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## Not Written In Letters of Blood: The Forgotten Legacy of the Army of the Cumberland


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## Not Written In Letters of Blood: The Forgotten Legacy of the Army of the Cumberland

### Cover Page Footnote

CEDARVILLE UNIVERSITY "NOT WRITTEN IN LETTERS OF BLOOD": THE FORGOTTEN LEGACY OF THE ARMY OF THE CUMBERLAND A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE GRAND VALLEY JOURNAL OF HISTORY BY ANDREW R.E. PERKINS 19 JANUARY 2017

There is a chapter missing in the annals of Civil War history. The story of an entire army, and the thousands of men that comprised it, is being widely overlooked by the majority of Civil War historians. That army, the Union Army of the Cumberland, has begun to fade into public obscurity due to four main factors: poorly timed defeats and victories in battle, personal feuds and politicking between Union officers, the mistakes of the army's commanders, and the undue emphasis of Civil War historians on Southern romanticism.

### **The Two Armies: Potomac and Cumberland**

While the largest Union army of the war, the Army of the Potomac, has numerous publications lining the shelves of libraries around the country, the second largest army, the Army of the Cumberland, has garnered no such attention. For proof, look no further than texts written about the Battle of Gettysburg (in which the Army of the Potomac took part), which make up approximately half of the 65,000 books about the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> This is relatively unsurprising, as Gettysburg does represent perhaps the Union's finest victory of the war, on its bloodiest battlefield. However, by comparison, the Battle of Stones River, one of the more notable battles in which the Army of the Cumberland took part, has received just four full volumes written about it,<sup>2</sup> despite being a significant Union

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Atkins, "Gettysburg by the Numbers" *Atkinsbookshelf.com*.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), ix. Larry J. Daniel. wrote a book on the battle later, and his book is added to Cozzens' figure.

victory with the highest casualty percentage of the entire war.<sup>3</sup> To uncover why the Army of the Potomac has been studied so thoroughly while the Army of the Cumberland has not, both armies need to be examined through their leadership, battles fought, and the soldiers themselves.

The Army of the Potomac lacked respectable leadership for the first half of the war. While its founder, George B. McClellan, was organizationally brilliant, he failed miserably during his Peninsular Campaign and barely gained success at Antietam. Following his failure to pursue Lee after the Maryland Campaign, Lincoln began a practice he would be forced to implement far too many times for this army; he removed McClellan from command. His successor, Ambrose Burnside, fared no better, displaying his incompetence through a horrible mauling at the Battle of Fredericksburg. In his footsteps came Joseph Hooker, who was trounced almost as badly at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Finally George Meade, the fourth and final commander of the Army of the Potomac, won at Gettysburg and proved himself worthy of command even after Ulysses S. Grant came east to supervise the army in 1864.<sup>4</sup>

The performance of the soldiers was generally better than their commanders. Though some of the men did wilt away in lopsided battles like

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<sup>3</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 582.

<sup>4</sup> William Swinton, *Army of the Potomac*, 227, 253-54, 303-07, 410-11.

Second Bull Run and Chancellorsville, most of the time they performed admirably, such as when they made assault after assault on Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg or the Sunken Road at Antietam. Units earned nicknames like "The Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>,"<sup>5</sup> and the "Iron Brigade."<sup>6</sup> The grit and determination of these kinds of men showed that their own commanders did not deserve them, nor did those soldiers deserve the defeats their officers so graciously handed to them time after time.

The Army of the Cumberland did not struggle quite as badly when it came to commanders. While the army was still referred to as the Army of the Ohio, it was commanded by Don Carlos Buell. While Buell was not a particularly brilliant man, he did come to Grant's aid and help save the Battle of Shiloh for the Union,<sup>7</sup> and he managed to turn Confederate General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee out of Kentucky, despite his poor handling of the Battle of Perryville.<sup>8</sup> After Buell was replaced because of that tactical loss, the army found its second commander, who would bring the soldiers together into a fully functioning and successful military unit. That commander was William Starke Rosecrans. He led the Army of the Cumberland to victory at Stones River and Tullahoma, before being soundly defeated at the Battle of Chickamauga. After Chickamauga, Grant

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<sup>5</sup> Larry J. Daniel, *Days of Glory*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004) xii.

<sup>6</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 528.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 84.

<sup>8</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 520-22.

replaced Rosecrans with George Thomas, a tough, stoic Virginian who led the army to even greater victories at Missionary Ridge, Atlanta, Franklin, and Nashville. All totaled, the Army of the Cumberland earned more victories and less defeats than the Army of the Potomac by a wide margin.<sup>9</sup>

This was due at least in part to the gallantry and valor of the Cumberlanders themselves, whose fighting performance on an individual basis was similar to their Eastern counterparts. Still, the two armies were more different than alike. One of the differences between the two was that the Army of the Cumberland had a distinctly Western flavor. While the Army of the Potomac was made up of genteel Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and East Coasters who had worked in shops and on fishing boats, the Army of the Cumberland was comprised of rough and tumble farmers and woodsmen from Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois.<sup>10</sup> When Eastern Confederate troops under James Longstreet joined their Western comrades in 1863, they were warned that:

Them fellers out thar you ar goin' up again, ain't none of the blue-bellied, white-livered Yanks an' sassidge-eatin' forrin hirelin's you have in

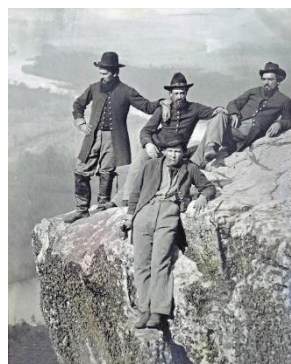
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<sup>9</sup> The Army of the Potomac won three clear victories: Antietam, Gettysburg and Petersburg (though Grant's Overland Campaign of 1864 was a strategic victory, the battles that made up that campaign were tactically inconclusive). In contrast, they were defeated during the Peninsula Campaign, at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, and large groups of which participated in losses at Bull Run, Second Bull Run, and the Shenandoah Valley Campaign. The Cumberlanders, on the other hand, found victory at Shiloh, Stones River, Tullahoma, Chattanooga, Atlanta, Franklin, Nashville, and the March to the Sea, while losing only the Battle of Chickamauga and fighting to a draw at Perryville.

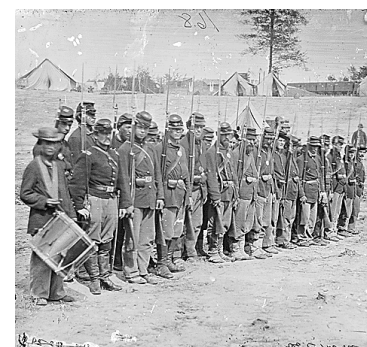
<sup>10</sup> Daniel, *Days*, xii, 3.

Virginny that'll run at the snap of a cap—they are Western fellers, an' they'll mighty quick give you a bellyful o' fightin'.<sup>11</sup>

While officers in the Army of the Potomac like McClellan believed in a high degree of pomp and circumstance, Western commanders like Buell, Rosecrans, and Thomas had no time for such triviality.<sup>12</sup> As the men in the Army of the Potomac favored small, fashionable French caps called kepis, many Westerners wore large-brimmed slouch hats to keep the sun off of their necks and out of their faces.<sup>13</sup> Overall, it could be said that the Army of the Cumberland was somewhat more casual than their Eastern counterparts. However, certainly the biggest difference between the two was that the Cumberlanders found more success in battle and had better leadership than their peers in the hard-luck Army of the Potomac.



Cumberlanders atop Lookout Mountain



“Potomacs” after the Battle of Fredericksburg

This leads to an intriguing

dilemma: If the soldiers of both armies were largely equal in fighting skill and performance in battle, and the Army of the Cumberland was largely more

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound: the Battle of Chickamauga*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996) 203, Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb*, (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1971), 340.

<sup>12</sup> Rosecrans was known for munching on an unlit cigar during battle, while Thomas often fell asleep during war council meetings.

<sup>13</sup> This can be observed when comparing photographs of units from the Eastern Theater with those from the Western Theater, as displayed by the inset on this page. (Photo courtesy: National Archives).

successful than the Army of the Potomac, why is it the latter that receives nearly all the attention?

### Poorly Timed Battles

The answer could lie in the timing of the victories and defeats of the two armies, coupled with the close proximity of Washington, D.C. to the Army of the Potomac. While the Army of the Cumberland's (Army of the Ohio's) first victory at Shiloh on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1862 was certainly praised throughout some of the Northern press, it came on the heels of McClellan's campaign on the Virginia Peninsula where the newspapers and politicians in Washington focused their attention, believing it to be the campaign to end the war.<sup>14</sup> McClellan's campaign with the newly christened Army of the Potomac was certainly destined to turn heads, since the effort consisted of a massive naval operation to move an entire army by sea to make a ground assault against the capital of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia beginning at Fort Monroe (near Norfolk). The splendor and enthusiasm of McClellan's eastern troops was unparalleled in the world, compounded by the sheer size of the Army of the Potomac, which numbered upwards of 100,000 men when it stepped off the docks at Alexandria, Virginia on March 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>15</sup> McClellan himself had already gained popularity from his

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<sup>14</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 437, 454.

<sup>15</sup> Swinton, *Potomac*, 100.



victorious skirmishes in Western Virginia and was a small but imposing figure of strength in the Napoleonic vein of army commanders. His reorganization of Irvin McDowell's former Northeastern Virginia Army into his own Army of the Potomac had Washington abuzz with excitement, and the eyes of the nation were on "Little Mac" up until the moment he was turned back from the gates of Richmond by Robert E. Lee.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, the Army of the Ohio, commanded by the lackluster Don Carlos Buell, numbered a modest 37,000 men when it helped turn the tide against the Confederate Army of Mississippi at Shiloh on April 7<sup>th</sup> (though only 18,000 were engaged in the battle).<sup>17</sup> While the campaign's movement did consist of an impressive march from Nashville to Savannah, Tennessee, and a stellar naval operation to bring Buell's men to Grant's aid in the nick of time, none of it compared to McClellan's unprecedented amphibious effort with the Army of the Potomac. In addition, the location of the showdowns played a role in how the public viewed them. Pittsburg Landing on the Tennessee River, where the Battle of Shiloh took place, was hardly known outside of southwestern Tennessee, while Richmond, McClellan's target, had been seen as the key to winning the war for the Union from the very beginning.<sup>18</sup> Thus, when news of Union victory at a

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<sup>16</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 349.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 75, 83.

<sup>18</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 334.

small place called Shiloh reached the Northern people, initial cheer and enthusiasm quickly faded as their hopes that McClellan would strike the final blow to the heart of the Confederacy were dashed later in July. Similarly, when Rosecrans led the Cumberlanders to victory at Stones River, it was not enough to brighten the mood that had been dampened by Burnside's disastrous defeat at Fredericksburg a few weeks earlier.

The Battle of Fredericksburg began December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1862 and ended on the 15<sup>th</sup>, just two weeks before Rosecrans would lead his men at Stones River. Ambrose Burnside, the newest commander of the 120,000-man Army of the Potomac, had thus far outmaneuvered Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia, numbering just under 80,000, and he hoped to pin down Lee's forces outside Fredericksburg, Virginia. Though Burnside had been hesitant to accept command of the army a month before, since McClellan had been a close personal friend and he was unsure he could live up to the legacy of "Little Mac," he had outpaced Lee's army and gained the upper hand by rapidly moving his large army towards Richmond. However, his wagon train had moved too slowly, and the army could not cross the Rappahannock River and enter the town of Fredericksburg until weeks after he had planned, giving Lee precious time to fortify the heights outside of town and prepare. Instead of wisely withdrawing and attempting to find another path to Richmond, Burnside foolishly sent his men in

piecemeal to their deaths on Marye's Heights on December 13<sup>th</sup> and paid a heavy cost of 12,321 men on the casualty list. Lee, on the other hand, lost only 5,309.<sup>19</sup>

The Battle of Fredericksburg sent shockwaves through the Northern public. The *New York Times* wrote, "The Nation will stand aghast at the terrible price which has been paid for its life when the realities of the battle-field of Fredericksburgh [sic] are spread before it."<sup>20</sup> As the Army of the Potomac slinked back towards the river it was named after, the North quickly settled into a gloom that cast a pall over the remaining days of 1862.

The final day of that perplexing year for the Union, December 31<sup>st</sup>, saw the beginning of a vicious battle near the city of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Out West, where the newspapers and Washington influence did not permeate the public conscious, the soldiers of the Army of the Cumberland awoke prepared to face their enemy across the field—until that enemy drove through their lines before their morning coffee had cooled. The opposing commanders, Braxton Bragg and William Rosecrans, had both planned on using diversions on their opponents' left flank while driving hard into their right. Bragg's plan called for an attack just an hour before Rosecrans', however, so it was the Confederates that made their advance at 6 o'clock that morning.<sup>21</sup> The right wing of the Army of the

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<sup>19</sup> Swinton, *Potomac*, 253.

<sup>20</sup> "The Battle of Fredericksburg," (*New York Times*, 1862).

<sup>21</sup> Cozzens, *Place to Die*, 83.

Cumberland collapsed almost immediately, having been unprepared for heavy fighting. From the onset, it appeared New Year's Eve would seal 1862 as the year of Confederate triumph.<sup>22</sup> However, in the coming hours, a stalwart defense by Brigadier General Phil Sheridan and his troops in the center of the line, along with the rallying of the right wing by Rosecrans, helped turn the tide enough to stifle a complete victory for Bragg.<sup>23</sup> Two days later, the Confederates attempted another attack, but it was met with a hail of gunfire from forty-five Union cannons and a devastating counterattack from several brigades of James Negley's division.<sup>24</sup> Bragg decided to retreat, leaving Rosecrans to claim a surprising victory.

When relaying to Rosecrans his gratitude at the triumph of the Army of the Cumberland, President Lincoln wrote, "You gave us a hard-earned victory, which had there been a defeat instead, the nation could scarcely have lived over."<sup>25</sup> He was correct. The Northern press rejoiced in the news of Rosecrans' victory, painting him as the hero of the Union. For once, it seemed that the Army of the Cumberland's exploits had been properly received. However, soon this "thin gleam of cheer"<sup>26</sup> wore off and could no longer boost the spirits of the Northern people from the heartbreak of Fredericksburg.

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<sup>22</sup> Cozzens, *Place to Die*, 101.

<sup>23</sup> Cozzens, *Place to Die*, 130.

<sup>24</sup> Cozzens, *Place to Die*, 191-92.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 224.

<sup>26</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 582.

In the summer of 1863, the Cumberlanders would be outshone once more. After constant prodding from the War Department in the six months following Stones River, Rosecrans finally left his fortifications in Murfreesboro in late June, brilliantly driving Bragg's army completely out of Eastern Tennessee and into Georgia, capturing eighty miles of land with very few casualties.<sup>27</sup> In addition, by the end of the Tullahoma Campaign (as it is now called), the Army of the Cumberland stood unopposed at the gates of Chattanooga, Tennessee, a key railroad hub for the Confederate Army. Unfortunately, this monumental campaign concluded on July 3, 1863, the exact same day the Battle of Gettysburg ended with the climactic and disastrous Pickett's Charge, and just one day before the Confederate Army of Mississippi and the heavily fortified city of Vicksburg, Mississippi fell to Grant further west. Thus, the campaign was overlooked by the Northern papers in favor of those two events. However, historian Steven Woodworth has advanced the possibility that Rosecrans' victory "hurt [the Confederacy] worse in some ways than the nearly simultaneous Battle of Gettysburg."<sup>28</sup> He adds, "[the campaign] cost the Confederacy a large swath of valuable territory, and with it went perhaps as many as several thousand soldiers who decided to give up the war and desert once their homes came within Union lines." Other historians, such as Earl Hess, have praised Rosecrans' "well-planned

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<sup>27</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 669.

<sup>28</sup> Steven E. Woodworth, *Decision in the Heartland: The Civil War in the West*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2008), 72.

and finely executed”<sup>29</sup> strategy, which did significant damage to the morale of the remaining soldiers in the Confederate Army of Tennessee.

Afterwards, when Secretary of War Edwin Stanton telegraphed Rosecrans proclaiming the great victories in Pennsylvania and Mississippi, and of an opportunity for him to strike the third and final blow to end the war, an appalled Rosecrans retorted, “I beg in behalf of this army that the War Department may not overlook so great an event because it is not written in letters of blood.”<sup>30</sup> Even then, when the events themselves were unfolding, Rosecrans could not help but feel that the poor timing of the army’s accomplishments were depriving them of their share of the glory.

Perhaps Rosecrans was right. While it is not sound logic to decisively conclude that the Cumberlanders have been neglected strictly due to coincidental unfortunate timing, the possibility remains very real and the evidence remarkably supportive. The aforementioned battles show that while the Northern people did take notice of Rosecrans and his army, their hopes and dreams for the war still lived and died with the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac. Still, it is most likely

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<sup>29</sup> Earl J. Hess, *The Civil War in the West*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 186.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 276.

that this is only one of several factors in the absence of material about the Army of the Cumberland.

### **Quarreling Between Union Generals**

Among the factors that have led to a misunderstanding of the Army of the Cumberland's significance are the personal feuds between high-ranking Union officers, in particular Generals Grant, Buell, Rosecrans and Thomas. Though the last three maintained fairly cordial professional relationships with one another, it was Grant's separate conflicts with all three individuals that helped seal the fate of the army they each came to command.

The first conflict, between Grant and Buell, came right on the heels of the Battle of Shiloh. To understand this conflict, the battle must first be analyzed to locate the origin of those hard feelings. The Battle of Shiloh was almost an enormous Confederate victory. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1862, Grant's Army of the Tennessee, with its back to the Tennessee River and Pittsburg Landing, had been driven from their tents by an unexpected early-morning attack from Albert Sidney Johnston's Army of Mississippi. Grant had allowed his army to become lax, as evidenced by lazy troop positioning and overconfidence. While he made his headquarters in a mansion nine miles away from the field, his officers, refusing to believe that Confederate troops were anywhere nearby, situated their men in a way that Winston Groom states was more fit for "a peacetime army" than one

actively campaigning in enemy territory.<sup>31</sup> In his own analysis of the battle, Larry J. Daniel added, “the most critical mistake was the lack of fortifications, for which neither Sherman nor Grant can escape culpability.”<sup>32</sup> As a result, the Army of the Tennessee stood on its back heels by the end of the first day of battle, awaiting a final Confederate assault that never came.

Perhaps the largest reason it did not was due to the timely arrival of Buell’s Army of the Ohio on the field beginning around 5:00 p.m. on the 6th.<sup>33</sup> These fresh troops, numbering 13,000 men, added size and strength to Grant’s force, enabling him to launch a devastating counterattack the next day, driving the Army of Mississippi from the field.<sup>34</sup> Without Buell’s troops, it is unlikely that the counterattack could have been made, and it is quite possible that General Beauregard (Johnston’s replacement after he had been killed) could have forced Grant’s survivors into the Tennessee River if the Army of the Ohio had not arrived.<sup>35</sup>

The newspapers were not kind to Grant following the battle, as many of them labeled him a drunkard who had been intoxicated during the battle (a charge

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<sup>31</sup> Winston Groom, *Shiloh, 1862*, (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2012), 60.

<sup>32</sup> Larry J. Daniel, *Shiloh: the Battle that Changed the Civil War* (Simon & Schuster, 1997), 132.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel, *Shiloh*, 246.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel, *Shiloh*, 265, 290-292

<sup>35</sup> James R. Chumney, “Don Carlos Buell and the Shiloh Campaign,” (*West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 66, December 2012), 20.



that is almost certainly untrue).<sup>36</sup> In stark contrast, the press lavished praise on Buell's men, claiming, "they were, in drill and appearance, the superiors of those under Grant."<sup>37</sup> Understandably, Grant was considerably upset by this, and there was, as one New York reporter wrote, "much ill feeling perceptible between the respective commands of Generals Grant and Buell."<sup>38</sup>

Grant had a similar relationship with Buell's successor, Rosecrans. However, one notable difference between the two relationships is that while Grant and Buell had never particularly liked each other,<sup>39</sup> Grant and Rosecrans had worked well together on multiple occasions and had maintained a cordial relationship for years prior to the Battle of Iuka.

That relationship began in 1839, while Grant was a student at West Point and Rosecrans a cadet officer. Grant had been the victim of a cruel prank regarding a faux night guarding duty, and Rosecrans took pity on him, sending him back to his quarters. Twenty-three years later, when the two met again to serve together in the Department of Mississippi, Grant wrote his wife that if he must serve under any of his subordinates he would do so "willingly" under only two: William Tecumseh Sherman (Grant's closest friend) and Rosecrans.

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel, *Shiloh*, 307.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen D. Engle, *Don Carlos Buell*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 237.

<sup>38</sup> Engle, *Buell*, 240.

<sup>39</sup> Groom, *Shiloh*, 339. Daniel, *Shiloh*, 243. The origin of their dislike for each other seems difficult to pinpoint, though Daniel attributed it to a "less than cordial" exchange in Nashville.

Furthermore, Grant described Rosecrans as a “warm personal friend [and] one of the ablest and purest of men, both in motive and action.”<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, this friendship was shattered a few months later at the Battle of Iuka.

At Iuka, Grant tasked Rosecrans with defeating Sterling Price’s Army of the West in a complex pincer movement. Unfortunately, as Rosecrans’ column attacked Price, the other side of the pincer, commanded by Edward Ord, did not budge. The signal for Ord’s movement was supposed to be the sounds of Rosecrans’ guns, but Ord claimed after the battle that he had not heard the guns, despite being only six miles away. As a result, Ord’s column never moved forward, leaving Rosecrans to fight the Confederates alone.<sup>41</sup> To his credit, Rosecrans singlehandedly defeated Price, driving the rebels from the field. Grant, though disappointed that Price had been able to get away, could find no fault in Rosecrans’ performance. In his initial report of the battle, he wrote, “I cannot speak too highly of the energy and skill displayed by General Rosecrans in the attack, and of the endurance of the troops under him.”<sup>42</sup> However, this opinion would not last long, as the press began to turn against him once more.

When reports of the Battle of Iuka reached the Northern public, Grant was again chastised by the Northern press, this time for not sending Ord’s column

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<sup>40</sup> Evan C. Jones, “From Friends to Enemies.” *Civil War Times* 53, no. 5: 30 (2014).

<sup>41</sup> Peter Cozzens, *Darkest Days of the War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, c. 1997), 129-30.

<sup>42</sup> William Lamers, *Edge of Glory*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 122-3.

to assist Rosecrans, and, once again, questions of Grant's sobriety circulated in the papers, infuriating him. Reports from the *Cincinnati Commercial* and *Cincinnati Gazette* were particularly painful, since they operated mere miles from Grant's birthplace in Point Pleasant and childhood home in Georgetown. In an unfortunate coincidence, Rosecrans was friends with the two key newspapermen responsible for libeling Grant at both the *Commercial* and the *Gazette*. Rumors circulated that Rosecrans had contacted his friends to instigate a "smear campaign" against Grant. When Grant insinuated this in a report to Rosecrans, it was the latter's turn to be furious. He responded heatedly:

There are no headquarters in these United States less responsible for what newspaper correspondents and paragraphists say of operations than mine...After this declaration I am forced to say that if you do not meet me frankly with a declaration that you are satisfied I shall consider my power to be useful in this department ended.<sup>43</sup>

After twenty-three years of amity, it was not among the smoke and musketry of Iuka, but in the musty air and rattle of two Cincinnati newspapers that Grant and Rosecrans' once fruitful, genial relationship withered and died. In later reports, Grant excluded Rosecrans from praise, later citing his "neglect" at not placing troops on a road blocking the Confederates' escape. Without the expected reinforcements from Grant and Ord, however, Rosecrans lacked the men

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<sup>43</sup> Jones, "Friends". Grant seems to have let Rosecrans' telegram go unanswered, as a survey of the OR will show. It is likely that General Halleck ordered Rosecrans out of Grant's command before the latter could reply.

and resources to capture or destroy Price's army. Nevertheless, when writing his memoirs years later, Grant penned, "I was disappointed at the result of the battle of Iuka—but I had so high an opinion of General Rosecrans that I found no fault at the time."<sup>44</sup>

The opportunity for Grant's revenge came a year later, when he was promoted to command the Division of Mississippi in October of 1863.<sup>45</sup> The promotion had come just a few months after Grant's capture of Vicksburg, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River, along with the remainder of John Pemberton's Army of Mississippi. Finally, for the first time since his victory at Fort Donelson in early 1862, it seemed the tables had turned his way. It was his turn to be the hero of the Northern press, and his star rose even higher in the eyes of Abraham Lincoln, who had been watching him with keen interest for over a year. Unfortunately for Rosecrans, the Army of the Cumberland was one of the armies included under Grant's command. The timing could not have been worse for him, as Rosecrans and his Cumberlanders had just been soundly defeated at the Battle of Chickamauga and forced back into Chattanooga, where the Confederates had cut off their supply lines, leading to widespread panic and starvation in the army.<sup>46</sup> Because of this, Rosecrans knew his head could very

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<sup>44</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Memoirs*, (Lexington, KY, 1885), 245.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Cozzens, *Shipwreck of Their Hopes*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>46</sup> Cozzens, *Shipwreck*, 8-9.

well be on the chopping block. However, Grant was given a choice by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton: he could either leave Rosecrans in command of the Army of the Cumberland or replace him with George H. Thomas, Rosecrans' highest-ranking subordinate. The choice had been between reconciliation and revenge. If Grant chose the former, the gesture of kindness Rosecrans had shown all those years ago at West Point would be returned, and the friendship of the two men could heal. If he chose the latter, Grant could rid himself of Rosecrans once and for all and seal the fate of their enmity. Grant chose the latter. The ax fell on October 19, when he relieved Rosecrans of command and replaced him with George Thomas.<sup>47</sup>

Thomas differentiated greatly from Rosecrans in personality, despite their genial working relationship. While Rosecrans was energetic and temperamental, Thomas was quiet and stoic.<sup>48</sup> Nor did Thomas have the prior history with Grant that Rosecrans had. Indeed, when he was promoted to command the Army of the Cumberland by Grant during the Chattanooga Campaign, the two men knew very little about each other. Nevertheless, they grew to know each other quite well as they began their campaign to equip and supply the besieged army. Unfortunately for Thomas, Grant's aggressive style contrasted sharply with his own defensive preferences, and problems soon arose. The first occurred on November 7<sup>th</sup>, when

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<sup>47</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 353-54.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 9.

Grant ordered Thomas to advance on Missionary Ridge. Thomas balked, as his men remained ill-equipped and hungry, as the famous “Cracker Line” had only been open for a week.<sup>49</sup> For weeks, the two men debated when the attack should take place, and whose forces would lead it. This frustrated the impatient Grant, who, according to Thomas’ biographer, “[perceived] Thomas to be overly cautious and slow.”<sup>50</sup>

When the attack finally did take place, however, it exceeded all expectations. At 3:40 p.m. on November 25<sup>th</sup>, four divisions of the Army of the Cumberland marched towards Missionary Ridge.<sup>51</sup> They quickly drove the Confederates from their positions at the base of the ridge, then, realizing their position was exposed, proceeded to charge up the steep ridge without orders.<sup>52</sup> Grant was furious. The Army of the Cumberland, which had already proven Grant’s favorite target for criticism,<sup>53</sup> was now disobeying his direct orders. He quickly turned to Thomas, demanding to know if he had ordered them up the ridge. Thomas said he had not.<sup>54</sup> Grant asked another general if he had ordered them forward. The general replied: “No, but when those fellows get started all

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<sup>49</sup> Christopher J. Einolf, *George Thomas*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007) 208-9. The “Cracker Line” was Grant’s method of supplying the Army of the Cumberland using a narrow lane through the mountains around Chattanooga.

<sup>50</sup> Einolf, *Thomas*, 210.

<sup>51</sup> Einolf, *Thomas*, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Einolf, *Thomas*, 216.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 370.

<sup>54</sup> Einolf, *Thomas*, 216.

hell can't stop them."<sup>55</sup> Grant seethed, but this time at least, the general had been right. The Cumberlanders took Missionary Ridge, driving off Bragg's army. Unfortunately, the damage to the relationship between Grant and Thomas had been done, and "Grant came away from the campaign with a low opinion of Thomas' generalship."<sup>56</sup> When Grant was promoted to Commander-in-Chief, he left his friend Sherman in charge of the Western armies rather than Thomas, who was thought by most to be the more capable and qualified of the two.<sup>57</sup>

What does this mean when it comes to the memory of the Army of the Cumberland? Unfortunately, Grant had a tendency to negate the positive achievements of his political enemies, and Buell, Rosecrans and Thomas all fit that bill.<sup>58</sup> As Professor Frank Varney has illustrated in his book *General Grant and the Rewriting of History*, Grant's memoirs contain harsh criticism for those who in his perception wronged him, and the book's main focus is on that of Grant's favorite target: William Rosecrans.<sup>59</sup> According to Varney, historians have taken Grant at his word on many occasions, treating his memoirs as if they

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<sup>55</sup> Einolf, *Thomas*, 217.

<sup>56</sup> Einolf, *Thomas*, 197.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 383. Though Sherman went on to prove himself up to the task, Daniel points out that he had a poor performance record at the time of his selection, while Thomas had proven himself capable on multiple occasions. Daniel argues that he was essentially chosen because of his friendship with Grant, not his battle record.

<sup>58</sup> Grant's other political enemies include Gouverneur K. Warren, Joseph Hooker, and Lew Wallace, and will be considered in a sequel to Varney's first book.

<sup>59</sup> Frank Varney, *General Grant and the Rewriting of History: How the Destruction of William S. Rosecrans Influenced Our Understanding of the Civil War*, (Savas Beatie: California, 2013), X.

are flawless. As he demonstrates, however, this is not the case as Grant continuously rewrote history to paint himself in a better light, while purposely twisting facts to condemn those he disliked. This unfortunately includes not only Rosecrans, but also Buell and Thomas.

The greatest victims of these feuds have been the Cumberlanders, as the success of an army often depends on the success of its commander, and history remembers armies with successful commanders. It is unlikely that the Grande Armée would be remembered without Napoleon, the Carthaginians without Hannibal, or the Macedonians without Alexander. It is therefore important to determine who is to blame for the losses that the Army of the Cumberland suffered, the men themselves or their commanders.

### **Mistakes of Command**

Don Carlos Buell was the least competent of the Cumberland's commanders, and his men regarded him as such.<sup>60</sup> In the battle that became crucial to his reputation, he faltered. His first mistake was in making his headquarters more than two miles behind the battlefield at the Dorsey house.<sup>61</sup> That he was unable to ride was not entirely his fault: he was confined to bed after his horse had fallen on top of him the night before.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, his distance

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<sup>60</sup> Cozzens, *Place to Die*, 12-13.

<sup>61</sup> Engle, *Buell*, 307.

<sup>62</sup> Kenneth W. Noe, *Perryville*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 161.



from the fighting only contributed to the determining factors of the battle: lack of communication and a breakdown of command.<sup>63</sup> As the battle raged late in the afternoon of October 8<sup>th</sup>, Buell could hear only the big guns and assumed his plan to attack the next day was still in place. He concluded that the sounds he could hear were nothing but “a great waste of powder there” and ordered the firing stopped.<sup>64</sup> For the next two hours, he remained in his delusion. Meanwhile, the troops under him found themselves in the fight of their lives back in Perryville.

The Confederates had not been content to wait for Buell to attack and had sent one brigade against the Union left, making contact around 2:10 p.m.<sup>65</sup> Many of these Union troops were still green, while the members of this Confederate brigade had served as far back as Shiloh. Nevertheless, after just twenty minutes of furious fighting in and around Open Knob, the attack by these Confederate veterans was forced back.<sup>66</sup> It would not be the last. Minutes later, thousands of gray-clad soldiers emerged from the woods, and the battle recommenced. Both sides poured murderous fire into one another while reinforcements moved their way.<sup>67</sup> For hours, the fight raged on, as more troops were fed into the fray on the Union left. Union General Alexander McCook’s corps, after fighting for an hour

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<sup>63</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 156.

<sup>64</sup> Noe, *Perryville*, 215. It should be noted that Buell’s orders to stop firing were wisely disregarded, as he was unaware a battle was being fought.

<sup>65</sup> Noe, *Perryville*, 198-9.

<sup>66</sup> Noe, *Perryville*, 204.

<sup>67</sup> Noe, *Perryville*, 207.

and a half, was near its breaking point.<sup>68</sup> Buell was nowhere to be found. His lack of presence on the battlefield contributed greatly to the confusion of Union command, and the sun set on Union troops that had been slowly forced back, taking heavy casualties. Even after the battle, Buell still failed to recognize the scale of the fight.<sup>69</sup> As a result, his days as commander of this army were numbered.

Even if their commanding general had not understood the magnitude of the battle, the soldiers had. They also understood that it was they, not their general officers, who had prevented the army from falling into disaster. One officer wrote of the fight: “To the soldiers in the ranks is the most credit due, as the nature of the fight was such as to require no military science, but simply brave men.”<sup>70</sup> The Army of the Ohio had no shortage of brave men. Lovell Rousseau, a Union general who had been in the thick of the fight, described a brigade who came to his relief as “a gallant body of men” who “moved directly into the fight like true soldiers.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the majority of the soldiers who served in Buell’s army fought well, despite their commanders’ failure to engineer a victory. In the end, the fault for the tactical defeat at Perryville lay with Don Carlos Buell, not the future Cumberlanders.

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 152.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 157.

<sup>70</sup> Noe, *Perryville*, xiv.

<sup>71</sup> Noe, *Perryville*, 295.

William Rosecrans led many of those same men into their greatest challenge less than a year later. After concluding his brilliant Tullahoma Campaign by driving Bragg back to Chattanooga by maneuvers, he unwisely believed exaggerated reports that Bragg's army would not stop short of Atlanta, and ordered his three corps to immediately pursue the Confederates, rather than regroup at Chattanooga.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, a dispute broke out between Rosecrans and one of his divisional commanders, Thomas Wood. Wood, having received orders from his corps commander to reconnoiter close to Chattanooga, refused to move, stating that his men would be hopelessly exposed and that he would not blindly obey orders.<sup>73</sup> Instead, Wood moved his division two miles to the rear of his position and sent Rosecrans an inflammatory message which the commanding general found insulting and insubordinate.<sup>74</sup> This event would have great repercussions for the coming battle.

The first day of the Battle of Chickamauga, September 19<sup>th</sup>, was segmented and inconclusive.<sup>75</sup> It was the following day that would prove to be the deciding factor of the battle. As the fighting raged in the center of the field, George Thomas, commanding his XX Corps, requested an additional division to support him. Rosecrans obliged, and the order went to John Brannan, who

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<sup>72</sup> Cozzens, *Terrible Sound*, 63.

<sup>73</sup> Cozzens, *Terrible Sound*, 51.

<sup>74</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 297.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas B. Van Horne, *History of the Army of the Cumberland Vol. I*, (Cincinnati: R. Clarke & Co., 1875), 338-40.

commanded the division connecting Thomas' right flank to the left flank of the XXI Corps, under Thomas Crittenden. Though Brannan initially obeyed the order and moved his men out of line to help Thomas, he countermanded them shortly afterwards, possibly fearing a Confederate attack that would fall on the gap his men would have to leave in order to do so. Nevertheless, Rosecrans believed Brannan's division had pulled out, creating a division-long gap in his line. To rectify this, he ordered that Thomas Wood's division (on Brannan's immediate right) "close up" and plug the hole he believed Brannan's division had left.<sup>76</sup>

When Wood was read the orders, he replied that there was no gap in the line for his division to fill, since Brannan was still to Wood's immediate left. The staff officer who delivered the order promptly replied that it was to be dismissed in that case. However, Wood, having been harshly criticized by Rosecrans before, was not keen to repeat the process. Instead, he insisted that the order be followed, and he pulled his division out of line to move to the left behind Brannan. Some report that he said to his staff: "Gentlemen, I hold the fatal order of the day in my hand and would not part with it for five thousand dollars." By moving his division out of line, he had in effect created the very problem he had been sent to rectify, as there now was a gap between Brannan and the right.<sup>77</sup>

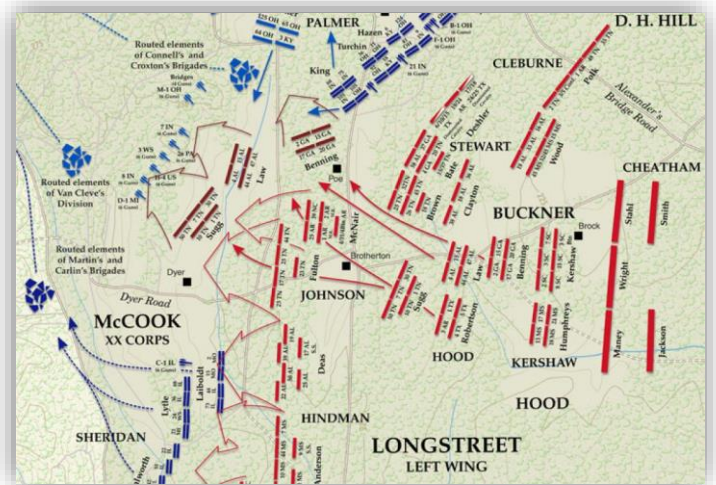
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<sup>76</sup> Cozzens, *Terrible Sound*, 360-61.

<sup>77</sup> Cozzens, *Terrible Sound*, 363.

Unfortunately for the Confederates, at this same moment, James Longstreet's twenty-three-thousand-man command happened upon the huge gap in the Union line.<sup>78</sup> As Longstreet's men began to sweep away the Union right, Rosecrans became cut off from Thomas' Corps by the retreating masses of Thomas Crittenden's XXI Corps, so he sent an order for him to report to Chattanooga, believing the battle to be lost.<sup>79</sup> In fact, Thomas' men were putting up a valiant fight on Horseshoe Ridge and Snodgrass Hill, earning him the nickname "Rock of Chickamauga."<sup>80</sup>

Historians have debated for decades who is to blame for the defeat at Chickamauga, whether it be Rosecrans, Wood, or a disparity in numbers (the Army of the Cumberland was outnumbered during the battle).<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, the man responsible for the success of the Army of the Cumberland was its commander, William Rosecrans. He had made several



Longstreet's men surge through the gap left by Wood's division (Courtesy: Civil War Trust)

<sup>78</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 329.

<sup>79</sup> Henry M. Cist, *Army of the Cumberland*, (C. Scribner's Sons, 1882), 225.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 332.

<sup>81</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 329, Cist, *Cumberland*, 199.

disastrous mistakes during the day, including: relying too heavily on his corps commanders, moving too many of his troops to Thomas' defense, writing complicated and confusing orders, and failing to come to Thomas' aid to rally the Cumberlanders on Horseshoe Ridge. It was this last action that was the "turning-point" of Rosecrans' career, and he spent the rest of his life trying to defend his own actions during the battle.<sup>82</sup>

The men under his command, however, need no justification. As their commander failed to lead them, thousands of Cumberlanders continued to fight tenaciously. The 125<sup>th</sup> Ohio earned the nickname "Opdycke's Tigers" for devastating Confederates in the Dyer field, while August Willich's brigade drove back an entire Confederate division, an action for which it became known as the "Iron Brigade of the Army of the Cumberland."<sup>83</sup> On Horseshoe Ridge, the 21<sup>st</sup> Ohio held for six hours before being forced to surrender by a bizarre case of mistaken identity, an action Peter Cozzens has called "the most distinguished service rendered by any single regiment at Chickamauga."<sup>84</sup> Nor were these types of stands in the minority. In fact, the majority of the Army of the Cumberland did

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<sup>82</sup> Cist, *Cumberland*, 225, Lamers, *Edge*, 443-445. Rosecrans became involved in a dispute with Garfield over the battle, in which Rosecrans stood up against Garfield's criticism. Their friendship never recovered.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 333, 335.

<sup>84</sup> Cozzens, *Terrible Sound*, 503-505.

not leave the field until 10:00 that night, nearly twelve full hours after the order delivered to Wood had sealed its fate.<sup>85</sup>

It is an injustice to the men of the Army of the Cumberland that it has been disregarded because of its commanders. Ultimately, it was Buell's fault for the fiasco of Perryville, Rosecrans' fault for the defeat at Chickamauga, and Thomas' sour relations with Grant that proved the army's undoing, not the actions of the Cumberlanders themselves. Unfortunately, in Grant's quest to paint himself as the only true hero of the West, he also swept aside the accomplishments of other Western generals, in particular the three commanders of the Army of the Cumberland. Unfortunately, many historians who have been heavily influenced by Grant have done nothing to alleviate their ongoing struggle for attention.<sup>86</sup> The inability of these and other historians to separate the fates of the soldiers of the Army of the Cumberland from the fate of their commander displays an unfortunate lack of fact-checking and, therefore, historical credibility.

### **Southern Romanticism**

The feud between Grant and the commanders of the Army of the Cumberland can be summed up in one divisive phrase: "History is written by the

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<sup>85</sup> Cozzens, *Terrible Sound*, 510.

<sup>86</sup> Varney, 6-7. Bruce Catton, Edmund Wilson, Edward Bonekemper, and James Marshall-Cornwall all seem to have taken Grant's memoirs at their words, using them liberally in their own writings. As a result, Rosecrans and his army have not been seen as instrumental to overall Union victory.

victors.”<sup>87</sup> However, in the case of the American Civil War, the victors have not been the only ones penning its history. In a similar fashion to Grant’s censorship of the Cumberlanders’ capabilities and exploits, some Southern historians and their pride for the Confederacy have deprived the Army of the Cumberland of receiving its due respect. This is mostly due to the mentality of some Southern-sympathizing historians and ordinary Southerners themselves who believe in the so-called “Lost Cause,” which maintains that the South fought an unwinnable battle against an overwhelming enemy for honorable, justifiable reasons.<sup>88</sup> To fit this narrative, these historians and everyday men and women have placed too much emphasis on their lionized hero Robert E. Lee, who fit the image of the admirable warrior, and not enough on his less stellar counterpart, Braxton Bragg, who did not. Just as the Army of the Cumberland’s fate plummeted with its commanders’ careers, Bragg’s Army of Tennessee has suffered the same indignity. This affects the Army of the Cumberland and its memory directly, as the Southern view of the war has always been tugged away from Bragg’s army to Lee’s. Unfortunately, if the focus of Southern historians is on Lee, they have little to say about Bragg and even less to say about his enemies, Buell, Rosecrans, Thomas and the Cumberlanders.

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<sup>87</sup> Often attributed to Winston Churchill, though its origin is unknown.

<sup>88</sup> Edward H. Bonekemper, *The Myth of the Lost Cause*, (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), xi.



Robert E. Lee was the epitome of the “Southern Gentleman.” The son of vaunted Revolutionary War hero “Light Horse” Harry, Lee grew up in his home state of Virginia, serving with distinction during the Mexican War and the Harper’s Ferry scuffle with John Brown and his men. When the Civil War broke out, Lee was quickly called to Richmond and assigned a desk job by Jefferson Davis. However, when the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Joseph Johnston, was wounded at the Battle of Seven Pines on the peninsula, Lee was given command.<sup>89</sup>

As commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee excelled. He turned back McClellan’s army from the gates of Richmond, ravaged John Pope at Second Manassas, and drove into Maryland, where he was turned back at the Battle of Antietam. Unfazed, he went on to maul Ambrose Burnside at Fredericksburg and whip Joseph Hooker at Chancellorsville, before suffering his greatest defeat at the hands of George Meade outside of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Still, Lee persevered, stymieing Grant in the Wilderness at Spotsylvania and badly defeating him at Cold Harbor, before finally crumbling under the Siege of Petersburg. On April 9, 1865, the favorite Son of the South surrendered to Grant, ending the war in the Eastern Theater.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Swinton, *Potomac*, 142.

<sup>90</sup> William Swinton, *Army of the Potomac*, 619-21.

Braxton Bragg was the complete opposite of Robert E. Lee. While Lee worked well with his subordinates, had a knack for tactical brilliance, and was the perfect model of the Christian general, Bragg was vitriolic, profane, and tactically unsuccessful. As Lee churned out success after success from Virginia, Bragg “snatched defeat from the jaws of victory”<sup>91</sup> time and time again in Kentucky and Tennessee.

This has led to the permeation of Lee-centered Southern revisionism that is prevalent and obvious to this day. A more noticeable example is the so-called “rebel flag.” In Southern states across the U.S., and many north of the Mason-Dixon as well, these flags adorn gift shops, pickup trucks, tattooed limbs, and home windows. Yet, not only was this flag not the national flag of the Confederate States of America (that distinction belongs to the far less known Stars and Bars), but it originally flew as the battle flag of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee’s army.<sup>92</sup> Gradually, in an occurrence that would foreshadow the influence of future Leeism, Western armies began adopting the “Southern Cross” as their own battle flag.<sup>93</sup> As a result, the most popular item of memorabilia from the Civil War is inextricably linked to the Virginia general, so much so that even

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<sup>91</sup> Daniel T. Davis, *Calamity in Carolina*, (Savas Beatie, 2015), 52.

<sup>92</sup> Henry Woodhead, *Echoes of Glory: Arms and Equipment of the Confederacy*, (Time Life Books: U.S.A., 1996), 231.

<sup>93</sup> Woodhead, *Glory*, 232.

the Dodge Charger featured in the Dukes of Hazzard, emblazoned with the Southern Cross, became known as the “General Lee.”

This is not the only instance in which Lee has been seared into the Southern conscious as the premier general of the Civil War. His name highlights the titles of high schools, colleges, streets, academic halls, ships, and tanks. His image is displayed on everything from t-shirts to paintings and sculptures, and even the side of Stone Mountain in Atlanta. Bragg, on the other hand, is the namesake of two forts and a ghost town in Texas.

Is this oversight justified? Perhaps. Unlike the Grant/Rosecrans debacle, where the two generals were of equal or similar caliber, Lee and Bragg could hardly have been farther apart. All told, Lee’s major victories number around four: the Peninsula Campaign, the battles of Second Manassas (or Second Bull Run), Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville. In addition, he was adored by his men, who referred to him affectionately as “Marse Robert.”<sup>94</sup> Bragg commanded very little respect from his own troops, and their apathy is understandable.<sup>95</sup> When it came to victories, Bragg could boast only one: the Battle of Chickamauga. Their defeats are similarly lopsided. Lee arguably lost two battles: Antietam (disputed) and Gettysburg. Bragg, conversely, was defeated in the battles of

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<sup>94</sup> Wiley, *Johnny Reb*, 151.

<sup>95</sup> Cozzens, *Place to Die*, 208.

Perryville (though only strategically); Stones River, during the Tullahoma Campaign; and the battles for Chattanooga.

One look at Bragg's battle record is enough for any champion of the Lost Cause to wince. The Lost Cause is dependent on the idea that the South fought valiantly against insurmountable odds, an idea that has its roots, and indeed its entire existence, in the battle prowess of Robert E. Lee.<sup>96</sup> Any possibility that runs contrary to this idea must then either be ignored entirely or acknowledged only grudgingly and fleetingly. Therefore, because Bragg's and the Army of Tennessee's existence is a perplexing enigma that is easier to ignore than explain, many Southern historians have chosen the former.

Are these historians at fault? Not necessarily. Ignorance may be bliss, but it is not always chosen. Because many of the initial histories of the war that "Lost Cause" enthusiasts fashioned do not dwell on Bragg's army, many subsequent historians, who base their own writings on the work of their predecessors, may simply not know much of Bragg's existence, thus skewing their uninformed opinions towards the Lost Cause idea that the South had better generals who put up a good fight against unbeatable foes.

This is an idea that must be put to rest if the Army of the Cumberland is ever going to be remembered correctly. While it is true that before the Battle of

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<sup>96</sup> Bonekemper, *Lost Cause*, Chapter 5.

Gettysburg, the Army of the Potomac suffered many defeats and won few victories, the exact opposite was true for the Army of the Cumberland. From the outset of the war, the men who became Cumberlanders were winning more than they were losing. They won the battles of Mill Springs and Shiloh, drove the Confederates out of Kentucky and deep into Tennessee, won again at Stones River, and drove the Confederates again, this time back to Chattanooga. By the time the Army of the Potomac had finally had its first taste of real victory at the so-called “turning point” of the war, Gettysburg, the Army of the Cumberland had defeated the Confederates three times tactically, twice strategically, and stood on the doorstep to the key railroad hub of Chattanooga.

It is facts like these that led the late renowned Civil War historian Shelby Foote, a Southerner himself, to say, “I don’t think the South ever had a chance to win [the] war.”<sup>97</sup> This statement is consistent with Lost Cause ideology which hinges on the belief that the South faced an impossible foe. More importantly, Lost Cause historians place great importance on Robert E. Lee’s seeming ability to conquer a military goliath in the Union. However, if one studies the war from an objective viewpoint, it becomes clear that the feats of Western armies like the Army of the Cumberland dampen the importance of Lee’s successes in the Eastern Theater. While this may in some ways contribute to the idea that the

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<sup>97</sup> Shelby Foote, quoted in *The Civil War* (videorecording) (United States: PBS Home Video, 2011).

South never had a chance at victory, it also downplays Lee's importance, as the other Southern armies were consistently defeated by their Western enemies.

Unfortunately for the men in those armies, the eyes of the public had always rested on the Army of the Potomac, as they still do in the fundamental understanding of the war today. The Eastern Theater, often considered the essential, main history of the war, is the worst example of Union success prior to 1863, yet it remains to be seen that way because of the focus on Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia.

### **Finding a Balance**

This work is not meant to be an indictment of any historians who have not focused their research and writings on the Army of the Cumberland, nor is it a condemnation of the noble soldiers those historians have chosen to focus on; those men have earned their right place in history as heroes of the Union. Instead, it is a call to arms, or the shining of a light on soldiers who have also earned their place but have not yet received it. It is a plea for historians to see the Cumberlanders for their true value and an encouragement to do what historians do best: bring new studies and interpretations to the table.

The Army of the Cumberland is one of the most important armies in American history. For three long years, it slugged its way through the wilderness of Eastern Tennessee and Northern Georgia: crossing rivers, navigating forests,

and climbing mountains, covering an expanse five times greater than that covered by the Army of the Potomac and with far fewer men.<sup>98</sup> It was the only Union army during the war to destroy an enemy army, which it did thoroughly under Thomas at the Battle of Nashville.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, many of the men who had called themselves Cumberlanders found themselves marching through Georgia with Sherman in 1864.<sup>100</sup> Those men—who went into battle at Shiloh, Perryville, Stones River, Tullahoma, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Franklin, and Nashville—should be considered of equal value with those who did so at Bull Run, the Peninsula, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Petersburg. The blood they spilled was the same: Northern, *Union* blood. They fought for the same country, under the same flag, for the same reasons. Those men, and their leaders, deserve to have their stories told just as much as their Eastern comrades. They have earned their place in history as heroes of the Union.

A well-rounded interpretation of the Civil War encapsulates both theaters of war and all the major armies therein. It does not favor one army over the other, one theater over the other, nor does it favor the Confederacy over the Union, Grant over Rosecrans, or Lee over Bragg. One of the chief goals of all historians is to present all available information on a subject in an objective, informative

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<sup>98</sup> Daniel, *Days*, xiii.

<sup>99</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 433.

<sup>100</sup> Daniel, *Days*, 430.

matter. However, it would be a disservice if an historian whose passion was for Gettysburg was to be dismayed at the high number of books on the subject and decided not to write. Likewise, if a historian was eager to write about the Battle of Stones River, it would be unfortunate if he became distraught with the seemingly low level of interest and information on the subject and came to the same conclusion. Thus, if any person is interested in a particular subject, that is the subject they ought to research and write about.

Therein lies the purposes of this work: to generate interest and focus attention. There is no shortage of interest or attention for the Army of the Potomac or the Eastern Theater of the Civil War. The men who served in that army have received their due share of glory. The Cumberlanders, as of yet, have not. Hence, if while scanning these pages, any reader has been intrigued by the Army of the Cumberland, by the battles of Shiloh, Stones River or Tullahoma, by Buell, Rosecrans or Thomas, by the men in the ranks themselves, or by the Western Theater in general, and that reader decides to devote his research on those subjects, then this work has been a success. It is hoped that by bringing this subject to light, others will be inspired to put effort into interpreting the stories of the Cumberlanders from different points of view, so as to cover all possible interpretations and thus gain a better understanding of the truth. It is this truth that all historians are meant to pursue, and it would truly be a tragedy if the Army of



the Cumberland continues to be overshadowed in Civil War history simply because its story is not written in letters of blood.

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