



**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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BRAXTON BRAGG - MILITARY STRATEGIST

BY

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Braxton Bragg progressed through a diverse and demanding career to become a military strategist and ultimately General-in-Chief of Confederate States of America (CSA) Armies. General Braxton Bragg devoted over four years of his life to senior CSA Army leadership positions, mostly in command. He surpassed every general officer in the CSA and Union in holding such a wide range of senior officer responsibilities. Bragg observed closely and operated in and around the operational and strategic environment for the majority of his life. By virtue of his previous duties, assignments, and experiences, Bragg observed, participated in, and influenced hundreds of meetings and decisions that are best described as "strategic art." He developed his strategic competencies through: civilian and military education; an honorable, diverse, demanding, and rare service and assignment history; and, life-threatening experiences that only a few would ever taste. Braxton Bragg strategized with the best experts of his day.

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PREFACE

General Braxton Bragg, you have the misfortune of being regarded as my personal friend, and are pursued, therefore, with malignant censure by men regardless of truth and whose want of principle to guide their conduct renders them incapable of conceiving that you are trusted because of your known fitness for command...

— President Jefferson Davis

The press of the country did [Bragg] great injustice.

— Brigadier General Arthur Middleton Manigault

The only enemies [Bragg] had were a few bad Generals and some newspaper editors.

— General Joseph Wheeler

The future Historian in chronicling the events and the lives of our great men, will hoist on high the name of Braxton Bragg, as synonymous with cool courage, consummate bravery, and determined devotion to the cause he espoused and served so well.

— Major Simon Mayer

The army under Bragg fought--and fought skillfully--some of the fiercest battles in the history of the world's wars. General Bragg's place in the annals of war must always remain large where the records are correctly read.

— Don C. Seitz

Let us, then, try to place him before our readers, void of all party feeling, and strictly as we find things honestly recorded.

— Captain William P. Snow

As an Army ROTC cadet at Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, 25 years ago, I began my journey as a student of General Braxton Bragg. Over these past two and a half decades, I have examined every book I could get my hands on that speaks of Braxton Bragg. Although I did not read every book in its entirety, I did examine every entry that referenced Braxton Bragg. Clearly, he was not "Mr. Collegiality," but if Braxton Bragg was alive today, he could easily win a "defamation of character" court case.

This paper will examine the positive aspects of Bragg's life that are routinely ignored by historians. I have deliberately dismissed the criticisms heaped on Bragg. One of the surest ways to turn a student away from a love of history is for the student to find in his books and readings only passages that embellish the negatives, most of which are not true. Although this paper does not rehabilitate Bragg's reputation, it will lay out "things" a bit differently (truth and accuracy) than some of our esteemed historians have done. If nothing else is achieved, perhaps some readers will come away with some incontestable positive aspects of Bragg's accomplishments and relook the details of Bragg's contributions.

Of the six military officers to rise to the highest rank of full General in the regular Confederate Army, Braxton Bragg is the most defamed. Many of our Civil War history books are threaded with mostly negative assessments and snippets of Bragg's actions and behavior. There is no doubt that the anti-Bragg clique led by the Reverend Leonidis Polk with the helpful aid of much of the press had too much influence and dominated the perception of Bragg in our Civil War history. Why do so many historians paint a completely negative, mean portrait of Braxton Bragg, when there is so much more documented evidence that disputes the negatives? This paper will accentuate the positive attributes of Braxton Bragg, and will not re-fight the Civil War battles in which he participated. Bottom line up front: Bragg is one of the great military strategists of the Civil War.

BRAXTON BRAGG--MILITARY STRATEGIST

Jefferson Davis failed to recognize the value of taking advantage of Bragg's capabilities as a strategist and organizer by placing him in a high office such as chief of staff of the armies early in the war.

— W. J. Wood

Although very tardy in making the decision, Confederate States of America (CSA) President Jefferson Davis recognized Braxton Bragg's administrative genius, mastery of strategy, and wisdom of the workings of the armies in the field, and finally appointed Bragg as General-in-Chief of CSA Armies, February 24, 1864. Bragg was one of only six men who ever became a full General in the regular Confederate army.¹ A veteran of three wars, he spent his life in heroic service in the cause of country.²

Bragg's closest friend, Union hero General William Tecumseh "Cump" Sherman, who knew Bragg better than anyone other than Mrs. Braxton Bragg and family, offered these comments of Bragg: "I think I knew Bragg as well as any living man, appreciated his good qualities, and had charity for his weaknesses....[and as the replacement for Beauregard]....Bragg [was] a man of more ability-of greater powers of organization, of action, and discipline

[and]....great integrity."³ Bragg's journey to full General and military strategist was certainly no surprise to Cump Sherman.

Historians do not give much attention to Braxton Bragg as a military strategist. However, Braxton Bragg progressed through a diverse and demanding career to become a strategist and ultimately General-in-Chief of CSA Armies. The purpose of this paper is to present a portrait of Braxton Bragg, devoid of graffiti, that accentuates his positive attributes and achievements. In looking at General Bragg, it is helpful to view his life and development in a chronological context.

PART I: BRAGG'S DEVELOPMENT

THE EARLY YEARS (1817 to 1837)

Braxton had developed in physical and intellectual strength and character each year at West Point, his final class rank was considered highly honorable.

— General Joseph Hooker

Braxton Bragg was born March 22, 1817, in Warrenton, North Carolina. He was welcomed into an industrious family that believed in higher education, a demanding work ethic, and public service. Surrounded by loving parents and high achieving siblings, including five brothers and six sisters, a great deal was expected of the youthful Braxton Bragg.

Braxton excelled in all academic areas. He was a standout student in mathematics and Latin for nine years at Warrenton Male Academy. At the ripe old age of 16, Bragg was appointed a cadet to the United States Military Academy at West Point. He continued to be an outstanding student, which formally culminated in his graduation with distinction, fifth of fifty, in his West Point class of 1837.

Twenty-year old Braxton Bragg galloped out of West Point as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army. He was an engineer, scholar, accomplished equestrian, and top ten per-center. More importantly, Bragg was a military officer who possessed a passion to discuss, debate, write about, and contribute to military and political matters.

THE LIEUTENANT YEARS (1837 to 1845)

Yesterday, I received a letter from General Gaines which called Scott "a vain glorious dabbler in politics" who wanted to establish "a prison discipline in the army." Gaines particularly deplored Scott's "iniquitous attempt to crush that talented young officer Lieutenant Bragg."

— Congressman James G. Clinton

Lieutenant Braxton Bragg began his active duty immediately after graduation and headed to Florida as a member of the Third Artillery. (Ironically, he began his CSA Army generalship in

Florida, too.) Bragg was involved primarily in a supporting role in this low-intensity conflict, guerrilla type action, fighting Seminole Indians.

Initially serving in positions as assistant commissary officer and regimental adjutant, Bragg did not see any combat. Due to poor health, which he endured throughout his lifetime, in 1840, he managed an assignment as a recruiter in New York City for several months. Returning to Florida from recruiting duty, Bragg assumed company command, which included commanding Fort Marion for part of that tenure.

In 1843, Third Artillery moved to Fort Moultrie, South Carolina. Bragg continued in command, and most surprising of all, he survived a court-martial conviction. He was found guilty of "disrespect toward his superiors," a badge of honor he wore proudly until the day he died. First Lieutenant Braxton Bragg was certainly not a "yes" man. He offered constructive criticism and creative thinking to his superiors, something that the chain of command, including the Secretary of War, certainly did not appreciate. Ironically, Bragg was correct, and he received an outpouring of support from some members of Congress and other senior Army officers.

WRITER AND AUTHOR (1840's AND BEYOND)

Bragg was the author of many essays relating to his profession and many other subjects, able and practical, and always free from the sickening egotism which fill the works of some of our more recent Army authors.

— General Joseph Hooker

Lieutenant Bragg contributed immeasurably to military thought of the 1840's. Particularly noteworthy was his series of nine articles published in the Southern Literary Messenger during 1844 and 1845. Bragg's recurring theme was army reform. He offered two important ways to improve the army: first, the many separate staff bureaus should be unified under one chief; and, second, staff assignments should be rotated so that all officers could learn staff duties.

First Lieutenant Bragg's appeal for army reforms was ignored. No significant staff changes were made until 1903, when Congress adopted a program suggested by Secretary of War Elihu Root.⁴ At the heart of this new system was what Braxton Bragg had proposed nearly sixty years before--the establishment of an integrated bureau organization headed by a chief of staff and the abolition of permanent staff assignments.⁵

THE MEXICAN WAR YEARS (1845 TO 1848)

Bragg was....a distinguished veteran of the campaigns of northern Mexico, whose bravery and skill had won him three brevet promotions--no other officer in the army had received more.

— Grady McWhiney

Fate, luck, and good fortune came to Bragg on June 18, 1845. He was ordered to join General Zachary Taylor's army for the defense of Texas against Mexico. For three exhausting years, Braxton Bragg commanded an artillery battery or company, rising from First Lieutenant to brevet Lieutenant Colonel. Bragg was tested in the heat of numerous battles and exhibited audacity, courage, and independent action. Historian Stewart Sifakis said of Bragg, "his battery of 'flying artillery' revolutionized, in many respects, the battlefield use of that arm."⁶

Bragg was the hero of one the most remarkable and famous battles of the Mexican War--the Battle of Buena Vista on February 23, 1847. "Captain Bragg....saved the day," reported General Zachary Taylor.⁷ Later, General Joseph Hooker would call Taylor's statement "the highest praise ever awarded an officer of....[Bragg's] rank....on the battlefield."⁸ Braxton Bragg established himself as the commander to emulate. He henceforth

carried a reputation for the highest ideals of preparation, discipline, and competency.

NATIONAL HERO, MARRIAGE, AND NEW ASSIGNMENTS (1848 to 1855)

Of those who shared in the glory of Zachary Taylor's Mexican War triumph at Buena Vista on February 23rd, 1847, Braxton Bragg stood foremost.

— Curt Johnson and Mark McLaughlin

In June 1848, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Braxton Bragg returned home from Texas and Mexico as a national hero. He was the "toast of the town" everywhere he traveled and treated as though he alone had won the war. Bragg made many public appearances and speeches as he traveled around the United States. He attempted to use his new influence for army reform. Much to his credit, Bragg praised the "rank and file" of the army and insisted that the enlisted men and company-grade officers deserved the credit for the American victory in Mexico.⁹

In January 1849, Bragg's life changed for-the-better and forever. He accepted an invitation to visit Thibodaux, Louisiana, and met his future wife, Eliza Brooks Ellis, while attending a ball in his honor. They were married on June 7, 1849, less than five months after meeting each other.

Mrs. Braxton Bragg, who preferred to be called Elise, was a huge influence on Braxton in all matters. Elise was wealthy, smart, opinionated, and believed and said of Braxton, "he is truth itself, firm, unbending with principles most exalted...."¹⁰

Almost immediately after getting married, Braxton and Elise headed for Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Bragg restored his command and renewed his efforts for army reform. Much of his time was spent traveling the frontier, reading, writing, and engaging in the issues of the day.

On October 31, 1853, Braxton and Elise were reassigned, with his artillery battery, to Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation, located on the Arkansas River in what is now northeastern Oklahoma. Eight months of primitive living conditions, harsh weather, and the threat of Indian attacks took their toll. This was the beginning of the end for Braxton Bragg's career in the United States Army.

For the next six months, Braxton and Elise were assigned to Fort Washita near the Texas border. Conditions were no better and in April 1855, the Braggs departed on leave for Thibodaux, Louisiana, never to return. Braxton fought the good fight for army reform and equipment modernization, to no avail.

Ironically, the United States Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis,

drove Braxton out of the United States Army. Bragg resigned and began a new adventure in Louisiana.

FARMER and BUSINESSMAN (1856-1860)

By 1860 Bragg's methods seemed successful. The census of 1860 verified Bragg's prosperity. Listed as a farmer, he reportedly owned 1,640 acres of land conservatively valued, together with machinery and livestock, at \$101,900....the estimated value of his personal estate was \$120,000. By standards of the time, he was a rich man.

— Grady McWhiney

In February 1856, Braxton Bragg began his new career--as a "farmer." Immediately after purchasing a sugar plantation north of Thibodaux, Louisiana, he started a new livelihood on a new estate--which he named "Bivouac." Again, Bragg was very successful.

Bragg studied, planned, and worked as a farmer with the same intensity and work ethic he applied to everything else he had pursued in the past. "My crop was finished on the 12th, and is by far the most profitable one I have made--giving me a net profit of \$30,000," he boasted in December 1859.¹¹ For five years he had no holiday; only after his health deteriorated, and on doctor's orders, would he spend a few weeks in the mountains.¹² During the Civil War, Bragg recalled and applied

many of the skills learned with the risks of owning and managing a huge plantation.

CIVILIAN PUBLIC SERVANT and POLITICIAN (1857 to 1860)

As Bragg became economically successful, he took a more active interest in public affairs. He had always been concerned with politics, and even as he struggled with the art of planting he watched the national scene.

— Grady McWhiney

Bragg was raised with a keen sense of public service. Two of Braxton's brothers were prominent government leaders, politicians and legal scholars. Thomas Jr. served as United States Senator and Governor of North Carolina and would become Attorney General of the CSA. John, the oldest brother, served as a state legislator for North Carolina, and state supreme court judge and congressman for Alabama. Both of these brothers served as confidants and advisers to Braxton on key national and international issues of the day.

Bragg's initial step in the civilian public service arena came by accepting local government appointments as Levee Inspector and School Director. In 1859, he agreed to run for public office as a Democrat. His first and only elective office attempt was a success. Bragg was elected Second District Commissioner on the Louisiana Board of Public Works. In this

capacity, Bragg designed, planned, and implemented the levee and drainage system that allowed Louisiana to reclaim a vast amount of land for farming.

Bragg's lifelong interest in higher education was the "spark" that allowed his direct involvement with the establishment and sustainment of the new Louisiana Military College at Alexandria, Louisiana, which became Louisiana State University. He was very helpful to William Tecumseh "Cump" Sherman, his devoted friend and first president of the college. Sherman commented, "Bragg...put me in such good relation with his friends that really they overcame me with zeal."¹³

On December 12, 1860, the Louisiana Governor appointed Bragg to his final civilian public service position prior to the Civil War, a member of the state military board. Additionally, he was the Governor's military aide and a Colonel in the Louisiana Militia. In less than two months he was appointed Major General and Commander of the Louisiana State Army.

PART II: CIVIL WAR (1861 TO 1865)

The Union is already dissolved. The only question now is: can we reconstruct any government without bloodshed?

— Braxton Bragg to "Cump" Sherman, December 26, 1860

WILL BRAXTON BRAGG BE THE FIRST CSA SECRETARY OF WAR?

Davis had wanted Braxton Bragg, who helped save the day at Buena Vista, to head the War Department.

— Hudson Strode

Braxton Bragg joined the CSA as an accomplished 43 year old man. He succeeded at everything he attempted. Bragg had proven himself as: student and scholar; writer and author; military commander and leader; speaker and orator; public servant, civilian government leader and politician; and, businessman, entrepreneur, farmer, and engineer.

Braxton Bragg was and had been friends with industry leaders, senior military leaders, state legislators, congressmen, senators, governors, cabinet members, presidents of both the USA and CSA, and foreign dignitaries. He enjoyed a 360 degree view of the highest level of political processes, mostly as an ardent Democrat. Bragg observed closely and operated in and around the operational and strategic environment for the majority of his life.

For these sound reasons, CSA President Jefferson Davis's first choice to be the CSA Secretary of War was Braxton Bragg. Ultimately, internal politics involving the Cabinet and Congress led Davis to choose someone not even on his short list. There

was much hope among professional soldiers, throughout the war, that Bragg would be appointed Secretary of War, but to no avail.

On March 23, 1862, Jefferson D. Bradford (nephew of Jefferson Davis) wrote to President Davis, "I hear a great deal of talk about your making General Bragg Secretary of War, as far as my knowledge and judgment goes I think you could not make a better selection or one that would give more lively satisfaction and confidence to the Army which he has so long commanded. He is one of the coolest men I have ever seen in danger, a shell burst within a few paces of him during the bombardment at Pensacola, and as the sulphur gained our nostrils, he turned round to us and with a smile said "Young gentlemen you smell your powder."¹⁴

BRAXTON BRAGG'S CSA ARMY SERVICE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Bragg...no General has more public confidence and admiration. Your praise is on the lips of every man. Mr. (Secretary of War Judah P.) Benjamin told me that you were "the greatest General we had." President Davis said to me that "you (were)...the only General who had accomplished all you undertook."

— Congressman James L. Pugh, March 16, 1862

Bragg devoted over four years of his life to senior CSA Army leadership positions, mostly in command. General Braxton Bragg surpassed every general officer in the CSA and Union in holding such a wide range of senior officer responsibilities.

His CSA Army appointments, promotions, and assignments included: Colonel, Louisiana Militia (early 1861); Major General, Louisiana Militia (early 1861); commanding Department of Louisiana (February 22-March 1861); Brigadier General, CSA (March 7, 1861); commanding Pensacola, Florida (March 11-October 29, 1861); Major General, CSA (September 12, 1861); commanding Department of Alabama and west Florida (October 14, 1861-February 28, 1862); also commanding Army of Pensacola (October 29-December 22, 1861); commanding Army of the Mississippi (March 6-17, May 7-July 5, August 15-September 28, and November 7-20, 1862); commanding II Corps, Army of the Mississippi (March 29-June 30, 1862); General, CSA (April 12, 1862); commanding Department Two (June 17-October 24, 1862 and November 3, 1862-July 25, 1863); commanding Army of Tennessee (November 20, 1862-December 2, 1863); also commanding Department of Tennessee (August 6-December 2, 1863, except for briefly in August); General-in-Chief of the CSA Armies (effective February 24, 1864); commanding Department of North Carolina (November 27, 1864-April 9, 1865, but under Joseph E. Johnston from March 6, 1865); and, supervising Hoke's Division, Hardee's Corps, Army of Tennessee (April 9-26, 1865).

His experience with (and confidence held by) Jefferson Davis was certainly the deciding factor in Bragg's promotion to full

General and ascendancy to General-in-Chief of the CSA Armies on February 24, 1864. However, Historian Grady McWhiney writes:

Bragg, it is often charged, received promotion to full general only because he and President Davis had long been friends. Such was not the case. One reason why Bragg resigned from the United States Army was because he disliked Davis, who was then Secretary of War. In 1855 Bragg informed his friend William T. Sherman, "To judge from high sounding words in reports and bills before Congress, Mr. Jeff. Davis intends to have an Army after his own heart (not a very good one by the way). We are all to be placed at his mercy, and to be placed at his mercy, and to be rearranged to suit his pleasure and convenience." Bragg considered Davis "a good deal of the pettifogger and special pleader." Years later Sherman recalled that "Bragg hated Davis bitterly" for sending him to the frontier, "as Bragg expressed it 'to chase Indians with six-pounders [cannons]'.¹⁵"

Bragg's elevation to the position of General-in-Chief of CSA Armies automatically ensured his "official" role as a strategic leader. By virtue of his previous duties, assignments, and experiences, Bragg observed, participated in, and influenced hundreds of meetings and decisions that can best be described as "strategic art."

Bragg's broad-based experience transcended merely the theoretical and academic understanding that many CSA senior military leaders possessed. He was a participant and leader in developing strategies that overlap between theater, national military, and national security. His boundless experiences and

travels made him one of only a handful of men in the nation that had formulated and developed in their minds a "strategic and operational intelligence preparation of the battlespace." By accepting President Jefferson Davis's offer and plea to take the position of General-in-Chief of CSA Armies, General Braxton Bragg's long road of preparation was complete.

BRAXTON BRAGG AS A STRATEGIST

Bragg had few peers in the grasp of strategy and its application on the highest military level.

— W. J. Wood

Bragg developed his strategic competencies through: civilian and military education; an honorable, diverse, demanding, and rare service and assignment history; and, life-threatening experiences that only a few would ever taste. He could and did strategize with the best experts of his day.

Soon after being promoted to Major General and while serving as Commander of Alabama and West Florida, Braxton Bragg perceived the fault in Jefferson Davis's national strategy in deploying forces for coastal defense instead of concentrating them where badly needed to counter invading Union armies in areas like Tennessee.¹⁶ Bragg expressed himself forcefully in letters to

Richmond, where Davis soon recognized the wisdom of Bragg's advice.¹⁷ Bragg wrote:

It is a great misfortune that our limited means should be so much dispersed....We are being whipped in detail, when a vigorous move with our resources concentrated would be infinitely more damaging to the enemy....I have urgently advised our government to cease protecting property, and apply all its means to the discomfiture of the enemy--the only strategic points to be held in the gulf are New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola. All else should be abandoned at once. It would double our resources, and enable us to aid those behind us.¹⁸

It was mainly Bragg's concept of rapid concentration followed by a swift and aggressive offense that made possible surprise of Grant's army at Shiloh.¹⁹ Of particular note, Bragg's personal supervision and vigorous command actions kept up the momentum of the attack at Shiloh.²⁰ The Confederate Cavalryman Joseph Wheeler praised Braxton Bragg for his understanding of the offensive, "Bragg...fully appreciated the fact that, when an adversary is not intrenched, a determined attack is the beginning of victory."²¹ Historian William C. Davis wrote, "of all the Confederate Army commanders, Bragg led more offensives than any other except Lee."²²

In July 1862, General Bragg conceived a strategic plan that was as bold as it was grand in concept, the invasion of Kentucky.²³ Historian, Lawrence L. Hewitt, wrote:

"The Confederates had invaded Federal territory, whether Kentucky was a border state or not. During the course of the campaign, they had recaptured the strong defensive position at Cumberland Gap; they had virtually annihilated the Federal force sent to Richmond, Kentucky, to stop the movement before it was underway, and they had captured a garrison of over 4,000 men at Mundfordville. In addition, Bragg had won a tactical victory against odds of almost four-to-one. Following this engagement, the confederates were allowed to make an almost unharassed retreat, undoubtedly giving the impression to many Northerners, Southerners, and Europeans alike that the Confederates could come and go almost as they pleased, regardless of the odds. Bragg had so maneuvered his forces that northern Alabama, Middle Tennessee below Nashville, and East Tennessee were cleared of Federal troops. Bragg's strategy had forced Major General Ulysses S. Grant to detach a considerable force from West Tennessee to aid Buell, and in doing so, Grant was held in check until late in the year by the small force that Bragg had left behind in Mississippi under Van Dorn and Price; a portion of Van Dorn's command had also established a second bastion on the Mississippi River at Port Hudson, thereby giving the Confederates control of a substantial stretch of the waterway as well as the Red River. Moreover, the Federal threat to Chattanooga, an important base for offensive operations for either side, was abated for an entire year. Bragg's campaigning by maneuver should have become the primary Confederate strategy in the Western theater. Even if the invasions were to fail, the maneuvers would upset Federal plans and would delay their penetration of the Confederate interior. More importantly, Bragg demonstrated what a single individual could accomplish when charged with the defense of the entire Western Theater. Between June and October of 1862, Bragg displayed greater abilities at grand strategy than did any other Confederate commander during the entire war; he had accepted responsibility for key positions hundreds of miles from his headquarters and had successfully held them for the Confederacy."²⁴

The Kentucky campaign displayed Bragg's superior skills as an organizer, trainer of troops, strategist, and logistician.²⁵

More important, Bragg's strategic use of the railroad reversed the direction of the war.²⁶ The Confederates, thanks to Bragg, had a chance to regain all they had lost.²⁷

The Battle of Chickamauga, the greatest Confederate victory in the Western Theater during the entire civil war, was planned and executed by General Braxton Bragg.²⁸ He should be credited with a Napoleonic perception of seizing the opportunity to take the offensive and destroy in detail a part of his enemy's forces while that enemy's major elements were widely separated.²⁹ The Battle of Chickamauga had more strategic significance than most civil war battles because it was a major strategic victory achieved by using the telegraph and the railroad to carry out a Napoleonic concentration over an immense space.³⁰

After the war, Union Corps Commander, General Thomas L. Crittenden remembered that Bragg was always eager to take the offensive.³¹ Crittenden remarked "the battle of Murfreesboro was fought according to the plan of General Bragg. Indeed, our uniform experience was--at Perryville, at Stone's River, at Chickamauga--that whenever we went to attack Bragg we were attacked by him."³²

BRAXTON BRAGG'S MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Bragg could discipline, organize, feed, and move troops better than any other Confederate general.

— Grady McWhiney

DISCIPLINARIAN

All the officers who knew Bragg....thought he was perhaps the best disciplinarian in the United States Army....That is the universal opinion as far as I have heard, and I have conversed with a great many of the old Regular Army officers.

— General Lovell H. Rousseau

Bragg was the foremost disciplinarian (martinet) of the Civil War. John Buie said, "Bragg is beyond doubt the best disciplinarian in the South."³³ He was one of the few Southern commanders who could establish and maintain discipline in large forces.³⁴ Bragg's reputation for high standards developed early in his adult life and received much attention during the Mexican War, but became prominent again in the early weeks of the Civil War. While Bragg was commanding at Pensacola as a Brigadier General in 1861, Richard Taylor (son of President Zachary Taylor) wrote of Bragg as, "a disciplinarian he far surpassed any of the other Confederate generals...."³⁵ President Jefferson Davis wrote to General Albert Sidney Johnston on February 28, 1862,

"General Bragg brings you disciplined troops and you will find in him the highest administrative capacity."³⁶

ORGANIZER

One call came from Albert Sidney Johnston, the Confederate commander in the West, who found great difficulty in filling his ranks, beset as he was by much loyalism in Kentucky and Tennessee. Knowing General Bragg's qualities as an organizer he sent Colonel W. P. Buckner to Pensacola seeking aid.

— Don Carlos Seitz

Bragg's organizational abilities were known throughout the Confederacy. He was a genius at organizing fighting forces.³⁷ Shortly after Bragg joined Johnston, he appointed Bragg as his Chief of Staff of the Army in order to improve army administration and discipline. Brigadier General Arthur Middleton Manigault said of Bragg, "General Braxton Bragg is the best organizer of an army that I have ever served under."³⁸

President Davis had praised Bragg's high "administrative capacity" to Johnston. Johnston knew he needed Bragg's close supervision of army reorganization. Bragg was, after all, a compulsive worker and delighted in details. Serving both as Chief of Staff of an Army and II Corps Commander (the largest corps in the army) simultaneously was a challenge. Bragg was the

only man in the Confederacy who could do both at the same time, with quality results.

TRANSPORTATION AND LOGISTICS GENIUS

Bragg boldly set out for Chattanooga...One thing Bragg understood clearly...This was a railroad war, the first one in history, and a general who knew how to use the rails could move armies faster and farther than armies had ever been moved before...The whole complexion of the war in the west had changed.

— Bruce Catton

Bragg's core competencies included logistics and transportation. He loved the soldiers and was always concerned about their welfare. Food and supplies were top priorities for Bragg's planning and actions. He was a terror to all quartermasters and commissaries, no trains ever stopped or were out of place, and seldom was there any grumbling about quantity or quality of food.³⁹ Sustaining such a large force as the Army of Tennessee or even all of the Confederate forces were always in Bragg's mind.

In July 1862, less than a month after becoming Commander of the Army of Tennessee, Bragg again displayed his creativity. He conceived and executed a logistical marvel. Bragg moved his army (almost 32,000 men) approximately 800 miles, over six railroads, going south from Tupelo to Mobile, northeast to Montgomery and

Atlanta and then Northwest to Chattanooga. Bragg's strategic decision and use of the railroad were unprecedented. Braxton Bragg had stolen a long march on the Federals by getting into Chattanooga while Buell was still methodically perfecting his arrangements in central Tennessee.⁴⁰

Organizing his rail movements with typical thoroughness, Bragg made sure that his commissary representatives met rail-borne soldiers along the way with rations, which they had not been able to forage for themselves from a moving train. Bragg used the railroad as if it were a pipeline, a method that permitted rapid concentration, and became a feature of Confederate strategy.

TRAINER

Bragg's genius for training troops was universally recognized.

— W. J. Wood

When given time and latitude Bragg unfailingly turned out a corps or army that was unmatched in the Confederate service for efficiency and standards of performance.⁴¹ He was good at whipping raw troops into soldiers and restoring their morale after a defeat.⁴² In fact, Brigadier General Bragg did such an outstanding job of training troops and organizing forces in

Florida, he attracted national attention.⁴³ Additionally, in the field of staff management, he created innovations that were models of effectiveness.⁴⁴

INNOVATIVE TACTICIAN

With guerrillas and calvary raids complementing each other, the Confederate's logistic raiding strategy stopped Buell and gave them the opportunity to plan another campaign. This operation came at the initiative of the new commander of the Western Department, General Braxton Bragg.

— Archer Jones

Bragg was certainly the man who envisioned, implemented, and had the most zeal for one of the CSA's most effective strategies, the use of cavalry raids against Union logistics. Essentially an offensive strategy, Bragg could use the raid successfully because it avoided the enemy's main forces. Bragg's plan of rapid concentration followed by a swift and aggressive offense made possible the tactical surprise of Grant's army at Shiloh.

Braxton Bragg and Robert E. Lee successfully united the turning movement, the raid, and concentration in time.⁴⁵ Bragg converted the turning movement into a fine art and introduced it as a defensive means of driving back the enemy without the necessity of fighting a defensive battle.⁴⁶

BRAGG'S HONORABLE CHARACTER

Bragg was a remarkably intelligent and well informed man, professionally and otherwise. He was also thoroughly upright.

— President U. S. Grant

There are countless actions and tributes that give insight to Bragg's honorable character throughout his life. Impartial historians that have studied General Braxton Bragg's traits in "detail" have described him in terms of: brave, caring, compassionate, conspicuous courage, devoted, fearless, heroic, integrity, intelligent, loyal, superior strength, dauntless warrior, untiring, valor, and vigor. Let's look at a couple.

COURAGE

Bragg's personal courage was unquestionable.

— W. J. Wood

The Shiloh battlefield was a fearful, stressful, and chaotic place. When the Confederates attacked at Shiloh on April 6, 1862, Major General Bragg, serving as chief of staff of the army and II Corps commander, personally led several direct assaults against Union forces. For several hours Bragg directed assaults near the center of the battlefield against a determined Union resistance.⁴⁷ Before 10 A.M., his horse was killed and fell on

him; mounting another horse, Bragg saw a regiment belonging to "Polk's mob" break, and rushed to halt them.⁴⁸ An hour later, his second horse was killed.⁴⁹ Bragg's nephew, who was a participant at Shiloh, said Uncle Braxton had three horses shot from under him and yet was not hit.⁵⁰

Bragg was a man of vigor and endowed with superior strength.⁵¹ He certainly exhibited strength, inspiration, and leadership at Shiloh. This type of conduct was common throughout his lifetime. Bragg's soldiers and the soldiers of other commanders viewed firsthand his personal courage. Two of Bragg's other traits, decisiveness and initiative, were clearly on display, too.

CARING and COMPASSION

When Union Major General John F. Reynolds was a Lieutenant, he came down with a severe attack of "bilious fever." He was in bed for a month and weak for many months. Throughout this illness he was nursed by Lieutenant Braxton Bragg. Reynolds may have owed his life to [Bragg's] care.

— Paul E. Steiner, M.D., Ph.D.

Bragg's devotion to and love for his soldiers and friends was exhibited in many ways throughout his lifetime. He was a commander who constantly looked out for the health of his command.⁵² In some cases it was his one-on-one personal care and

attention, and many times it was just plain "tough-love." A reporter noted in October, 1861, "General Bragg was at the....Hospital this morning. He visited the bedside of every wounded soldier, and had a kind word for each. Bragg tried to cheer the sick with his sometimes less than humorous jokes."⁵³ Sternness coupled with concern for the Army's welfare characterized Bragg's command.⁵⁴

On the evening that Bragg relinquished command of the Army of Tennessee, December 2, 1863, J. H. Fraser, wrote to Bragg personally, "Our camp is full of sorrow and sadness, for we had learned to love you as a child loves his father, and the thought of being separated from you, losing perhaps forever your parental-like care sends pangs most bitter through our insides. Many of us have followed you with gladness from Mobile up to the present, and the longer we remained with you the more we loved you, and the more confidence we had in your skill and ability as a military chieftain; and we always felt sure that while General Bragg commanded no evil could ever fall us."⁵⁵ Bragg loved his soldiers and he was loved by the soldiers that really knew him.

CONCLUSION

Braxton Bragg is unique in his Civil War experiences. Throughout the four years of the Confederacy's existence, no other prominent person held such a range of positions and responsibilities. In charge of Gulf Coast fortifications at the start of the war, Bragg later served as a corps commander and chief of staff in the Army of Tennessee before moving up to command the army, a post he held longer than anyone else. With his 1864 appointment as Jefferson Davis' military adviser, Bragg became one of only two Southerner's assigned duties of general-in-chief.

— Historian, Judith Lee Hallock

General Braxton Bragg lived a life of "Duty, Honor, Country."

In analyzing a "restored" portrait of Bragg's experiences, it should be evident that he was an extraordinary strategist. A resident of middle Tennessee wrote in her diary, "When the History of this war is impartially written, it is my deliberate opinion, that to Bragg will be awarded the praise of having done more with his men and means, than any other General of the War, with equal resources."⁵⁶

Word count is 5,621 words.

ENDNOTES

¹ Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L. Hewitt, eds., Leadership During the Civil War (Shippensburg: White Mane Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), 27.

² Clayton Rand, Sons of the South (New York: The Fairfax Press, 1978), 119.

³ William Tecumseh Sherman, Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1990), .

⁴ Grady McWhiney, Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat, Volume I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 38.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stewart Sifakis, Who Was Who in the Civil War (New York: Facts On File Publications, 1988), 68.

⁷ McWhiney, 89.

⁸ Ibid, 89-90.

⁹ Ibid, 107.

¹⁰ Ibid, 115.

¹¹ Ibid, 143.

¹² Ibid, 142.

¹³ Ibid, 148.

¹⁴ Jefferson Davis, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 8, 1862 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 113.

¹⁵ Heleniak and Hewitt, 31-32.

¹⁶ W. J. Wood, Civil War Generalship (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 125.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ McWhiney, 199-200.

¹⁹ Wood, 130.

²⁰ Ibid, 126.

²¹ Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, Attack and Die (University: The University of Alabama Press, 1982), 71.

²² William C. Davis, The Lost Cause (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 16.

²³ Wood, 127.

²⁴ Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L. Hewitt, eds, Leadership During the Civil War (Shippensburg: White Mane Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), 67-68.

²⁵ Wood, 127.

²⁶ McWhiney, 271.

²⁷ Ibid.

- ²⁸ Joseph B. Mitchell, Military Leaders in the Civil War (McLean: EPM Publications, Inc., 1972),.
- ²⁹ Wood, 186.
- ³⁰ Archer Jones, Civil War Command and Strategy New York: The Free Press, 1992), 176.
- ³¹ McWhiney and Jamieson, 71.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ McWhiney, 265.
- ³⁴ Wood, 239.
- ³⁵ McWhiney, 178.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 203.
- ³⁷ Wood, 129.
- ³⁸ Arthur Middleton Manigault, A Carolinian Goes to War (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1983), 158.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Bruce Catton, Terrible Swift Sword (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), 407.
- ⁴¹ Wood, 129.
- ⁴² Curt Anders, Hearts in Conflict (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1994), 179.
- ⁴³ Wood, 125.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 129.
- ⁴⁵ Archer Jones, Civil War Command and Strategy (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 99.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, 233-234.
- ⁴⁷ McWhiney, 235.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 236.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Rand, 119.
- ⁵² Wood, 129.
- ⁵³ McWhiney, 184.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, 185-186.
- ⁵⁶ Heleniak and Hewitt, 68.

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