the crossroads. The delay was inexplicable to me."⁴² An attack through densely wooded terrain upon an imperfectly defined enemy takes audacity and requires confidence in the man giving the orders. Audacity and confidence were missing in McLemore's cove on 11 September.⁴³

Bragg deserves credit for creating the conditions for victory on 11 September. Once created, however, he began to contribute to the failure. Bragg once again exhibited his trait of allowing discretion to officers who could not be counted on to vigorously execute his intent. In his meeting with Nocquet and the following attack order to Hindman Bragg was absolutely clear in his intent: "Attack and force your way through the enemy to this point at the earliest hour you can see him in the morning. Cleburne will attack in front the moment your guns are heard." Bragg then diluted this intent throughout 11 September with poorly worded messages that fed Hindman's lack of resolve. The repeated references to Hindman's ability to retreat if required and to threats from Union forces north and south allowed Hindman to perceive a lack of resolve in Bragg, and inclined Hindman to rely on his own judgment, or "discretion".

As it became clear that Hindman was not executing according to plan Bragg failed to take positive action to influence the situation. A decision to cease waiting on Hindman and initiate and continue the attack from Dug Gap may have allowed some Federals to escape, but would have produced better results than those attained. If Hindman's attack was absolutely critical, Bragg himself could have reached Hindman in less than an hour and taken personal command. Instead,

Bragg sent couriers, stalked the top of Pigeon mountain in disgust and periodically dug his spurs into the dirt.

Rock Spring Church

The strike at Crittenden's Corps on 13 September is more problematical. Bragg's information on 12 September supported a massed attack on the Federal division at Pea Vine Church. Once Polk arrived at Rock Spring Church he quickly learned that the situation had changed, that the division he had been ordered to strike was probably no longer there. Instead he believed he faced three divisions. Though the impression of three divisions was actually created by aggressive Union pickets and cavalry covering the corps' movement to Lee and Gordon's, Polk was correct in concluding that there was no longer an isolated Union division at Pea Vine Church. It would not have been logical for Polk to blindly execute a plan that was based on outdated intelligence.⁴⁴

The fact that nothing of consequence was done on the 13th is harder to explain. By early afternoon Bragg and Polk knew that most of Crittenden's Corps was near Lee and Gordon's Mill, absolutely isolated from Thomas or McCook. A successful attack on Crittenden's entire corps could have been more decisive than the destruction of one or two divisions in McLemore's Cove, allowing the Army of Tennessee to regain Chattanooga and operate against Rosecrans's strained line of communications. Bragg had the combat power to adjust his plan and attack the enemy at the mill, and was on the scene early enough to make the decision. Instead, Bragg, "though expressing great disappointment, had not a word of censure to offer."⁴⁵ Nor did he offer a new plan. According to Polk's son, hardly an impartial observer, Polk "begged" for permission to attack Crittenden at Lee and Gordon's Mill, but was refused.⁴⁶

Perhaps Bragg, heeding reports of increased activity from Thomas and McCook, felt he was the one about to be defeated in detail. During the morning of 13 September Hill's pickets two miles south of LaFayette had engaged Federal cavalry, leading Hill to conclude that McCook's Corps was following closely. By the afternoon of the 13th Buckner and Hill were also reporting

that Thomas was once again moving on Dug Gap. Returning to LaFayette allowed Bragg to reconcentrate his army and await the reinforcements from Virginia, expected to reach Atlanta on the 13th.⁴⁷

In retrospect it was perhaps fortunate for the Army of Tennessee that Bragg did not immediately move on Lee and Gordon's Mill. An attack on Crittenden 13 September may well have ended in Confederate defeat. Unknown to Bragg, Rosecrans' knew by the afternoon of 11 September that the Confederate army was concentrating at LaFayette and posed a threat to Crittenden. By nightfall of 12 September Crittenden had concentrated his three divisions at Lee and Gordon's Mill, and ordered them to be in line of battle by dawn 13 September. Crittenden's Corps was in hasty defensive positions ready to meet an attack on the 13th. Bragg's two division advantage would not have guaranteed success in an attack over the difficult ground against the prepared Federals.⁴⁸

Continuing Opportunity

Opportunities to mass superior force against Rosecrans' army did not end on 13 September. Rosecrans did not finally unite his army until 17 September, and Bragg was aware of the Federal vulnerability. At council on the morning of 14 September Bragg stated his belief that McCook was at Alpine, Thomas once again in McLemore's Cove, and Crittenden at Lee and Gordon's Mill. Even as the council was meeting, however, Bragg lost his last great opportunity to smash Crittenden. Not realizing that the majority of Bragg's army had lain within five miles of Lee and Gordon's Mill, Crittenden on 14 September moved two divisions several miles west to Missionary ridge, leaving a single division at the mill. This unseen opportunity on the 14th offered Bragg an excellent chance to attack the Federals with overwhelming odds of success. Not known, and not sought, it was not attempted. Hill's official report described the tactical situation that morning: "The Yankee right, was . . . separated from the left by some sixty miles, with a difficult mountain to cross, and the center was more than a day's march from each wing. Our own force was concentrated at LaFayette, and could have been thrown upon either corps without the remotest

possibility of being molested by the other two. The attack, however, was delayed for six days." Hill seems to have forgotten that Bragg had been trying to attack for the last four days.⁴⁹

Bragg's reluctance to continue his attempts to strike the dispersed Union corps was due to personal frustration with his subordinates, tactical considerations, and the emotional strain of the last few days. Hill, Polk and Buckner had all shown a lack of vigor in executing Bragg's plans, indicating command climate had not improved since the spring. Bragg's intelligence on the Union army, though generally accurate, still left doubt about exactly what McCook and Crittenden were doing, and Rosecrans' overall strength. Finally, according to Brent, the recent disappointments had taken their toll on Bragg. Bragg had appeared healthy and "in good spirits" when the army evacuated Chattanooga. Now Brent recorded that "Genl Bragg seems sick and feeble. The responsibilities of his trust weighs heavily upon him."⁵⁰ Unwell, distrustful of his corps commanders, uncertain of Rosecrans' movements, and awaiting reinforcement from Virginia, Bragg ceded the initiative. When next the Army of Tennessee moved it would be against Rosecrans' reunited army, along the banks of Chickamauga Creek.

The events of 9-13 September 1863 demonstrate all that was wrong in the Army of Tennessee under Braxton Bragg. Weak subordinate initiative, lack of confidence in Bragg, and Bragg's wavering degrees of decisiveness all combined to result in five days of wasted maneuvering and subsequent demoralization. It is not at all clear that the "Missed Opportunities" contributed to the ultimate outcome of the campaign. Perhaps a determined strike in McLemore's Cove or at Crittenden would have yielded greater results than the victory at Chickamauga. It is very possible that Bragg's command problems would have rendered this hypothetical victory as ultimately futile as Chickamauga proved to be.

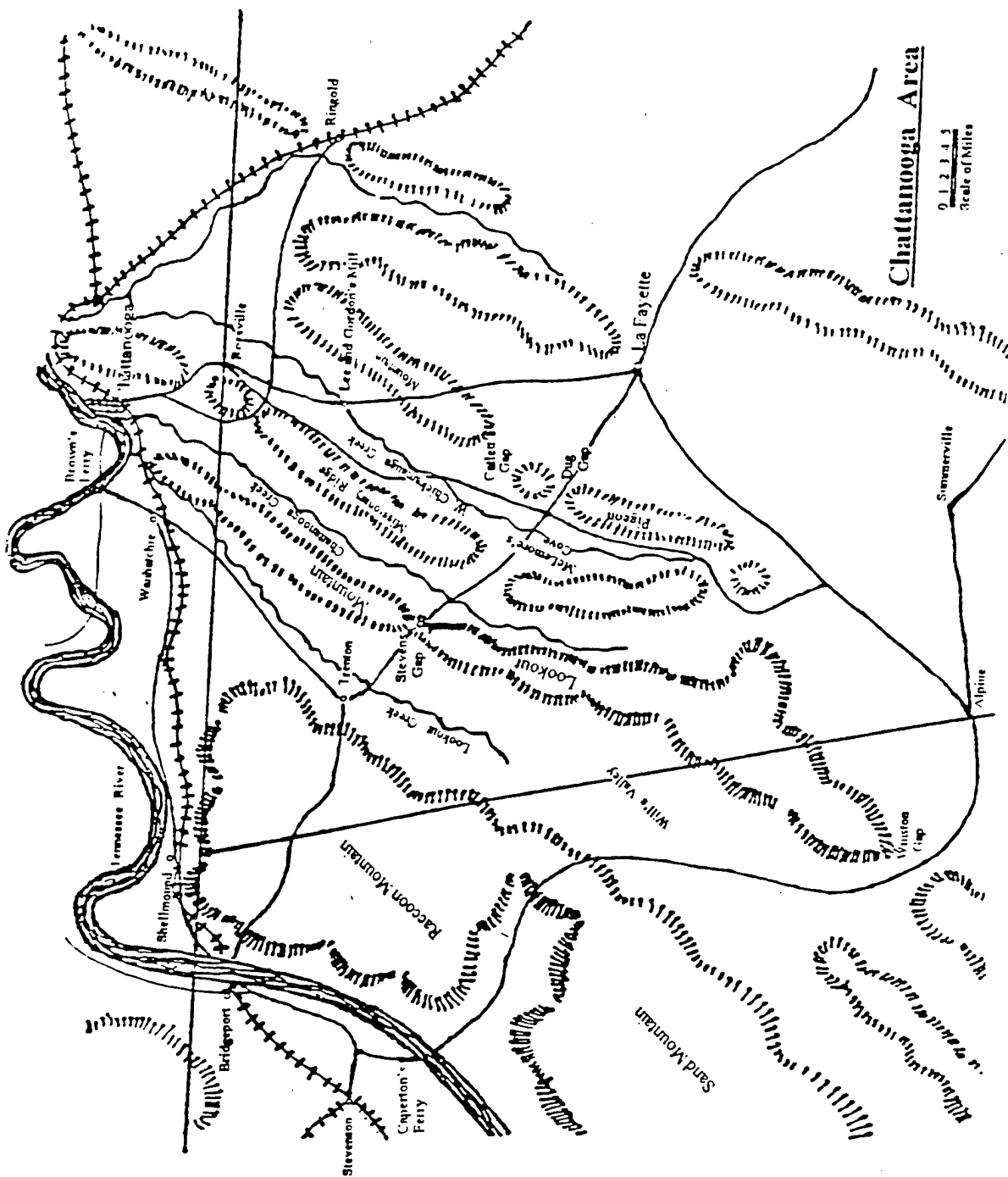


FIGURE 3. THE CHATTANOOGA AREA

¹Thomas Lawrence Connelly, Autumn of Glory (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 173 (Cited hereafter as Connelly); and The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies 128 vols. (Washington : Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Serial 1, volume 30, part 2, p.137, 524 (Cited hereafter as OR).

²Robert U. Johnson, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War 4 vols. (New York : Century, 1887-1888), 3:641. (Cited hereafter as BL); and Brent Diary, 8- 9, 13 September 1863, in Bragg Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

³OR, 30 (part 2), 522-523, 71-72; and OR, 30 (part 4), 627, 629-630; and Connelly, 174-175; and Michael Anderson Hughes, The Struggle for Chattanooga, 1862-1863 (Ann Arbor : UMI Dissertation Services, 1993), 86; and W. T. Martin, "A Defense of General Bragg's Conduct at Chickamauga" Southern Historical Society Papers 11 (June 1884), 204.(Cited hereafter as Martin).

⁴OR, 30 (part 4), 629; and Connelly, 175.

⁵OR, 30 (part 2), 28, 298.

⁶OR, 30 (part 2), 28.

⁷OR, 30 (part 2), 292-293; and Connelly, 177.

⁸OR, 30 (part 2), 138, 299.

⁹OR, 30 (part 2), 28, 298, 300; and Connelly, 178.

¹⁰OR, 30 (part 2), 300; and Hughes, 89.

¹¹OR, 30 (part 2), 300-301; and Connelly, 178.

¹²OR, 30 (part 2), 29, 73, 520; and OR, 30 (part 4), 634; and Connelly, 179-180; and Brent Diary, 10 September 1863.

¹³OR, 30 (part 2), 302.

¹⁴OR, 30 (part 2), 301.

¹⁵James Patton Anderson Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History; OR, 30 (part 2), 301-302.

¹⁶OR, 30 (part 2), 29, 294, 311; and Connelly, 180-181.

¹⁷OR, 30 (part 2), 29, 138; and Connelly, 184; and Howell Purdue, Pat Cleburne, Confederate General (Hillsboro, Tx : Hill Jr. College Press, 1973), 212.

¹⁸OR, 30 (part 2), 294-295.

¹⁹OR, 30 (part 2), 296, 307; and OR, 30 (part 4), 633.

²⁰Judith Lee Hallock, Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat 2 vol. (Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press, 1991), 2:59; and Purdue, 213.

²¹OR, 30 (part 2), 296.

²²James Patton Anderson Papers.

²³OR, 30 (part 4), 636.

²⁴Taylor Beatty Diary, 11 September 1863, Southern Historical Collection (#54), University of North Carolina; and OR, 30 (part 4), 634.

²⁵OR, 30 (part 2), 138-139; and Connelly, 184; and Hughes, 91; and Purdue, 213.

²⁶Purdue, 213; and Brent Diary 11 September 1863; and Hallock, 59; and Jarnigan Memoir, Civil War Collection: Confederate and Federal, 1861 - 1865 (Confederate Collection), Tennessee State Library and Archives (Box C 26, Folder 5); and Martin, 205.

²⁷OR, 30 (part 2), 22, 74, 139; and OR, 30 (part 4), 636; and Connelly, 185.

²⁸Brent Diary, 12 September 1863; and Connelly, 186.

²⁹OR, 30 (part 2), 48; and OR, 30 (part 4), 640.

³⁰OR, 30 (part 2), 30.

³¹OR, 30 (part 4), 640-641; and OR, 30 (part 2), 75.

³²OR, 30 (part 2), 44-45.

³³OR, 30 (part 2), 30; and Connelly, 187.

³⁴OR, 30 (part 2), 30, 49, 76; and Connelly, 187.

³⁵OR, 30 (part 2), 30, 50.

³⁶OR, 30 (part 2), 48 - 49; and OR, 30 (part 4), 647; and Connelly, 188.

³⁷OR, 30 (part 4), 645; and Connelly, 188; and W. M. Polk, "General Bragg and the Chickamauga Campaign," Southern Historical Society Papers 12 (June 1884), 384-386 (Cited hereafter as Polk); and Brent Diary, 13 September 1863; and J. F. Wheless Memoirs, Civil War Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

³⁸OR, 30 (part 4), 648; and Connelly, 189.

³⁹OR, 30 (part 3), 509-510.

⁴⁰Purdue, 211.

⁴¹Jarnigan.

⁴²Martin, 205.

⁴³Hughes, 88, 92; and OR, 30 (part 3), 545-546; and John Beatty, The Citizen Soldier (Cincinnati : Wilstach, Baldwin & Co., 1879), 330-331.

⁴⁴Polk, 385.

⁴⁵Hughes, 84-85; and Polk, 386.

⁴⁶Hughes, 84-85; and Polk, 386; and W. M. Polk to Gracie, 18 December 1911, in Leonidas Polk Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁴⁷OR, 30 (part 2), 139; and Hughes, 96-97; and Brent Diary, 13 September 1863; and Buckner to Hill, 13 September 1863, D.H. Hill Papers, Virginia State Library.

⁴⁸OR, 30 (part 3), 517, 532-533, 539-541, 577, 585; and Hughes, 95-96.

⁴⁹OR, 30 (part 4), 631, 646-647; and OR, 30 (part 1), 630 - 631; and OR, 30 (part 2), 139; and BL, 3:645.

⁵⁰Brent Diary, 15 September 1863; and Polk to Wife, Leonidas Polk Papers, University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The Confederate disappointments of 9-13 September 1863 were a result of a breakdown in senior level command relationships in the Army of Tennessee. Important subordinates lacked confidence in Bragg's abilities, and feared his wrath should they exercise initiative and fail. Bragg despaired of ever receiving hearty cooperation from his key generals and was frustrated by their continued selective obedience. The situation had been a long time developing, but by the summer of 1863 the rumors of problems in the Army of Tennessee were so pervasive that newly assigned officers like Hill and Hindman arrived already questioning Bragg's competence. This poor command atmosphere hindered the army's operations and perhaps discouraged Bragg from attempting any bold strategy.

Bragg's principal corps commanders during this period, Polk and Hardee, bear great responsibility for creating and fostering the negative command climate. They displayed selective disobedience and disrespect towards their commander, and allowed subordinate commanders to do the same. Their behavior became a vicious circle of self-fulfilling prophecy. Compounding this, Bragg reacted poorly to physical and mental stress. Attacks by his subordinates increased the strain, resulting in physical breakdowns, emotional isolation and poorer performance than he was capable of. These reactions verified the "Anti-Bragg" group's beliefs, and led to further dissension. This vicious circle could have been stopped at any time by a heartfelt, public expression of support by Polk and Hardee. This never happened. They failed to see that the "good of the cause" would be best served by their unshakable support of the commander of the Army of Tennessee.

As commander of the Army of Tennessee Bragg was ultimately responsible for the rift. The situation developed under his command and he proved unable or unwilling to mend it.

However, concentration on the command problems leads many to unfairly characterize Bragg as a failure, ignoring his many personal capabilities and positive contributions to the Confederate cause. Until Missionary Ridge the Army of Tennessee was never defeated in battle, and under Bragg the army successfully tied down large Union forces that otherwise might have been thrown against Lee in Virginia and protected vital Confederate sustainment areas. Bragg accomplished this despite the command problems, the challenges of defending a huge territory with an under-resourced army, and a lack of consistent strategic direction from Richmond.

A review of Bragg's battles prior to Chickamauga shows that charges of incompetence as an army commander are false. Bragg was, and still is, chastised for poor tactical decisions and for constantly falling back from his battles. Yet virtually all his withdrawals were made with the full concurrence of his subordinates, and many of the tactical mistakes were the result of a subordinate's failure to obey orders or intent.

Bragg was criticized after Perryville for failing to concentrate his force. Bragg actually was forced to fight at Perryville when Polk and Hardee chose to ignore his order to move north and join Kirby Smith's force. It is impossible to say whether Bragg's planned concentration would have been successful, but it is clear that at Perryville his corps commanders forced him to fight at a time and place not of his choosing. The subsequent withdrawal was made with the approval of his generals, and seems wise in light of the large Union reinforcements arriving on the field and the tenuous Confederate logistic situation.

Bragg seized the initiative with his attack at Murfreesboro. The success of the morning attack shifted to stalemate when Major General Breckinridge, never a Bragg supporter, hesitated in committing his reserve division as ordered. The night of the third day Polk and several of his subordinates counseled retreat. The next day Hardee concurred. Bragg initially refused to consider withdrawing. He finally made the decision to fall back when he received intelligence that Rosecrans had many more men than he had thought. Though the confused retreat to the Duck River was not Bragg's finest moment it was in accordance with the advice of his corps

commanders. It was also more moderate than the course of action advocated by President Davis, who a few days before the battle told Bragg to "Fight if you can, and fall back behind the Tennessee."¹

Tullahoma was fought after the "Anti-Bragg" episode of spring 1863, and showed the effects of the worsening command situation. It appears hard feelings on all sides prevented frequent and candid tactical discussions between Bragg, Polk and Hardee. As a result the Army of Tennessee, with all spring to prepare to meet the Union advance, was not ready to counter Rosecrans with a well-understood course of action. The complex terrain may have made it impossible to thwart Rosecrans' movement in any case, but a good plan executed by willing, well rehearsed subordinates would have made the advance much more costly for the Federals. Both Polk and Hardee agreed with the necessity of falling back from Tullahoma. Not consulted by Bragg on the continuing withdrawal across the Tennessee River, they later claimed that a fight should have been made north of the river at Cowan or Decherd. Perhaps a confident Bragg would have attempted it; a pessimistic Bragg did not. His strategic assessment to Jefferson Davis detailing the reasons for falling back to Chattanooga made military sense. The force that fell back to Chattanooga in July 1863 was not an army that had lacked success, but an army that had not seized all potential success. Under a commander assured of the full loyalty of his generals the Army of Tennessee might have earned a fuller measure of victory.

Tactical results and Bragg's generalship alone do not provide a viable motivation for the insubordination and distrust in the Army of Tennessee. The root cause of the command frictions seems to be that many of Bragg's subordinates simply disliked him. Put off by Bragg's curt, businesslike, even cold personality, they trumpeted every reversal or mistake as a reason to replace Bragg. What Polk, and to a lesser extent Hardee, actually desired was a more genial commander. They couched their public and private statements concerning Bragg's unfitness to command in altruistic terms: Bragg was a capable general of great utility to the Confederacy, but not as commander of the Army of Tennessee; removal of Bragg was necessary for the good of the army

and the good of the cause. Only after the battle of Chickamauga did the long simmering personal hatreds appear in correspondence, and by that time Bragg was responding in kind. Polk, finally relieved by Bragg, wrote his daughter in October 1863 of his disdain for Bragg: "I certainly feel a lofty contempt for his puny efforts to inflict injury upon a man who has dry nursed him for the whole period of his connection with him and has kept him from ruining the cause of the country by the sacrifice of its armies."² Several days earlier Bragg had written of Polk, "General Polk, though gallant and patriotic, is luxurious in his habits, rises late, moves slowly, and always conceives his plan to be the best. He has proved an injury to us on every field where I have been associated with him."³

Given Bragg's opinion of Polk, his primary antagonist, what actions were available to Bragg to remedy the situation? The obvious course of action was for Bragg, as army commander, to demand that President Davis relieve Polk and other dissatisfied generals. Bragg had often written Davis of his frustration at being denied the power to make and replace generals as he saw fit. He had much more support within and outside the army than is generally acknowledged, and an ultimatum of "Polk or me" might have been successful. Bragg never made this demand of Davis. Bragg knew that this demand would place Davis under severe political stress and complicate the President's efforts to execute the overall war effort. As a dedicated soldier perhaps Bragg felt that it was his duty to support Davis by continuing to suffer Polk and the other politically connected malcontents.

The next option not taken was resignation. If Bragg truly felt he was not being given the authority to execute his responsibilities properly he could have tendered his resignation. He often wrote of his willingness to resign, most significantly in the message of spring 1863 requesting the opinion of his generals. When faced with the statements of his own staff and commanders that he should quit, Bragg refused to execute the action he himself had suggested. This decision seems to spring from Bragg's personal pride and ambition, his sense of duty, and his anger at those who he saw as undermining him. He refused to quit in the face of adversity.

Bragg's actual solution to the problem was to continue to make the best of the situation. Curiously this did not take the form of more detailed instructions and closer supervision of mistrusted generals. Rather, Bragg seemed to seek cooperation, allowing his corps commanders to exercise their initiative and frequently requesting their counsel. Even the tone of Bragg's later orders seem more civil, even pleasant, than previous, frequently suggesting action when a direct order would have been more appropriate. He was trying to foster cooperation by appealing to the innate patriotism and sense of duty of his commanders. It should be noted that Bragg maintained a high personal regard for the professional abilities of several men who were known to have been against him at some point, including Hardee, Buckner and Cleburne. However, Bragg's attempts to mend fences came too late. By summer 1863 the command climate was too damaged to be redeemed by anything but a change of command or a brilliant victory.

Ultimately, it does not matter whether Braxton Bragg has been unfairly judged or whether his subordinates were just in disparaging him. By the fall of 1862 President Davis knew that command problems existed, and by the following spring the entire nation was aware of the internal squabbling and lack of confidence in the Army of Tennessee. It is true that Johnston and others reported in the spring of 1863 that conditions were satisfactory in the army, yet Davis was in possession of correspondence from Polk, Kirby Smith, and others reporting otherwise. Davis was so concerned that he made a personal trip to Murfreesboro to investigate. As an experienced military man he must have realized that the Army of Tennessee had major command problems that could only be resolved by the removal of Bragg or Polk. As a politician he was not willing to run the political risks inherent in relieving the generals fomenting unrest. The situation seemed to demand he replace Bragg. Yet, Davis sustained in command a general who was unable to induce appropriate respect and cooperation from his subordinates. President Davis failed to support Bragg by replacing Polk, failed to relieve Bragg when all indicators were that it was necessary, and failed to force Johnston to assume command when so ordered.

Jefferson Davis' personal loyalties were legendary. Liddell records that Davis "with singular tenacity . . . upheld those who had met his favor, no matter how poorly rated by public opinion."⁴ Therein may lie the reason for his failure to relieve Bragg in early 1863. The subsequent lost opportunities had been conceived on the battlefield of Buena Vista.

Relevance to Today's Army

The primary lesson provided to today's warriors by the Army of Tennessee is the importance of a solid command climate in achieving tactical success. The commander, his superiors, and his followers play essential roles in developing that climate. A chain of command in disarray will always fail to achieve the full measure of success. This is a timeless truth. Not only is it certain to be a factor on future battlefields, it is doubtless being proven in many unfortunate army organizations today.

Officers will most often encounter a difficult command climate as subordinates in a unit with an incompetent, unpleasant or divisive commander. In this situation they will find fewer available options than their forebears had in the Civil War. Professional military ethics in 1863 differed from those of today. Officers then felt it was acceptable, perhaps even a professional duty, to oppose commanders who did not meet expectations. Bragg did it to Winfield Scott and the "Old Fogies" in the 1850's; fifteen years later his subordinates did it to him. Today we have a different concept of the duties of a follower. We are taught that it is our right to exchange frank opinions with a superior while contemplating a decision, and our duty to execute that decision with zeal and good faith once it is made, regardless of personal opinion. Bragg's difficulties prove the rightness of this modern military ethic.

The first step in creating a good unit is to be a good follower. Officers are only justified in going over their superior's head in cases of clear ethical or moral failings, or, in combat, in cases of demonstrated and deadly incompetence. Faithful and loyal service, in spite of personal feelings towards the commander, is the quickest way for a subordinate to improve command climate and perhaps create a good commander.

Not all commanders or subordinates are good. It is then the duty of the superior to relieve the offending officer. In the case of demonstrated incompetence, ethical violations or disloyalty few today will question a superior officer's right to relieve. This difficult decision must be made after careful thought, but made with the firm belief that the over-riding priority is to create an effective organization. This decision is often hampered by personal considerations and feelings of goodwill towards the suspect officer. Moral courage and an appreciation of his overall responsibilities help a commander make the necessary and perhaps personally painful decision to relieve.

¹The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies 128 vols. (Washington : Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Serial 1, volume 20, part 2, p.441, 493.

²Polk to Daughter, 10 October 1863, Leonidas Polk Papers, University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.

³Bragg to Charles Jones, 25 September 1863, Charles Jones Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

⁴St. John Richardson Liddell, Liddell's Record ed. Nathaniel C. Hughes (Dayton : Morningside, 1985), 59.

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Martin, W. T. "A Defense of General Bragg's Conduct at Chickamauga." Southern Historical Society Papers 11 (January-December 1883) : 201-206.

Polk, W. M. "General Bragg and the Chickamauga Campaign." Southern Historical Society Papers 12 (June 1884) : 378-390.

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