The Civil Wars of General

Joseph E. Johnston,

Confederate States Army

Volume I: Virginia and Mississippi, 1861–1863

Richard M. McMurry

SB
Savas Beatie
California

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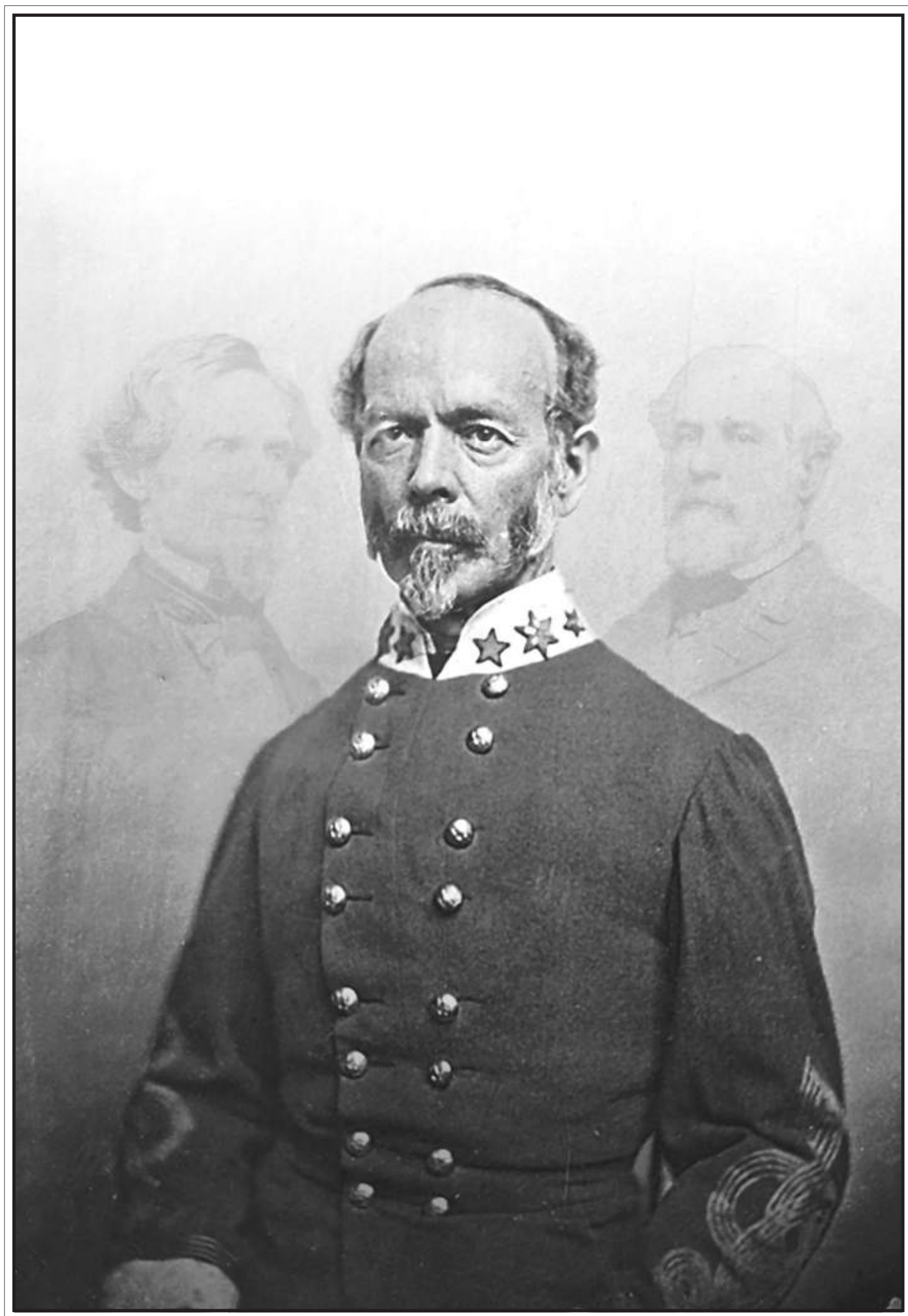
Proudly published, printed, and warehoused in the United States of America.

For the Fab Five, my wonderful grandchildren
Sarah, Sam, Kai, Nate, and Liam

Every day you guys show your dads how much they mean to me.

Love,
Grandpa M



GENERAL JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON (center),
flanked by President Jefferson Davis (left) and General Robert E. Lee (right).
LOC

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Foreword

A Fresh Assessment

by Stephen Davis

The ancient Romans had a phrase, *sui generis*, meaning "of its own kind." Today, we would probably say "one of a kind." Both of these compliments apply to Richard M. McMurry's *The Civil Wars of General Joseph E. Johnston*, *Confederate States Army*.

Joseph Eggleston Johnston (1807-1891) was a complicated character and controversial figure in Confederate history. Dr. McMurry offers an analysis of his extremely important role in the War for Southern Independence. Part military history, part biography, part psychological profile, this study offers boundless benefits to those who wish to know how Joe Johnston ticked, and why he acted in ways that so often hurt—and certainly did not help—the Confederacy's hopes for military victory and political sovereignty.

McMurry argues that Joseph E. Johnston was "the central military figure in the history of the Southern Confederacy," and by doing so immediately stakes out why this book is so achingly overdue. Johnston commanded both major Confederate field armies (those in Virginia and in the Western Theater) and through the course of the war commanded more Confederate troops than Lee did in Virginia. He also surrendered more troops in the Carolinas than Lee did at Appomattox Courthouse. Countless biographies have been written about Marse Robert; Old Joe has all of three.

When McMurry describes Johnston as "the most controversial of the Confederacy's wartime military figures," he places his subject in the uncomfortable company of, say, Braxton Bragg, but his point is a cogent one. And when Richard declares that his subject's "long, bitter feud with President Davis [was] arguably *the* key reason for the Rebels' failure to attain independence," you know this is going to be a hard book to put down.

McMurry makes it clear that his is not a traditional biography of Joe Johnston; Hughes' *Johnston* (1894), Govan's and Livingood's *A Different Valor* (1956), and

Symonds's *Joseph. E. Johnston* (1992) have already done that. Rather, this is a study of Johnston's generalship in the context of his relations with Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee.

Fascinating.

McMurry makes a strong argument that "Johnston placed his reputation above more important matters." For instance, early in the war he wanted to evacuate Harpers Ferry, but waited for an order so as to escape criticism for a retreat. McMurry rightly calls out Johnston for his "incessant whining" over the issue. Our author explains the spat over rank between Davis and Johnston in September 1861 with surgical precision. (Who else but Johnston would have written, "I outrank General Lee"?) McMurry is not afraid of bold judgments. When he writes that Johnston's argument with Davis about seniority "was to have a profound effect on the history of the Confederate States of America and therefore on the history of the United States," he is making just the kind of imaginative declaration one expects in a book like this.

Another example is the author's judgment of "the general's extreme, often unwise, sometimes intemperate, usually petty and childish, and always foolish hypersensitivity with regard to his status and reputation in the Confederate military establishment." Johnston's recalcitrance, October 1861-May 1862, in the face of the administration's orders to reorganize his regiments into single-state brigades is so demonstrative of the general's political obtuseness—and so telling as another coffin-nail in the Davis-Johnston relationship–that McMurry devotes a full chapter to the imbroglio. (In contrast, Robert E. Lee did not like the reorganization idea either, but he went along with it anyway; after all, Davis was president and commander-in-chief.) "The prickly general" also failed to cooperate when Richmond asked that he write often as to his tactical situation.

The author's perspective shrewdly includes Jefferson Davis. His assessment of the Confederate president is sharp, but well supported by the primary evidence and Davis's biographers. Davis, concludes McMurry, was intelligent and committed to the cause, but not averse to picking squabbles that "made him a divisive force in Confederate political and military affairs." The President's role as War Department micro-manager is also well known. Not so is our author's claim that in the spring of 1862 Johnston angrily offered to resign, but that Davis refused to accept it. McMurry argues convincingly that one of Davis's chief failures as war president was that he only gave suggestions, not orders to his army commanders, and that too many times he seemed incapable of making a strong decision.

Then there is General Lee. McMurry posits that Lee embodied Steven Covey's precepts of character and practiced Covey's habits of effectiveness, while Johnston

exhibited "old patterns of self-defeating behavior." The author's analysis of Lee's and Johnston's complicated relationship in the decades before the war is nothing less than fascinating. Then, when Lee succeeded Johnston in command of the Confederate army in Virginia, Johnston began to exhibit a quiet, smoldering jealousy toward his fellow Virginian, West Point classmate, and prewar friend.

After Johnston recovered from his Seven Pines wound in November 1862, the President sent him to Tullahoma, Tennessee (Bragg's base) to command the "Department of the West," a super department that placed Johnston in nominal charge of Bragg's army in Tennessee, John C. Pemberton's in Mississippi, and E. Kirby Smith's force in east Tennessee. McMurry aptly relates Johnston's frustration with this awkward command structure, one in which he served until the spring of 1863.

Louis T. Wigfall emerges as a secondary character in McMurry's analysis of the complex relationship of Johnston and Davis, such as when the Texas senator advised the general in the fall of 1862 to keep "careful records to protect himself later against possible accusations by the Davis administration." Johnston's wife Lydia also figures into the mix when, in November of 1862 she told her husband that Davis "hates you & he has power & he will ruin you." When Johnston wrote his friend Wigfall that "nobody ever assumed a command under more unfortunate circumstances," McMurry agrees: "Johnston found himself tossed into the rapidly escalating command chaos and confusion" of a theater command split between Bragg and Pemberton, and an administration that could not declare to Johnston that Tennessee was more important than Mississippi (or vice versa). Worse, Pemberton communicated directly with Richmond—a practice that Davis did not try to stop. The new department commander rightly worried about his new situation, but he did not help himself, either. As McMurry demonstrates, "it is also a damning comment about his almost completely passive approach to high-level command that he did almost nothing to advise the government about his fears"—much less do anything to try to quell them (like relieving Pemberton).

The author finds related importance in the fact that during his trip in December 1862 through Tennessee to Mississippi, the President did not meet with Georgia governor Joseph E. Brown. Given Brown's loud-mouthed objections to conscription and criticisms of the Davis administration over habeas corpus and other issues, McMurry is on-the-spot in seeing this episode as another example of Jefferson Davis's "failure to think like a national war leader."

By the start of 1863, "Johnston's nagging suspicion that the Davis government was hostile to him had grown," as our author declares. Worse, so too had his sense of self-doubt in the face of daunting challenge. "I cannot direct both parts of my

command [Bragg, Pemberton] at once," he wrote on January 6, 1863. At the same time, McMurry recognizes that "Johnston's refusal . . . to communicate meaningfully with the government lay at the heart of his many self-inflicted difficulties."

Not all of Johnston's difficulties were self-inflicted, and McMurry is alert to these as well. He pays attention, for example, to the Confederate railway system, which was already deteriorating by early 1863 and thus influencing Johnston's thinking about how to transfer reinforcements from Bragg's army to the Vicksburg garrison. And while McMurry is frequently critical of Johnston, at times he defends the general's decisions, such as that to abandon Jackson, Mississippi, on May 14, 1863. Johnston has been accused of timidity by Davis and others, but McMurry exonerates him: "with only 6,000 men, Johnston could do nothing at the time to reinforce or relieve Vicksburg."

When Major General U. S. Grant headed toward the Mississippi River fortress, Johnston implored Pemberton to unite with the forces he was then gathering near Jackson. Had Pemberton done so, the Confederates could have turned on Grant before he received heavy reinforcements in June. Instead, Pemberton tried to take Grant on himself and was routed. The result, concludes Richard, was that the combat of Champion Hill on May 16 was "arguably the most important battle of the war." Eventually Johnston gave up even trying to coordinate strategy with the Vicksburg commander (three times Pemberton refused to obey Johnston's orders). McMurry sympathizes with Johnston in making this decision, calling attention to "an almost complete failure on the part of the government to comprehend the enormity of the difficulties facing Johnston in Mississippi." By early June Johnston had built his Army of Relief up to around 30,000 troops. By then, Grant was besieging Vicksburg. Even if Johnston attacked Grant from the east, McMurry believes the general stood little chance of driving the Federal army away so Pemberton could escape. This is the kind of judgment you don't often see in Civil War books.

Related to the crisis out West was General Lee's decision after the battle of Chancellorsville to march his Army of Northern Virginia north into Pennsylvania instead of sending, say, George Pickett's infantry division to Mississippi. We know how all that worked out . . .

Then there was the argument between Johnston and Davis over the general's departmental authority. Johnston believed that when he was ordered from Tennessee to Mississippi, he ceased to command troops in the former state; Davis contended it did no such thing. Our author has little patience for either participant in this little tiff, and at one point criticizes Johnston's "long and silly letter" as well as Davis's "foolish screed."

With a trained military historian's keen eye and sure hand, McMurry outlines all the factors that doomed the Southern forces at Vicksburg: Grant's numbers (70,000); geography—especially how the Yazoo and Big Black rivers pinched Johnston's avenues of approach; Federal river gunboats; no timely communication between Pemberton and Johnston once the former had become besieged; and, the garrison's physical weakness ("exposure, malnourishment, and sickness"). All of these did not keep Confederates trapped inside the Vicksburg fortifications from hoping that Old Joe would come and save them.

Johnston learned of Pemberton's surrender on July 5. He had seen it coming: "I consider saving Vicksburg hopeless," he had written on June 15. In the end, McMurry fairly and accurately apportions blame for the fall of the river fortress on both Jeff Davis and Joe Johnston. Relations between the two men had sunk into mistrust, suspicion, and rancor. That the Confederacy's Chief Executive would in just six months' time once more turn to General Johnston in a command crisis says much about Davis's lingering respect for the general's military ability and experience. Or maybe the President had simply run out of officer options. It is a story we will look forward to Richard telling us in Volume II of his *magnum opus*.

Until then, we may conclude that in this work, his assessment of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston is one of the most scathing that exists in the voluminous Civil War literature.

Preface

Jeff, Bob, and Joe

"... it seems it is only a fight between Joe Johnston and Jeff Davis."
— Mary Chesnut, December 27, 1864

During the 1960-1961 academic year I was a first classman (senior) at the Virginia Military Institute. By then I knew that I wanted to pursue graduate work specializing in the field of Civil War history. At the suggestion of several of the VMI professors I had applied for admission to the history graduate program at Emory University in Atlanta. By some incomprehensible miracle (or more likely an egregious administrative blunder) the school accepted me into the program. I had even begun to correspond with Bell I. Wiley, Emory's Civil War historian, about possible thesis/dissertation topics.

Since I had grown up in the Atlanta area and had a longstanding interest in the Civil War in that region, the great 1864 struggle for that key Confederate city quickly emerged as the obvious subject for my specialized graduate work. Owing to this fortuitous convergence of circumstances, I was able to take some very preliminary steps toward that end during my final year at the Institute.[1]

Both John Barrett's class, "The Civil War and Reconstruction," and Tyson Wilson's course in "American Military History" involved much outside-the-classroom work of one kind or another. By taking the Atlanta Campaign as the subject of as much of that work as possible, I had the opportunity to begin what I—perhaps erroneously—like to think of as a serious study of what became my

1 At that time the best—indeed, the only—book on the 1864 campaign in North Georgia (not counting *Gone With the Wind*, of course) was Jacob D. Cox's 1882 *Atlanta*, a volume in Scribner's "Campaigns of the Civil War" Series. Cox's then-outdated work was at best a short, very general narrative, and it devoted undue attention to the part of the Union force with which he had served in 1864. Note: full bibliographical data for works cited in these notes will be found where those data belong—in the Bibliography that will appear in Volume II. The short titles used in the notes are in a key word/words in context format. The ones that are not obvious are listed in a short title index incorporated alphabetically into the Bibliography.

major area of Civil War interest. In one way or another I have been studying that military operation and the people who waged it ever since.

GENERAL JOSEPH EGGLESTON Johnston clearly became the central figure on the Confederate side of the 1864 campaign in North Georgia—in terms both of what happened (the facts of the campaign) and of how both the general public and serious students of the war have understood those events (the memory and history of the campaign). Owing to this fact much of my work with the campaign has revolved around a study of Johnston, his personality, and his conduct of the 1864 defense of North Georgia and the crucial city of Atlanta.

Such an undertaking inevitably expanded to include investigations of other periods of Johnston's life, his other Civil War military operations, his relations with other prominent Confederates—notably President Jefferson Davis and Generals Robert E. Lee, John C. Pemberton, and John Bell Hood—and his standing in the general history of the war.

OVER THE DECADES I have come to two conclusions about Johnston and his place in the war and its history. First, he stands, I have come firmly to believe, as the central military figure in the history of the Southern Confederacy, not just of the 1864 operations in North Georgia. To be sure, Robert E. Lee is clearly the most prominent Southern military figure in both the popular mind and in Confederate military historiography (Confederate military history as it has been written).[2] Lee's role in the *ultimate military outcome* of the war, however, was not as important or as consequential as was that of Johnston.[3]

2 A. L. Long (*Lee*, 161), who had served on General Lee's staff, called the general "the central figure of the war."

3 Lee's importance as far as the war's history goes, it seems to me, lies in his 1862-1864 military successes in Virginia. Those victories prolonged the war by two or three years. As the war lengthened, its overall nature changed—as the nature of wars so often does—and those changes led to more and more far-reaching results. The most obvious example can be seen in the growth of "radical" sentiment among Northern Republicans with regard to slavery, then to emancipation, and finally to citizenship and equality for black Americans. Would those developments have come about when they did, had the war ended in, say, June or July 1862—as it may well have done had President Jefferson Davis not named Lee to command the army defending Richmond? Historian Allan Nevins commented: "Had fighting ended in the spring of 1862 it [slavery] might have survived for years" (*Ordeal of the Union*, VI, viii). Was Lee's role, in fact, that of the Great Emancipator? (See my *Fourth Battle of Winchester*, 80.) Lee also occupies the key military spot in the white South's postwar mythmaking that far surpasses that of any

Lee still served as a staff officer in Richmond in July 1861 when Johnston commanded the victorious Confederate army in the war's first major battle. Johnston commanded another Confederate army in the field for more than two weeks after Lee surrendered in 1865.

Johnston commanded major Rebel armies in Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. In addition, smaller units in Alabama, Florida, and East Louisiana came under his authority at one time or another. He, in fact, was the only officer to command both principal Confederate field armies. More individual Confederate soldiers served in forces under Johnston's direct control than under the authority of any other Southern general.[4]

Johnston commanded the Rebel troops in the war's two most *militarily* crucial campaigns—Vicksburg in 1863 and Atlanta the following year. His long bitter feud with President Jefferson Davis runs like an angry scar through the history of the Southern Confederacy. It was certainly a key reason—arguably *the* key reason—for the Rebels' failure to attain independence. In May 1864, the well-known Confederate author Mary Chesnut wrote of "the Joe Johnston disaffection eating into the very vitals of our distracted country." Seven months later under date of December 27 she commented, "We thought this was a struggle for independence—Southern states against odds—in the U. S. A. Now it seems it is only a fight between Joe Johnston and Jeff Davis."[5]

Second, I have come to believe that for most of the past 160 years or so, Johnston's role in the war, especially his part in the great operations of 1863 and even more so in those of the following year, has often been misunderstood. That misunderstanding, in turn, has led to what I believe to be a badly flawed view of the war in general and of its military history in particular. Indeed, that misunderstanding carried over into the post-1865 history and memory of the war as the

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other former Confederate. Neither of these facts, however, means that Lee's role was as great as was that of Johnston in determining the war's *military* outcome.

4 Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard commanded the Army of Tennessee (then known as the Army of the Mississippi, sometimes without the "the") for a few weeks in the spring of 1862 and is the only other possible claimant to having commanded both major Confederate armies. Beauregard, however, commanded only one of the predecessor units of the Army of Northern Virginia. He never commanded the entire army. Technically, of course, all Rebel soldiers served under Lee's command once he became general-in-chief of Confederate land forces in February 1865. That appointment, however, came much too late to affect the course of the war, and Lee in person commanded only one major Rebel field army.

5 Chesnut, *Chesnut's Civil War*, 609, 698.

conflict came to be understood in the mind of white America in general, and especially in the mind of the white South. The influence of that misunderstanding lingers yet in the national cultural, social, intellectual, and political life.

If these conclusions are valid, it follows that to *understand* the military history of the Confederacy, and hence of the war itself, both as it was fought and as it has been remembered and written, we must reach a better understanding of Joseph E. Johnston's wartime role and of his place in overall Confederate military history—even in the larger fields of Confederate and Civil War history. Indeed, one could construct a reasonable argument that the story of Johnston's Confederate career *is* the story of Confederate military history.

This book is a report on my clumsy efforts to explore and understand these topics.

I BEGAN WORK on this project many years ago with the happy and naïve assumption that it could take the form of a simple, if long biographical essay, chronologically tracing Johnston's Confederate career with extended pauses every so often to analyze what he had done in this or that situation as it arose in the course of the war. At one time I had completed about two-thirds of such a book. That manuscript, however, became less satisfactory as it grew longer.

Eventually I concluded that to have even a chance of understanding the part Joseph E. Johnston played in the Civil War—not to mention the even larger part he played (and in some cases still plays) in our understanding (misunderstanding?) of the war—I would have to start all over. The account of Johnston's role had to be put into the larger context of Confederate military policy, of the overall political history of the Confederacy itself, and particularly into that of Johnston's decades-long relationship with Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee. As persevering readers will see, Davis came to occupy a great many of these pages. Lee, too, eventually received much more coverage than I had originally intended for him. In fact, at one time, the working title of this project was "Jeff, Bob, and Joe."[6]

6 Historian Joseph T. Glatthaar observed, "One cannot analyze the Davis-Johnston relationship . . . without delving into the Confederate president's dealings with Lee" (*Partners in Command*, viii). To this, I would add one must also delve into the Lee-Johnston, Johnston-Pemberton, and Johnston-Hood relationships. Hood does not emerge as an important factor in this matter until Volume II of this work.

This study—the product of that realization (revelation?)—is not a collective biography of the three men, although it has much biographical material and even presents some new, if minor, biographical facts about Johnston. It comprises instead a series of discrete essays covering in chronological order Johnston's different Confederate command assignments with frequent, but I hope relevant, flashbacks to analyze the situations in which the general found himself, and how he, and frequently Davis and Lee, reacted to them. At times, Davis and/or Lee take center stage and Johnston disappears—as in the account of the summer and fall of 1862 when he goes off to recover from his wounds, and in the case of the crucial spring 1863 "Gettysburg decision" in which he played no part. A final section offers my speculations as to why Johnston behaved as he did, and some thoughts on his place in the war and its history.[7]

INEVITABLY SUCH AN approach has produced some overlaps in which the same matter is discussed in two or more of the essays. In each such case I believe the practice justified and I have tried to keep the overlapping sections as short as possible. In every such instance the purpose of the overlap is to view the topic under discussion from a different perspective or in the context of a different, larger, subject. This approach will also spare readers the need to flip around in the pages to refresh their memory, and each part of the work can stand on its own—so far as it deserves to—as a separate study of one of Johnston's four periods of Confederate command.

I also felt it necessary to insert into the text at several points some long quotations. These permit readers to experience the writings and something of the emotions of Johnston, Davis, and others in their own words. In so doing, they offer insights directly into the minds of the principals and present the precise language of the laws and other documents about which they differed, as well as the language of their efforts to justify their decisions and actions. I apologize if these long quotations unduly interrupt the flow of the narrative. Be assured, gentle reader, that I have used them only where I believe them necessary to a full understanding of the matter under discussion.

7 To hold down the length of this book, I have omitted treatment of several minor, if interesting events in Johnston's life that did not affect his relationship with other Confederates. Examples include his possible role in designing the South's battleflag and in the early use of observation balloons as well as the story of his wartime meeting with an elderly slave who had been his nurse when he was an infant.

READERS will also notice a major difference in the subject matter emphasized in Book One and that covered in the remainder of the work. Book One deals with Johnston's 1861-1862 tenure as commander of the main Rebel force in Virginia. It focuses on the origins and early development of the Davis-Johnston quarrels and is virtually devoid of any treatment of events on the battlefield. The 1861 and 1862 military operations in Virginia did not become the subjects of major disputes between the President and the general, and they do not tell us very much about Johnston the general or Johnston the man. Book Two (and Books Three and Four in the second volume of this study), on the other hand, present considerably more detail about Johnston's 1863-1865 military operations, his role as an army commander, and the military events about which he and Davis quarreled, or which affected him in some significant way.

Books Two and Three, especially, reflect this change of emphasis. Book Two deals with Johnston's 1862-1863 period of command in the West. Most of what historians have written about that period is devoted to events in the field during the long struggle for Vicksburg. Since this work concentrates on Johnston, I have had to cover his activities during those weeks in much more detail than have those writing about the field operations with which he had almost nothing to do. For the reasons mentioned in the opening paragraphs of the second chapter of Book Three in Volume II and elsewhere in the second installment, I have covered Johnston's activities in the first six-and-one half-months of 1864 in much greater detail than I had originally planned.

THE overall interpretation presented in these pages, I need to say at the outset, has as its general framework my very strong conviction that the Confederates lost the war on the Western battlefields; the Federal government did not win it.

Ever since the war ended in the spring of 1865, whole battalions of historians have eked out a living producing books and articles in which each argues that this, or that, or something else brought about the national military triumph. In truth, almost all the reasons put forth to explain Confederate defeat had little, if anything, to do with bringing about the Rebels' *military* downfall.

Many of the suggested reasons for the failure of secession were in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, the *products*, not the causes, of defeat on the battlefield. Examples include inflation of the currency, civilian suffering on the home front, and the unsuccessful efforts to gain support and diplomatic recognition from European governments.

Virtually all the other reasons put forth to explain Confederate failure involve factors that *might* well have (probably would have?) brought about *eventual* Federal

victory had the Confederates not managed to propel themselves so far along the road to ruin before those factors became crucial. The naval blockade of the Rebel coast and the oft-cited Northern population and industrial superiority (the famous "overwhelming numbers and resources," as General Lee put it in the well-known "Farewell Order" to his army of April 10, 1865), are examples of Union advantages that played at most a very slight role in the key events of 1861-1863 that launched the Secessionists on and carried them far along the path to defeat. Perhaps this concept would be better put if phrased "the Confederates managed to lose the war before the Yankees could manage to win it, and they lost it in battles fought between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River."[8]

Late in 2011, many years after launching this project and many more before completing it, I was pleased to come across the following observation in Julia Stern's *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic*: "Chesnut documents throughout her narrative the ways this feud [between Davis and Johnston] registered among wives and other officers; and this small chapter of the war is a story that could comprise an entire book in itself."[9]

This work, I hope, is that book.

8 See my *Fourth Battle of Winchester*, especially 57-79; and (with others) "The Union Didn't Win the War, the Confederacy Lost It."

9 Stern, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War Epic*, 310 n7.

Acknowledgments

AS MENTIONED IN the Preface, this book has taken shape over some six and a half decades. Throughout those years I have benefitted greatly from the help of (literally) many thousands of people.

This vast multitude includes teachers of long ago classes (not all of them, by any means, history classes); archivists and librarians all over the country; attendees at various gatherings sponsored by many different organizations from California to New Hampshire and Minnesota to Florida; collectors of Civil War letters and other documents who have shared copies of items in their collections or family papers; members of Civil War Round Tables as well as several state and local historical and heritage societies; National Park Service rangers and historians; students; participants in Elderhostel (now ROAD Scholars) programs; as well as amateur and professional historians (many of the amateurs, by the way, do excellent work).

Comments, questions, insights, and criticisms from these folks have added much to my knowledge and understanding of the war and of the people who waged it, as well as of the lives of those who simply sought to survive it. A goodly number of these helpful people have become personal friends as well as fellow Civil Warriors. Many of them, alas, have crossed over the river (to paraphrase Stonewall Jackson) and are no longer with us.

To list all these people is impossible. To list the ones whose names I remember would yield a long roster that would still omit many names. At several places in the footnotes, I have thanked individuals who provided documents, information on particular subjects, or specific help with certain matters. To all, a hearty “thank you.” You have done your best to make this a respectable work. The many faults that doubtless remain are my responsibility and mine alone. It is a pleasure and privilege to know (or to have known) all of you. Additional acknowledgments will appear in the second volume.

To those who slog through these volumes, take heart. The Army of the Potomac survived the Mud March. The Army of Tennessee fought well after Franklin and Nashville.

Richard M. McMurry
Spring 2022

Prelude

A Meeting on the Hudson

"... the triangular relationship among Davis, Johnston, and Lee."
— Stephen Newton, 1998

THE young Mississippian first saw the two Virginians sometime in the summer of 1825. The two were then among the eighty-seven newcomers beginning their four-year cadetships at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. The Mississippian was already there, a seasoned and veteran cadet—a "third classman," in Academy jargon—with one year's experience at the school under his belt.

Perhaps that initial meeting occurred when the Virginians first came ashore at the boat landing and climbed the steep path leading from the majestic Hudson River to the austere buildings of the Academy. It might have come a bit later, maybe after the new boys had passed their admissions tests and were struggling to fit themselves into the unfamiliar uniforms the school required them to wear.

If the three did not meet earlier, they doubtless did at the summer encampment called "Camp Adams" that year to honor newly inaugurated President John Quincy Adams. All members of the Academy's Corps of Cadets except those entering their third year at the school (the rising "second classmen," who got to go home for an all-too brief summer furlough) spent most of July and August "in the field." There they learned and practiced various aspects of soldier life. During those weeks the old cadets put the new fourth classmen through what amounted to basic military training.

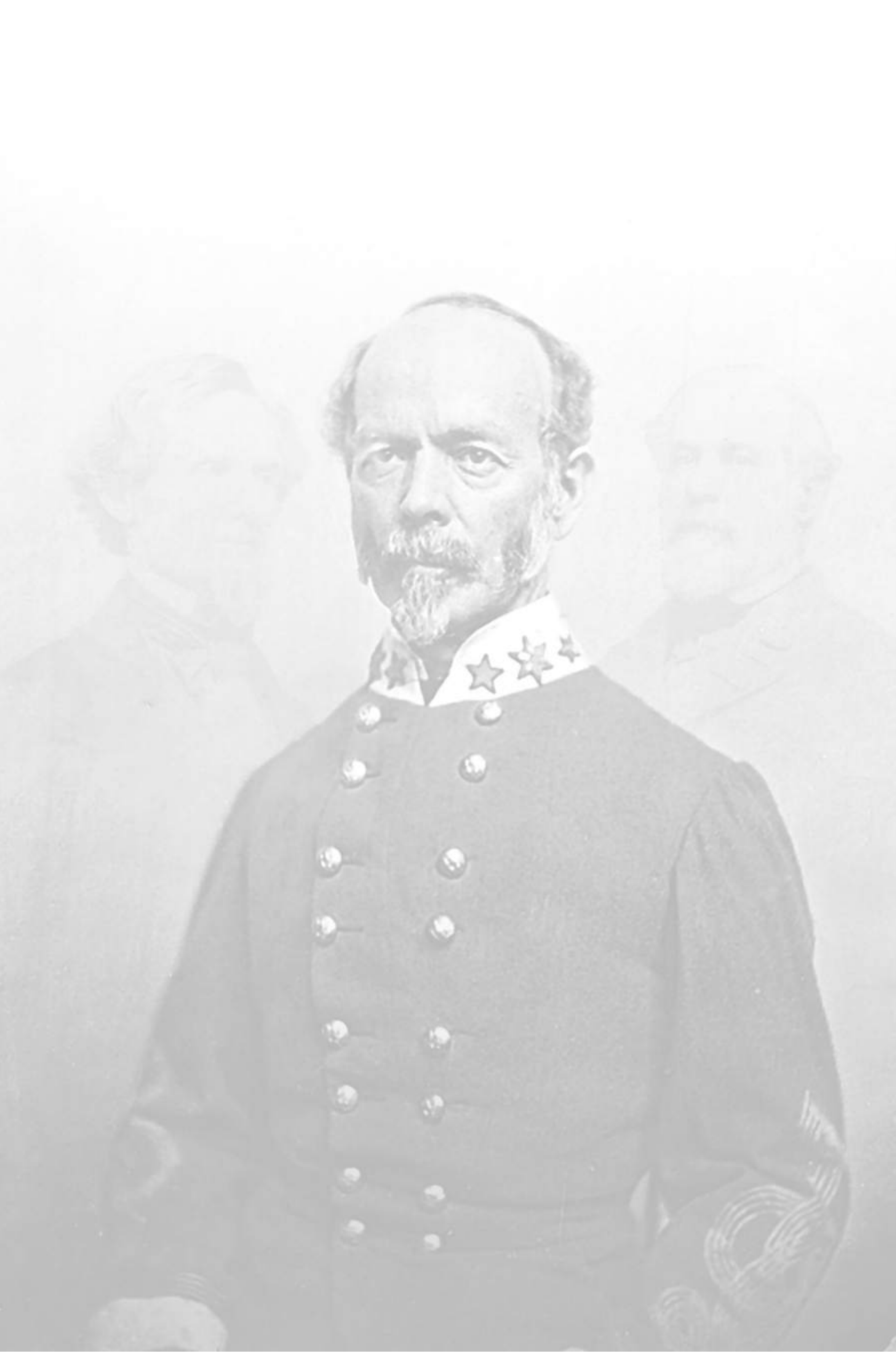
WE SHALL NEVER know the circumstances in which the young Mississippian and the two Virginians first saw one another, for their initial meeting went unremarked and unrecorded. When that summer 1825 encounter took place, they were three intelligent high-spirited college boys at the beginning of a new school year and a new life. They were at an early stage of their adulthood and at the very commencement of their professional careers. Forty summers later they were three old gray men standing amid the ruined hopes of their people.

Over the course of the four decades after they met the strands of their personal lives and of their professional careers came to resemble nothing so much as the long fronds of an underwater plant moving in the invisible currents. Sometimes the fronds sway in unison; at other times they appear to move independently. Occasionally they bump against one another; then, again at times, they seem to be on more or less parallel planes. Always, however, they have common roots and a common destiny.

So it was to be with the young Mississippian and the two Virginians. Their common roots were found in their backgrounds and at the Military Academy on the Hudson. The three found their common destiny forty years later amid the rubble of the Confederate States of America.

To a large extent both their destiny and the fate of their people had been determined by what the three of them did and did not do during the American Civil War—by "the triangular relationship among Davis, Johnston, and Lee."[1]

1 Newton, *Johnston*, 69. As noted in the Preface, this work is not a conventional biography. For that reason, as well as to shorten the book and to minimize pedantry, I have not cited sources for well-known facts, biographical or otherwise. The planet is already cursed with, among many other things, too many footnotes. Unless otherwise noted, the biographical material is from the standard works: Cooper, *Davis*; W. Davis (no kin to his subject), *Davis*; Govan and Livingood, *Different Valor*; Symonds, *Johnston*; Freeman, *Lee*; Guelzo, *Lee*; Korda, *Lee*; Pryor, *Lee*; and Thomas, *Lee*.



The Civil Wars of General Joseph E. Johnston

Book One

Virginia, 1861-1862

Chapter One

JEFFERSON DAVIS AND JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON: The General's Rank

PART I

"The army's iron-clad respect for seniority."
— Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, 2009

IN the spring 1861 crisis brought on by secession, Southern-born officers of the United States Army faced the question of whether their primary loyalty lay with the national government or with their individual State (as everyone would have written the word at that time). The dilemma constituted a terrible ordeal for many of them—the better the officer, the more terrible the ordeal. A few decades later one veteran of both the antebellum army and the Civil War recalled, "it was a trying time for all Southern officers . . . many, even from South Carolina, resigned with bitter tears."[1]

One by one those officers who came down on the State side of the question submitted their resignations to the War Department; balanced their accounts; closed their books and completed other administrative and housekeeping tasks; turned their duties over to their replacements; took leave of their comrades; and, finally, departed for their homes to offer their services in defense first of their State and then of the newly established Confederacy. Since initially only the seven States of the Deep South had declared themselves out of the Union, officers from the

1 Stanley, *Memoirs*, 61. Chapter XXV of volume I of Freeman's *Lee*, "The Decision He Was Born to Make," 431-447, is the classic account of an officer's struggle with this dilemma, but keep in mind Freeman's semi-worshipful attitude toward Lee.

border slave States were spared, but only temporarily, the agony of making that decision.[2]

The outbreak of war in mid-April forced the eight slave States remaining in the Union to reconsider their earlier decisions against secession. Four of them—Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—opted to join their Deep South sisters in the Confederate States of America.

Virginia's secession on April 17 led two of the most distinguished officers of the national army to conclude, after much agonized thinking, that they could not fight against their State and that duty compelled them to leave the army in which they had served so well for more than thirty years and to take up arms in defense of the Old Dominion. Colonel Robert E. Lee submitted his resignation from the United States Army on April 20; Brigadier General Joseph E. Johnston handed in his two days later.[3]

After brief service in the Virginia State Army (the Old Dominion had not yet joined the Confederacy), both Lee and Johnston received from President Jefferson Davis appointments as brigadier generals in the Confederate Regular Army. (At the time brigadier general was the highest grade authorized by Confederate law.) The Rebel Chief Executive assigned Johnston to command Secessionist troops gathering at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now in West Virginia). Lee wound up as a military adviser to the President with his office in Richmond.

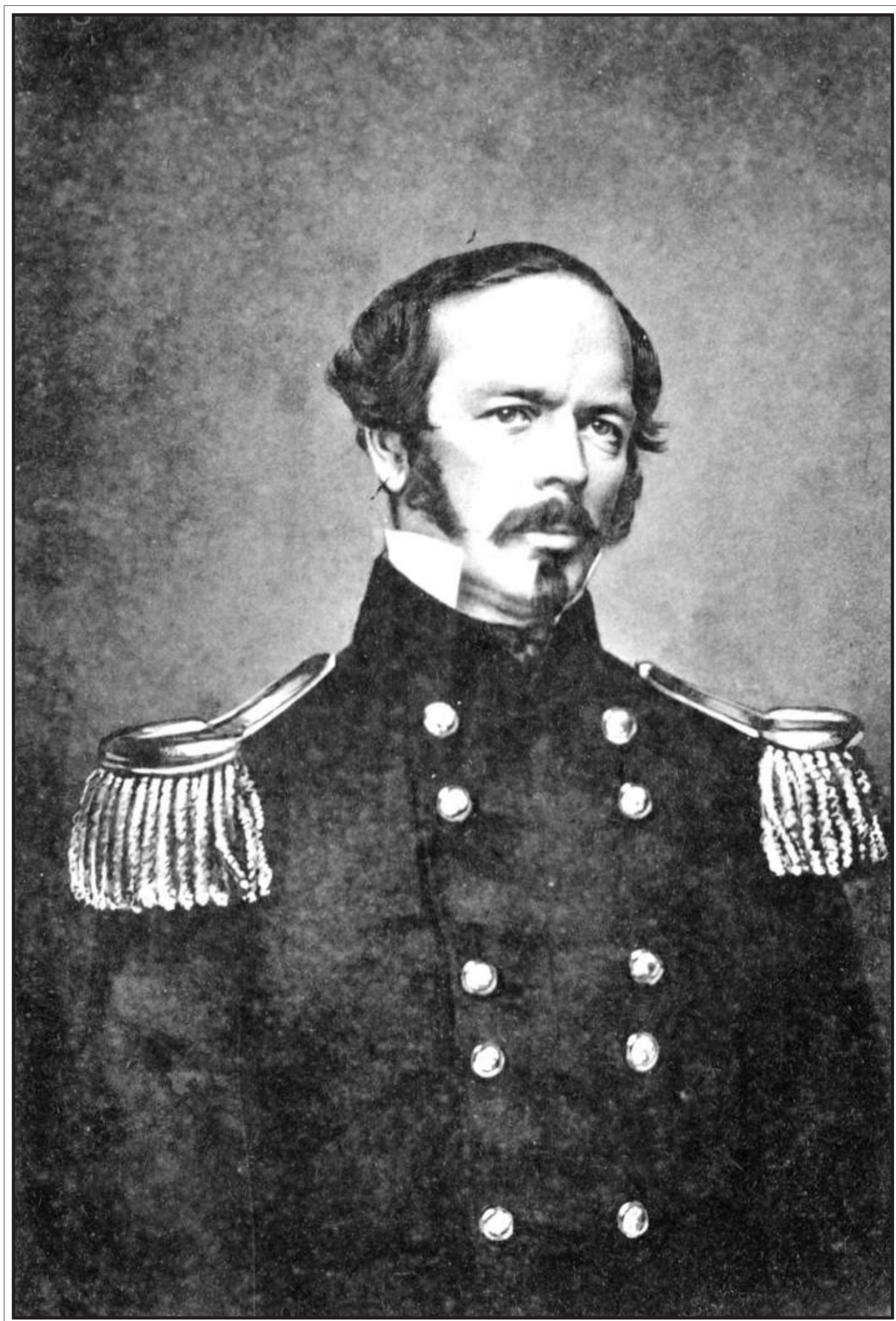
By early fall Johnston found himself commanding Secessionist forces spread along Virginia's northern frontier. Lee at that time had charge of the defenses of far-off western Virginia and would soon take command on the South Atlantic coast. By then both men held the grade of full general (equivalent to a modern "four-star general") which the Rebel Congress on May 16 had created as the highest in the Confederate Army.[4]

THE general Joseph E. Johnston, who directed the defenses of northern Virginia in 1861 and early 1862, embodied a massive bundle of high-strung

2 James Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 29-30, gives some hint of this course of events in an officer's life.

3 One writer remembered that Joseph E. Johnston was so overcome with emotion when he submitted his resignation that he had to be helped from the room. See Pryor, *Lee*, 284-285.

4 'Grade" and "rank" are often (and incorrectly) used interchangeably. Strictly speaking, an officer holds a certain grade (captain, colonel, and so on) within which he (and, in modern times, or she) is ranked by seniority. Except in quotations, this strict meaning will be used in this study. Officers in higher grades, of course, "outrank" those in lower grades.



JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON
in the United States Army.
Carlisle Barracks

contradictions. He was to prove the most controversial of the Confederacy's wartime military figures. By April 1861 when he left the "old army" to "go South," he had shown himself to be a knowledgeable and unusually competent officer in no fewer than five different branches of the army—artillery, topographical engineers, infantry, cavalry, and quartermaster. A brave as well as an accomplished officer, he had twice been wounded in combat—by Indians in Florida in 1838 and by Mexicans nine years later.[5]

In the Civil War Johnston was to prove himself a general who could win—or at least receive—and frequently retain the loyalty, and even the devotion of, tens of thousands who served under his command. At the same time, he could demoralize thousands of other troops as well as many civilians even as he alienated, frustrated, and disgusted some other people—especially if they held authority over him.[6]

On occasion Johnston displayed a grasp of the Confederacy's general military situation and an understanding of the war's general military strategy far surpassing that of most other Rebels. He could, at the same time, show himself to be vain, self-centered, extremely petty, passive, parochial, and—most important of all—unbelievably dense and obtuse with regard to the importance of personal relations with his superiors and colleagues. He seems to have been almost indifferent regarding such crucial matters as his government's political, diplomatic, economic, logistical, and psychological (public opinion) needs. This last trait was to play the most significant role in shaping Johnston's part in the Confederacy and his place in American military history.

Almost all of this, however, lay in the unknown future in early September 1861, when General Joseph E. Johnston sat down at his desk in his Manassas, Virginia, headquarters, began to sort through the contents of a packet of mail recently

5 One of Johnston's admirers, writing just after the general's death in 1891, proclaimed that in 1861 he had been "the best soldier in the Army of the United States, accomplished in all the knowledge of the art of war and capable of directing great affairs and great armies. He was master of the art of logistics, the art of managing great armies. Robert E. Lee, by contrast, had not had the scientific training that Johnston had." Johnson, *Memoir of Johnston*, 16.

6 Mary Chesnut, who gave us so many wonderful pen pictures of Confederate higher-ups, noted that Johnston's power to draw men to his support was "magnetic." (*Chesnut's Civil War*, 483. See also 633). At the same time, however, he was "a good hater" who "hates not wisely but too well." Campbell Brown (*Brown's Civil War*, 49-50), who served on Johnston's staff early in 1863 and who knew the general for many years, wrote soon after the war of Johnston's "power of attaching his subordinates & his troops devotedly to himself. . . . [but] he unfortunately falls short . . . in that . . . temper which alone could mould [President] Davis [his commander-in-chief] to his purpose." As we shall see Johnston's power failed in 1864 in four crucial instances. See Chapter Four ("Ole Joe in the Vipers' Pit"), in Book Three, Volume 2 of this work.

received from the War Department in Richmond, and settled back in his chair to study an account of the military legislation enacted during the just-closed session of the Confederate Congress.

IN February 1861 delegates from the seven seceded States assembled in Montgomery, Alabama, to organize the general government of their new nation. The need to make military preparations to defend their recently proclaimed independence obviously took precedence over almost everything else. Once the new government had been formed and at least the top executive officers installed, the delegates took up a series of bills providing for the raising of an army and spelling out the details of its organization.

When the legislators completed their task, they had created the legal framework for the Confederacy's basic military structure. The lawmakers had provided for what amounted to two armies. An act approved on February 28 authorized formation of the "Provisional Army of the Confederate States"; a March 6 law brought into being the "Confederate Regular Army."

The former was to be a large temporary force made up of troops raised and organized as regiments and battalions by the separate States and then taken into national (Confederate) service to wage the impending war for Southern independence. That goal achieved, the Provisional Army would disband and the troops would return to their individual States and to civilian life. All but a small handful of the approximately one million men who fought for the Confederacy did so as members of the Rebels' Provisional Army. The much smaller Regular Army, on the other hand, was to be raised directly by the Confederate Government and would remain in existence after independence had been won. It would become the Confederate version of a permanent, standing, professional military force.

The president was to appoint, with the consent of the Congress (later only of the Senate), such officers as Congress had authorized by law to command the Regular Army units and general officers to command the Provisional units above the regimental level. A May 21, 1861, act authorized the Chief Executive to give temporary commissions to RACS officers for service with PACS ("volunteer") troops. During the approaching war the two armies would function as a single organization, much in the way that in modern times a National Guard or Reserve unit called to active duty in Federal service becomes a part of a larger force that includes Regular, permanent United States Army units.

The bulk of the 1861 military legislation dealt with routine matters authorizing the transfer of some of the pre-existing State units to the new Confederate Provisional Army, spelling out details of the armies' size and organization, setting

the pay level for soldiers of various grades, and so on. These laws also provided for creation of the different staff branches of the Regular Army—Adjutant and Inspector General's Department, Corps of Engineers, Ordnance Department, Quartermaster and Subsistence (Commissary) departments, and so on.

Section 8 of the March 6 law provided for the appointment in the Regular Army of four "brigadier generals, who shall be assigned to such commands and duties as the President may specially direct." On March 14 Congress increased the number of brigadier generals to five. In May 1861, Lee and Johnston received their appointments as brigadier generals in the Confederate Regular Army under the provisions of these laws.[7]

AS the Secessionists went about perfecting and implementing their army organization, they found a potentially serious problem with the grade structure of their military force. Each of the Confederate States had seceded and theoretically had been an independent republic before joining the Confederacy. As a sovereign country, each of the Rebel States had organized its own army under the command of one of its own officers who usually held the grade of major general in that State's military force. Upon resigning from the United States Army, Robert E. Lee had been named (by Virginia authorities) as the State major general to command the Old Dominion's State army. Jefferson Davis, prior to his election as Confederate president, had served as the State major general in command of the Mississippi State army.

When the Rebels organized the Confederacy's military force, they formed its Provisional Army by calling upon each State to raise its quota of troops and, once organized as regiments and battalions, turn them over to the Confederate government for national ("volunteer") service in the Provisional Army. The individual State armies themselves (minus the units turned over to the Confederacy) remained in existence as an army or as part of the State militia. They were independent of the national (Confederate) military establishment just as in modern times a National Guard unit not in Federal service is a state force.

Should a Confederate State be invaded, the governor could send its army into the field to reinforce and to operate in conjunction with the Confederate

7 These laws are in United States War Department, comp., *The War of the Rebellion*: *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series IV, Volume I, 117, 126-131, 163, 326, and 341. Hereafter this compilation will be cited as *OR*. Unless otherwise noted, all references are to volumes in Series I. Citations to volumes in Series I will be volume number, *OR*, part number (if applicable), and page. Examples: 8 *OR*, 74; 38 *OR* pt. 4, 116, 134.

government's own forces. In such a case could—or should—a State major general (a "two-star" grade) exercise command over a Confederate brigadier general ("one-star")? Could a State brigadier who was senior to his Confederate counterpart order the latter about? Would Alabama troops in the Confederate Provisional Army be willing to serve under the command of a general of the Georgia State army?[8]

To deal with this problem, as well as with several lesser matters, the Confederate Congress on May 16 passed an act amending the law of March 6. Section 2 of the May 16 law declared that the five Regular Army brigadier generals whose appointments were authorized by earlier legislation would be re-designated "general . . . which shall be the highest military grade known to the Confederate States." These "full" or "four-star" Confederate generals would outrank any State officer.[9]

The May 16 law solved the problem of whether a State general would exercise command over a Confederate army. Later Congress would tinker with the army's organization and make various changes, but for our present purposes the acts summarized above created the relevant grade structure.

In the late summer of 1861, however, another problem arose. This one concerned only General Joseph E. Johnston. It involved the matter of rank within a grade, and it grew out of a provision in the March 14 law. This problem set the tone for the remainder of Johnston's Confederate career. In many ways it set the tone for the remainder of his life. It was to have a profound effect on the history of the Confederate States of America and therefore on the history of the United States.

CAREER soldiers have always taken great interest in promotion and rank. At isolated antebellum army posts officers spent hours poring over whatever documents came their way to learn who had died, retired, or been promoted or transferred, possibly opening slots into which they themselves might move. Frequently arguments, sometimes bitter, raged over who outranked whom.[10]

8 The status of all Confederate general officers was, in fact, indicated by three stars surrounded by a wreath. In some cases such as these sentences, I have used modern terms for clarity.

9 1 *OR*, Series IV, 249, 267, 326-327. See also Weinert, *Confederate Regular Army*, Chapter I. Late in 1862 Congress created the grade of lieutenant general ("three stars").

10 One Confederate general explained to a civilian official early in the war that "The jealousy with which professional soldiers look upon military rank is second only, my dear sir, to that of honor." Braxton Bragg to Judah P. Benjamin, Sep. 25, 1861, 6 *OR*, 744.

In the March 14 Confederate law that increased the number of brigadier generals from four to five, the Rebel Congress undertook to deal with the hypersensitive question of "rank" among officers of the same grade in the new Southern army. Section 5 of that law read:

> Be it further enacted, that in all cases of officers who have resigned, or who may within six months tender their resignations from the Army of the United States, and who have been or may be appointed to original vacancies in the Army of the Confederate States, the [Confederate] commissions issued shall bear one and the same date, so that the relative rank of the officers of each grade shall be determined by their former commissions in the U. S. Army, held anterior to the secession of these Confederate States from the United States.

The intent of the passage of this legislation is clear enough: The Southern Congress did not want a Confederate officer to be outranked by another Confederate officer of the same grade whom he had outranked in the antebellum United States Army.[11]

WE do not know when Joseph E. Johnston first became aware of the several Confederate statutes and their provisions regarding grade and rank in the Rebel army. He may have known of at least some of the legislation even before he resigned from the United States Army on April 22 to join first the Virginia State forces and then the Confederate Army. More likely, it seems, he would have learned of the law in May 1861 when he was in the then-Confederate capital of Montgomery, Alabama, at the time of his appointment as a brigadier general in the new nation's Regular Army.

Whenever the laws came to Johnston's attention, the section regarding rank doubtless pleased him greatly. He, after all, had been a brigadier general in the United States Army, and he believed himself to be the highest-ranking officer to leave the old service and to join the new Confederate Army. Johnston, therefore, naturally concluded that under the provisions of the March 14 law, he would be the

11 Some of the seceded States had earlier adopted similar legislation with regard to their forces. See, for example, Georgia's Jan. 25 stipulation on the subject (1 *OR*, Series IV, 79 and 167); *Virginia's policy* (ibid., 738); and South Carolina's problems with the question (ibid., 189, 190, and 202-203).

highest-ranking Confederate officer—and rank was crucial to Joseph E. Johnston. The desire (need?) for it consumed him.[12]

UNTIL the great reforms it underwent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States Army employed a complex grade/rank structure. The army divided its officer corps into "line officers" and "staff officers." The former commanded troops, the latter performed specialized tasks for a commander but could not in their own names exercise command over troops. Although an individual could sometimes switch from line to staff or vice versa, ill-feelings and jealousies often flared up between the two groups. (Douglas Southall Freeman entitled one chapter of his great book *R. E. Lee* "The Ancient War of Staff and Line.")[13]

Every United States line officer below the grade of brigadier general received a commission into a regiment; every staff officer, including general officers, into a staff branch. Promotion up through the grade of colonel was within the regiment or staff branch and went strictly by seniority. Thus, no matter how capable an officer proved himself, or how brilliant his performance in a given assignment, or how brave his conduct on the battlefield, he had to await a vacancy above him in his

12 See also the comments in Newton, *Johnston*, 99-100. Historian Steven Woodworth (*Davis and Lee*, 53, 55, and 56) writes of Johnston's "never-ending lust for high rank." Johnston was clearly wrong in the matter of being the highest-ranking United States Army officer to join the Confederacy. David Emanuel Twiggs of Georgia, a brigadier general since the late 1840s, held that distinction. Twiggs, however, was old (born 1790), not a graduate of the Military Academy, in bad health in 1861, and had quarreled with Jefferson Davis in the 1850s. He served for a few months as a Confederate major general—outranking, per the law, all other Confederate major generals—and died in 1862. An interesting sidelight in his case is the fact that he did not resign from the United States Army in 1861. President James Buchanan dismissed him "for treachery" in March 1861. Would that fact have altered his Confederate status? (See the wording of the law quoted in the text.) The matter never came up.

13 Freeman, *Lee*, I, 111-128 (Chapter VII). The theme of staff-line conflict in the nineteenth-century United States Army runs through the pages of Daniel Beaver's *Modernizing the War Department*. See the same provision in Confederate law (1 *OR*, Series IV, 115). The Rebels did, however, permit the assignment of staff officers to line duty by special direction of the President. For some examples of staff-line conflict in the Confederacy, see Goff, *Confederate Supply*, 66-67 and 75-88. In *Manassas to Appomattox* (112), James Longstreet wrote, "officers of the line are not apt to look to the staff in choosing leaders of soldiers, either in tactics or strategy." He probably intended this as a swipe at Lee, whom he criticized in the postwar decades.

regiment or staff branch before he could move up in the military hierarchy. His place in the regiment or staff branch was his "permanent grade."[14]

The army then had no "up or out" rule or mandatory retirement age. It was not unusual, therefore, for an officer to find himself "stuck in grade" for long periods. Robert E. Lee, for example, spent seventeen years (1838-1855) in his "permanent" status as a captain of engineers. Ironically, his third cousin, Samuel Phillips Lee, who was to become a distinguished Union naval officer in the Civil War, also found himself "stuck in grade" as a navy lieutenant at almost the same time (1837-1855).[15]

TO get around the many morale problems inevitably generated by this system, the army—borrowing from British practice—developed a second grade/rank structure running parallel to its "permanent" system. This "brevet" system fulfilled three functions. First, and most often, it served to allow promotion of an officer outside the army's permanent structure. Thus, outstanding service could be quickly acknowledged with a "brevet" promotion. In effect, while promotion within the permanent structure of the army was based solely on seniority, in the brevet structure it could be based on merit.

For this reason, a captain who distinguished himself in a battle but who could not receive a permanent promotion because no vacancy then existed in his regiment, could be awarded a brevet majority. When he left the regiment—to go on leave, say, or to sit as a member of a military court at another post—he did so as a major. Under these circumstances he was entitled to wear a major's uniform, to be addressed as "Major," and to rank as a major. In some cases, he could also draw a major's pay. Upon returning to duty with his regiment, he reverted to his permanent status as captain. Thomas J. Jackson, for example, graduated from the Military Academy in 1846 and received a commission as second lieutenant in the 3rd Artillery Regiment. He quickly proved such a terror on the battlefields of

14 Historian Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh (*West Pointers*, 145) writes of the *antebellum* army's "profound respect for seniority" and of "the army's iron-clad respect for seniority." Jefferson Davis's biographer William J. Cooper observed that in the "old army" "seniority dominated all else." (*Davis*, 246).

15 A study conducted in 1836 found that an officer who entered the army that year as a second lieutenant and spent the average time in each grade could expect promotion to colonel in 1894—after fifty-eight years of service. One officer who joined the army in 1799 died on active duty as a colonel in 1857 at the age of ninety-three. The monetary cost of a retirement system seems to have been a key factor in the decision not to establish one. Coffman, *Old Army*, 49, 99.

Mexico that fourteen months later he was "First Lieutenant and Brevet Major Jackson."[16]

The brevet system also permitted the President and the War Department to detach an officer from his unit or staff branch and order him to temporary duty in his brevet status. An officer could, therefore, receive an assignment in his brevet grade to some specialized task for which he was unusually well qualified even in cases in which the law, army regulations, or practice mandated that the task be performed by an officer holding a higher grade than his permanent one.

Captain Robert E. Lee of the Corps of Engineers received three brevets for his brilliant service in the Mexican War and, therefore became "Captain and Brevet Colonel Lee" in 1847. In September of 1852, Captain Lee, by order of the War Department, put aside his normal engineering duties and "[Brevet] Colonel Lee" became superintendent of the Military Academy—a post he filled for three years. The secretary of war then selected him for assignment to the newly organized 2nd Cavalry Regiment, transferred him from staff to line, and promoted him to the permanent status of lieutenant colonel in that unit. He, therefore, became "Lieutenant Colonel and Brevet Colonel Lee." His March 1861 promotion to colonel of the 1st Cavalry Regiment rendered his brevet status irrelevant.

Third, the brevet system gave the army a place to put (i. e. administratively to account for) surplus officers. On occasion a Military Academy graduate found himself commissioned "brevet second lieutenant" when he left the school. Although formally commissioned into a unit or staff branch, he had no permanent grade because no vacancy then existed in his unit or branch into which he could be placed.

As a brevet second lieutenant, the new officer reported to his unit or branch and performed whatever tasks could be found for him. (The technical term for his status was "supernumerary.") Brevet Second Lieutenant Jefferson Davis spent three years in that status with the 1st Infantry Regiment. When a second lieutenant's slot finally opened, he received a permanent promotion to second lieutenant to fill it, with his date of rank set back to his 1828 graduation day from the Military Academy. Since his "permanent" and "brevet" grades were then the same, the latter lost all meaning.

16 It was for this reason that after Lieutenant Thomas Jackson resigned from the army in 1851 and began teaching at the Virginia Military Institute he was "Major Jackson" although, of course, he no longer held any commission in the United States Army. VMI faculty held commissions in the Virginia militia. They still do, although it is now officially "the Virginia Militia unorganized." Irreverent cadets call it "The Virginia Militia disorganized."

As if to complicate matters even more, the army implemented what amounted to a third grade/rank system by designating staff officers' grades as such. In 1860, when Joseph E. Johnston became the new Quartermaster General of the army, the War Department transferred him to that staff branch from his line unit, the 1st Cavalry Regiment, in which he then held the permanent grade of lieutenant colonel and the brevet grade of colonel. As a result of this transfer, he received a promotion to the grade of "brigadier general, staff." He thereupon lost his permanent status as a line officer along with his permanent grade of lieutenant colonel, and his brevet grade lost its meaning.

IN summary, an officer could hold different permanent and brevet grades simultaneously. He could not, however, hold both line and staff grades. His active grade depended upon where and in which capacity he served at any given time—line, permanent, brevet, or staff. So, too, did his rank relative to other officers. Officer A might outrank Officer B in their permanent grade, but not in their brevet status. Which was the higher-ranking man at any given time depended upon what the active status of each then was.[17]

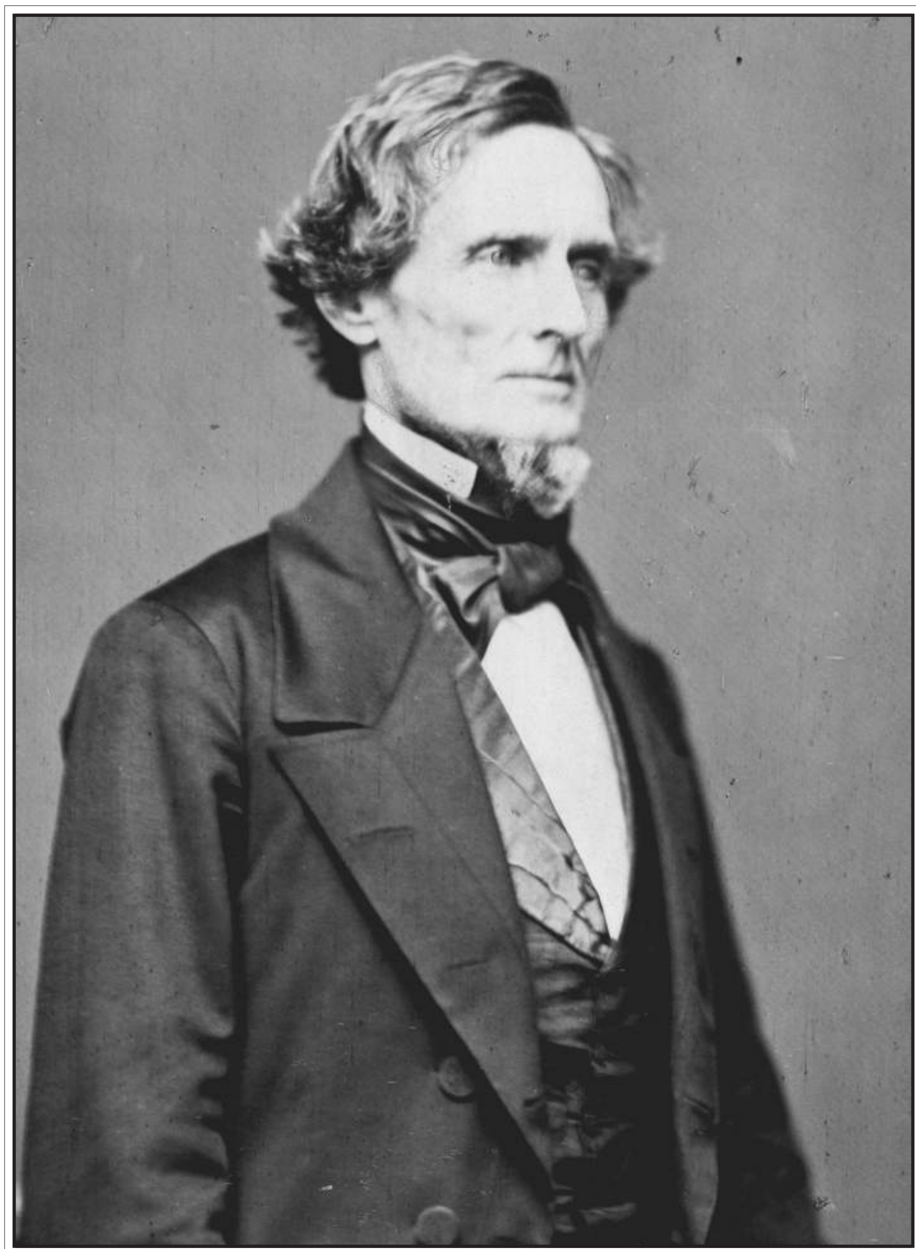
Such a grade/rank structure could (and frequently did) produce endless hyper-byzantine bureaucratic bickering. It could also greatly complicate application of the March 14, 1861, Confederate law, which stipulated that an officer's rank in the new Rebel army derived from his rank in the old Federal army.

TO President Jefferson Davis fell the task of selecting the men to nominate for the general officer posts created in the Confederate Provisional and Regular armies by the early 1861 legislation. Although Davis had involved himself in the detailed work of drawing up the laws to create the new Southern military force, he did not immediately act to select its top Regular Army generals.[18]

We have no record of the reason for Davis's delay in naming the men he wanted to head the Confederate armies. It seems a reasonable speculation, however, that he had several excellent possible selections (or possible selections that he thought were excellent) in mind, but did not know for some time which men would be available. After all, when Congress enacted the initial military legislation, the Confederacy comprised only the seven states from South Carolina

17 Many thanks to the late, great Dick Sommers for crucial help in puzzling out the complicated subject of "rank" in the *antebellum* United States Army.

18 Cooper, *Davis*, 335.



JEFFERSON DAVIS,
president of the Confederacy.
LOC

west to Texas. Those states, as Davis well knew, could boast of few really distinguished high-ranking military men, and it was possible that not all those officers would opt to join the Confederacy.

From his own long experience—at West Point (1824-1828), as an antebellum army officer (1828-1835), as a regimental commander in the Mexican War (1846-1848), as secretary of war (1853-1857), and as chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee (1857-1861)—Davis had gained extensive personal knowledge about many of the professional military men of the small antebellum United States Army. He doubtless knew all too well that the most distinguished Southerners in that army hailed from States that had not joined the Confederacy at the time the Southern Congress enacted the first laws organizing the Rebel forces. Probably for that reason Davis did not immediately rush to submit to Congress formal nominations for the Regular Army generals' slots. Instead, he elected to wait to see if future events would bring him more and better options.

VIRGINIA was one of the keys. The Old Dominion boasted a long martial tradition and as of 1861 had sent far more of her sons to the national Military Academy and into the United States Army than had any other Southern state. On February 15, 1861, the Atlanta *Gate City Guardian* published a study of the 1,132 commissioned officers then serving in the United States Army. Of the 413 from the fifteen slave states, only 96 hailed from the first seven states to join the Confederacy. Another 198 came from the four states that joined the Rebels after the war began—and 127 of those were Virginians.[19]

In the secession winter of 1860-1861 Virginia claimed five of the chief officers of the national army along with scores of younger men whose records indicated promising careers in the future. Should the Old Dominion join the Confederacy, Davis could hope to have in the Secessionist army such distinguished Virginians as Major General Winfield Scott, commanding general of the army;[20] Brigadier General Joseph E. Johnston, the army's quartermaster general; Colonel Samuel

19 Freeman, (*Lee's Lieutenants*, I, 709) calculated that by the time of the Civil War Virginia had 104 living graduates of the Academy (not all of them then in active service). The other ten Confederate states combined had only 184.

20 Davis and Scott had quarreled bitterly (and usually foolishly) in the 1850s. For that reason, the President may not have wanted him in the Confederacy. See W. Davis, *Davis*, 245-246 and 252-254.

Cooper, adjutant general of the army;[21] Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment—Colonel of the 1st Cavalry Regiment as of March 16; and Major George H. Thomas of the 2nd Cavalry. In March 1861, in fact, the Rebel government had contacted some of these officers to inquire about their accepting appointments in the Secessionist forces although their State had not then declared herself out of the Union and they still served in the Federal army.[22]

EVEN more than the Virginians, as distinguished and highly regarded as they were, Davis desperately wanted the man whom he and a great many others judged the most renowned of living American soldiers. In the spring of 1861 Colonel and Brevet Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston (no kin to Joseph E. Johnston) commanded the far-off Department of the Pacific from his headquarters in San Francisco. Born in Kentucky, Sidney Johnston had long since associated himself with Texas. He had served as a general in the army of, and then as secretary of war for, the Lone Star Republic when it was an independent nation. Would he follow his adopted State into the Confederacy?[23]

IN mid-April, when Virginia declared herself out of the Union, Scott and Thomas elected to remain loyal to the Federal government. Cooper had joined the Confederacy several weeks prior to his State's secession and had received an appointment as a Regular Army brigadier general from President Davis. When Lee and Joseph E. Johnston chose to follow their State, Davis quickly named them brigadier generals in the Confederacy's Regular Army. Once the May 16 law took

21 Born in and appointed to the Military Academy from New York, Cooper had married into a prominent Virginia family and become an adopted son of the Old Dominion. Many sources list New Jersey as his native state. The Military Academy *Register* (205) gives New York as his birthplace, as does Heitman's *Register* (I, 326). See also the errata sheet for Warner's *Generals in Gray*.

22 The state of Virginia had also initiated such contacts. See 51 *OR*, pt. 2, 22 and 37; 1 *OR*, Series IV, 165-166, 738, 956; Govan and Livingood, *Different Valor*, 27; Freeman, *Lee*, I, 434; and J. Davis, *Papers*, Vol. 7, 115.

23 Jefferson Davis later labeled Sidney Johnston "that truly great and good man, . . . one of the greatest and best characters I have ever known" (quoted in V. Davis, *J. Davis*, I, 36-37). On Sep. 2, 1861, the Richmond *Daily Dispatch* commented that Sidney Johnston was "a star of the first magnitude in the military world." Five days later the Macon *Daily Telegraph* noted that he and Lee were regarded by all as very highly qualified for military command. On Sep. 8 another Southern newspaper correspondent reported that A. S. Johnston "is generally conceded to be the finest field officer in the Confederate States, if not on this continent." Alexander, *Writing & Fighting*, 39.

effect, Cooper, Lee, and J. E. Johnston automatically became full generals. Davis, however, did not then formally nominate any of them for Congressional confirmation. It seems likely that he had chosen to wait to learn what Albert Sidney Johnston would decide to do.

NEWS of the secession of Texas did not reach San Francisco until April 9. That same day Sidney Johnston dispatched a letter to the War Department in Washington relinquishing his commission in the United States Army, and on May 6 the authorities accepted his resignation. Hoping that a North-South conflict could be averted, Johnston moved to Los Angeles after he left the Federal service.

A few weeks later Johnston concluded that duty compelled him to fight for Texas and the Confederacy. On June 16 he rode out of Los Angeles in the company of a small party of men going east to join the Rebels. After an arduous trek across the deserts of what are now the states of Arizona and New Mexico, he and his party reached the western boundary of Texas. In mid-August he arrived in Houston. On the sixth of September he reached Richmond. Overjoyed at Sidney Johnston's coming, President Davis, then ill in bed, quickly named him a full general in the Confederate Regular Army and assigned him to command Secessionist forces in the Kentucky-Tennessee-Arkansas-Missouri area.[24]

Already on August 31, with Sidney Johnston safely inside the boundaries of the Confederacy and soon to be in Richmond, Davis had sent the names of the nominees for the Confederacy's five highest generals' slots to Congress for confirmation. The lawmakers quickly gave their approval and then adjourned.

Joseph E. Johnston found an account of the August 31 Congressional action confirming Davis's full general nominees in his Manassas, Virginia, headquarters mail packet early in September—about the time Sidney Johnston reached the capital.

24 Roland, *Johnston*, 246-260; Richmond *Daily Dispatch*, Sep. 6, 1861; P. W. A. letter, Sep. 8, 1861 (published Sep. 15), Alexander, *Writing & Fighting*, 38.

PART II

"Your strictures upon my order . . .
imply strong disapproval—I suppose that of General Lee."
— Joseph E. Johnston, June 26, 1861

THE packet from the War Department reached Joseph E. Johnston's Manassas headquarters sometime between September 3 and 10, inclusive.[25] An aide placed the packet on the general's desk, and Johnston found it there when he sat down to go through the day's mail. Once the general opened the packet and examined its contents, his attention focused on an account of the recent Congressional proceedings when the lawmakers had confirmed President Davis's nominees for the five full general slots authorized for the Regular Confederate Army by the law of May 16, 1861.

Johnston's anger rose as he read down the short list of appointments. The President had not only nominated the five officers to be confirmed as full generals, but he had also assigned to each a different date of rank. In so doing he had bestowed upon them their relative status in the Confederate army based upon the hallowed practice of seniority.

IN first place among the Confederacy's full generals with a May 16 date of rank stood Samuel Cooper. As "colonel, staff," Cooper had been the antebellum Adjutant General of the United States Army, and Davis had named him Adjutant and Inspector General of the new Confederate Army.[26] Johnston doubtless knew that Davis and Cooper had been allies in several political and bureaucratic battles in

25 On September 3, 1861, Johnston ended a letter to Davis with the warm "your friend & obt servt"—a closing he would not have used once he learned how Davis had ranked the generals. Johnston completed his written protest of the rankings on or before September 10. A date of about September 5 or 6, therefore, seems reasonable as the time of Johnston's receiving the packet. See J. Davis, *Papers*, vol. 7, 322.

26 A provision of the March 14 law (as amended by the law of May 16) stipulated that the President could assign one of the Regular Army full generals as the Adjutant and Inspector General—the army's chief administrative officer.

the 1850s.[27] Second place on the seniority list went to the recently arrived Albert Sidney Johnston, whose date of rank Davis had set at May 30.

Joseph E. Johnston did not even stand third on the roster. Robert E. Lee occupied that position with a June 14 date of rank. Johnston probably found Lee's superior rank especially galling. Although the two had been friends since the first days of their cadetships at the Military Academy thirty-six years earlier, they had also been—at least in Johnston's easily-agitated mind—serious professional rivals.[28] Until the summer of 1860 when Johnston's selection as Quartermaster General had brought him promotion to "brigadier general, staff," Lee had always been a step or two in the lead. Now, Johnston, whose date of rank Davis had set at July 4, found himself once again outranked by his long-time friend and (as he thought) rival.[29]

Fifth place among the generals went to Pierre G. T. Beauregard, upon whom Davis had bestowed the date of rank July 21. Beauregard's status also upset the hyper-sensitive Johnston, but not because of that officer's elevation from brigadier general Provisional Army to full general in the Regular Army. Johnston himself, in fact, had recommended Beauregard's promotion to his new grade. Now Johnston took offense with the symbolism of Beauregard's date of rank.

On July 21, with Beauregard as second in command, Johnston had been at the head of the army that had won the Battle of Manassas, the war's first significant engagement. In the weeks after that battle the public had come to credit the flamboyant Beauregard with the victory. As early as July 22, for example, journalist Peter W. Alexander reported that in the previous day's battle Johnston had carried out Beauregard's plan and that Beauregard "was really the officer and hero of the day." As a result of the public acclaim for his subordinate, Johnston had more or less faded into the background, his crucial role in the overall management of the battle almost ignored. Now, the date of rank that Davis assigned to Beauregard seemed to Johnston's impassioned mind to reinforce that tendency.[30]

27 In her "memoir" of her husband, Varina Davis (*Davis*, I, 563) called Cooper the president's "dear friend and coadjutor."

28 This subject will be discussed in Book Two, Chapter Two, Part II.

29 See, for example, Glatthaar, *Lee's Army*, 46.

30 Alexander's reports first appeared in the Savannah *Republican* on Jul. 20 and 27, respectively. See also Alexander, *Writing & Fighting*, 18 and 20. After the war Johnston and Beauregard would clash in their accounts of the battle. See Book Six, Chapter One, Part I, in Volume II. Johnston had his own newspaper advocate. In early August, a letter from "a prominent officer,

Believing that he rightfully and lawfully held the post of highest-ranking general in the Confederate Army, and deeply wounded by what he easily convinced himself was a clear and intentional violation of the law and a gross act of injustice on the part of the President, Johnston sat down sometime about September 6 or 7 to compose a letter protesting the position assigned him by Davis.[31]

JOHNSTON'S September protest was not the first manifestation of the general's extreme, often unwise, sometimes intemperate, usually petty and childish, and always foolish hypersensitivity with regard to his status and reputation in the Confederate military establishment. His initial touchiness regarding the matter surfaced in June 1861, a mere twenty-three days after he arrived at his first Confederate duty station at Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

Johnston reached his post at the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers a little after noon on May 23 and assumed command the following day. Almost from the moment he saw Harpers Ferry, Johnston was unhappy with his situation. Indeed, he came to the post with "preconceived ideas" that it was untenable. "A complete reconnaissance of the area," he reported, confirmed this belief and led him to the conclusion (realization?) that Harpers Ferry was a trap and simply could not be defended. Even to try to hold it, he feared, would tie down the defending Confederates while allowing an enemy force "unrestricted" movement.

The town sat in a bowl in the acute angle formed by the two rivers, with high ground all around. Johnston did not have enough troops to defend it, and most of those he had were raw, undisciplined, and untrained. His men, he moaned, lacked weapons, ammunition, and equipment of all sorts. Of one of his units he wrote, "It is much to be regretted, I think, that the Tennessee regiment was admitted into the service. It is without accoutrements, instruction, or subordination." "Most of the reinforcements that have joined since my arrival," he complained on July 9, "have

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who bore an honorable part in the battle" appeared in the Richmond *Dispatch*. The author wrote to dispel the widespread idea that Beauregard had fought the battle. "It is due to Gen. Johnston to say," wrote the prominent officer, "*that he planned the battle* . . . no one can now dare to dispute the sagacity which planned all the [army's] movements" (quoted from *Dispatch*, n. d., in Macon *Daily Telegraph*, Aug. 12, 1861). This was not the last time that newspaper criticism of Johnston was quickly followed by articles defending and praising the general. See Book Two, Chapter Eleven, and Book Three, Chapter Eleven (the latter in Volume II). At an unknown date Mrs. Chesnut noted that Johnston had many good writers on his staff (*Chesnut's Civil War*, 608).

31 In his postwar *Narrative* (71) Johnston wrote: "This [Davis's action] was illegal and contrary to all the laws enacted to regulate the rank of the class of officers concerned."

incompetent officers, and are therefore uninstructed." In a pattern he was to repeat with slight variations on several other occasions, Johnston began to bombard Confederate authorities with reasons why he could not successfully defend his post and how risky it would be for him even to try to do so.

At Harpers Ferry in the late spring of 1861 Johnston found himself confronted for the first time by what his biographer Craig Symonds called "the ambiguities of high command." If he made the wrong decision, he could bring a major—perhaps a mortal—defeat to the Confederacy and severely damage if not destroy his own carefully burnished reputation.[32]

CONFEDERATE leaders wanted to hold Harpers Ferry, if possible, but they realized that circumstances might well force the Rebels to evacuate the place once Federal troops pushed southward from Pennsylvania and Maryland. Johnston, commanding on the ground, must decide if and when the time had come to withdraw from the town.

For almost three weeks after reaching Harpers Ferry, Johnston agonized over his situation. Unable to devise any way that he could improve things, he constantly moaned about his plight. In reply he received repeated assurances that the government relied upon his judgment. Twice on June 1, for example, General Lee, writing for the Confederate authorities, told Johnston that he should move out of Harpers Ferry if threatened by a force he could not resist—a message that Lee repeated on June 7.

As Symonds points out, Johnston feared that abandoning the town might tarnish his honor and besmirch his reputation. If, however, he could induce the authorities to order him to withdraw, he would preserve his carefully guarded prestige.

BY mid-June, with a large Union army only a few miles north of the Potomac and bearing down on the entrance to the Shenandoah Valley, Johnston pulled his army out of Harpers Ferry and marched for Winchester. While en route, he received a letter from Adjutant and Inspector General Samuel Cooper. Dated June 13, the document was the government's latest response to Johnston's incessant whining about his plight at Harpers Ferry. It read in part:

32 Symonds, *Johnston*, 103-109. See Johnston's comments in May and June, 2 *OR*, *passim*.

> You had been heretofore instructed to exercise your discretion as to retiring from your position at Harper's Ferry. . . . It is to be inferred that you have considered the authority given as not equal to the necessity of the case. . . . In all the directions which have been given to you[,] you will not have failed to perceive that, relying equally on your sound judgment and soldierly qualifications, it was intended that you should judge of the necessities of your condition and of the means best adapted to answer the general purpose of the campaign. As the movements of the enemy could not be foreseen, so it was impossible to give you specific directions, and the cause of the country could only be confided to one who, like yourself, was deemed entirely competent to decide upon events as they arose.
>
> *As you seem to desire, however, that the responsibility of your retirement be assumed here* [in Richmond], and as no reluctance is felt to bear any burden which the public interests require, you will consider yourself authorized, whenever the position of the enemy shall convince you that he is about to turn your position and thus deprive the country of the use of yourself and the troops under your command, to destroy everything at Harper's Ferry . . . . and retire upon the railroad towards Winchester [my emphasis].
>
> . . . . It has been with reluctance that any attempt was made to give you specific instructions, and you will accept *assurances of the readiness with which the freest exercise of discretion* on your part will be sustained [my emphasis].

Immediately upon receipt of this letter Johnston fired off a telegram in response: "I am confident that nothing in my correspondence with my military superiors makes me obnoxious to the charge of desiring that responsibility for my official acts should be borne by any other person than myself." (Johnston used "obnoxious" in the old sense of liable or deserving censure.)

Back from Cooper came the reply, dated June 18:

> In the letter to you of the . . . [13th], if the instructions seemed to you specific, be assured it was only intended to respond to the desire manifested . . . by you, and both then and theretofore and now the fullest reliance was placed in your zeal and discretion and *you are expected to act as circumstances may require* only keeping in view the general purpose to resist invasion as far as may be practicable, and seek to repel the invaders whenever and however it may be done. In order that all disposition may be made to meet your wants *it is necessary that you should write frequently and fully as to your position and the movements which may be contemplated by you* [my emphasis].
>
> . . . I would enforce upon you the necessity of *communicating promptly* all reliable information which you may obtain in relation to the enemy [my emphasis].

With General Cooper's June 18 letter the correspondence on the subject came to an end. Johnston was obviously correct about the impossibility of holding Harpers Ferry with a force too small to occupy the surrounding high ground and to

block the Potomac River crossings above and below the place, as well as with regard to tying down a garrison in what could only have been a hopeless attempt to hold the town itself simply by occupying it. The general, however, had clearly shied away from the responsibility of deciding to evacuate his post and had left it only when events had forced his hand. Cooper's June 18 letter seems to have been a clumsy attempt to close out the matter and to salve Johnston's very fragile ego.

The incident, nevertheless, had clearly "irritated" Confederate authorities (to use biographer Symonds's word). It had created the strong impression that Johnston placed his own reputation above more important matters.[33]

THREE sentences from this small flurry of correspondence stand out as adumbrations of what was to come. Two of them are quoted above: Cooper's pleas that "In order that all disposition may be made to meet your wants it is necessary that you should write frequently and fully as to your position . . . ," and "I would enforce upon you the necessity of communicating promptly. . . ."

A third prophetic sentence appeared in Johnston's June 15 telegram but is not quoted above: "*I know myself to be a careless writer*, and will not, therefore, pretend to have expressed clearly the opinion I wished to have put before the government [my emphasis]."

Four days after Cooper penned his June 18 letter President Davis himself would plead with Johnston, "I wish you would write whenever your convenience will permit, and give me fully both information and suggestions . . . I am sure you cannot feel hesitation in writing to me freely and trust your engagements will permit you to do so frequently."

These messages were but the first of multiple such exchanges. The following four years would see many similar pleas from Richmond and numerous instances of missed and misunderstood communications.[34]

LESS than a week after the question of Johnston's willingness (or unwillingness) to assume responsibility for the evacuation of Harpers Ferry died

33 Symonds, *Johnston*, 109.

34 All this correspondence is in 2 *OR*, 881-945, where the documents are arranged chronologically. For an example of Davis asking Johnston to communicate see his Aug. 1, 1861, message (5 *OR,* 766-767). Johnston's biographer Symonds ("Fatal Relationship," 14-15) noted that a lack of full and free communication was "the single greatest failing in the Davis-Johnston relationship" and was "primarily Johnston's fault." He also commented on Johnston's "deliberate" failure to cultivate Davis's support. See also ibid., 14-15, 20, and 25-26.

down, another brouhaha flared up when the prickly general convinced himself that he had again been censured by the Confederate authorities in Richmond. Even worse to Johnston's excitable mind, the authority in this case was none other than his old rival Robert E. Lee.

On June 21 Johnston directed (State) Brigadier General Gilbert S. Meem, commanding a local brigade of Virginia militia, to activate two additional regiments to help support Johnston's Confederate army near Winchester. When the state's governor learned of the order a few days later he inquired through channels if the report was correct. The query went to the Richmond office of Robert E. Lee, who still functioned as commander of the State forces and directed the activities of both Virginia and Confederate troops in the Old Dominion.

Lee had Lieutenant Colonel George Deas, his assistant adjutant general, write Johnston on his behalf to ask about the matter. The note, dated June 24, also included some advice for Johnston:

> If certain allegations in respect to the general's [Meem's] habits and daily condition, which have been made to General Lee are correct, he certainly would not be a fit person for this responsible duty. In addition to this, also, it is believed that the population from which these [militia] regiments would be taken is by no means loyal to the cause of Virginia.

Two days later Johnston replied to Deas, correctly pointing out that as a Confederate general he could not pick and choose officers of the State forces and that the allegation (of too much drinking by Meem) should be handled by the Virginia authorities. Then his well-honed desire to guard his reputation flared up:

> Your strictures upon my order to General Meem imply strong disapproval—*I suppose that of General Lee*. If I am correct in so understanding you, would it not be well to countermand the order in question at headquarters [my emphasis]?

Deas, again writing for Lee, replied on July 1:

> The general desires me to say that it was far from his intention to cast any strictures upon you. . . . The matter coming from the governor in the form of an inquiry was submitted to you for reply, as none could be given from this office. . . . The latter part of my letter was simply to convey to you certain information of a nature which might influence you if found correct.

In his first month commanding a Confederate force in the field Johnston had twice reacted explosively to what he clearly perceived as severe official censure of

his professional actions. In both cases the comments that provoked him had come from officers he had outranked in the "old army" and whom he then believed he still outranked in Confederate service. Johnston's first field command as a general officer had not begun auspiciously.[35]

FOR the first two-and-one-half weeks of July Johnston's force hovered about Winchester, drilling and occasionally skirmishing with small parties of the enemy striking southward into the Shenandoah Valley. Some fifty miles to the southeast another Confederate army under Beauregard defended the crucial rail junction at Manassas. Should either Johnston or Beauregard find himself threatened by a superior force, the Rebels' best chance to meet the danger would be to unite their two armies.

Johnston received the order at 1:00 a.m. on July 18. "General Beauregard is attacked," Cooper telegraphed. "To strike the enemy a decisive blow a junction of all your effective force will be needed. If practicable, make the movement, sending your sick and baggage to Culpeper Court-House. . . . In all arrangements exercise your discretion."

Disengaging from the Federals near Winchester and leaving some cavalry and the local militia (Meem and all) to protect the area, Johnston had his troops on the way by 12:00 M. The Confederates were able to utilize a railroad for part of their movement, and Johnston's leading units reached Manassas during the afternoon of July 19. Johnston himself arrived the following day, but the last of his men did not get to the area until the afternoon of the twenty-first.

WHILE en route, Johnston realized that a problem might erupt over command of the united forces. Doubtless he knew by then that he was or would be a full general by virtue of the law of May 16. As of yet, however, he had not been nominated for and confirmed in that grade. Might he still be a brigadier general? If so, did Beauregard, who had held that grade in the Provisional Army since March 1, outrank him? (Johnston, in fact, sometimes continued to sign documents "J. E. Johnston, Brigadier General" at least as late as July 23.)[36]

Unlike so many of Johnston's spats with the government, this was a legitimate matter of concern. Uncertain lines of authority and doubts about who outranked and commanded whom could produce chaos and defeat on the battlefield. To

35 2 *OR*, 948, 956, and 962; 5 *OR*, 808, 810, and 826.

36 2 *OR,* 995.

clarify matters, the general paused on the march to Manassas to dispatch an inquiry to Richmond. His telegram has been lost, so we do not know how he worded the question. Davis's July 20 reply read:

> You are a general in the Confederate Army possessed of the power attaching to that rank [grade].
>
> You will know how to make the exact knowledge of Brig. Gen. Beauregard, as well of the ground as of the troops and preparation, available for the success of the object in which you co-operate. The zeal of both assures me of harmonious action.

Three things about this short presidential dispatch merit comment. First, Davis did not give a clear and direct answer to Johnston's question—a practice he was to repeat on other occasions and one which sometimes must have frustrated those to whom he addressed his messages. Second, did the President expect the two generals to "co-operate," or was Johnston as the senior officer higher in grade and rank to command? Third, the telegram's last sentence is especially revealing. As will be discussed several times throughout this work, the President held consistently to a naive conviction that every Confederate would put aside personal considerations and grievances stemming from past events and cheerfully cooperate in the Secessionist cause. No experience to the contrary could shake this belief.

It did not affect this case, but it constituted one of Davis's major weaknesses as a wartime leader. On several occasions it contributed to defeats and massive disasters for the Rebels when the Chief Executive was not clear in his directives and simply would not enforce necessary subordination and obedience on some of his headstrong generals.[37]

ONCE arrived at Manassas, Johnston assumed command of the combined Southern forces. On July 21, with Johnston managing the overall battlefield and directing the movement of troops into the action and with Beauregard exercising tactical command, the Confederates won a convincing victory. After the battle Johnston and most of his troops from the Shenandoah Valley remained in the Manassas area, and he took overall command of the defense of northern Virginia. Almost immediately the previous pattern of his relations with the authorities in Richmond reemerged.

37 2 *OR,* 895; J. Davis, *Papers*, vol. 7, 254; Johnson, *Memoir of Johnston*, 49; Woodworth, *Davis and Lee*, xii; Cooper, *Davis*, 3, and 15-16.

On July 23, Lieutenant Colonel Dabney H. Maury reported to Johnston with orders from Lee assigning him to duty as Johnston's adjutant general. Johnston professed delight at seeing his old friend, but when he read Maury's orders, he exploded. "This is an outrage!" Maury remembered him exclaiming, "I outrank General Lee, and he has no right to order officers into my army." Johnston soon calmed down enough to assure Maury that he would like to have him serve on the staff, but he had already named another officer to the post and could not allow his inferior in rank (Lee) to assign officers within his command. The next day, while an embarrassed Maury returned to Richmond to seek another assignment, Johnston protested to Cooper about the order.

Lee had been using paper with the letterhead "Headquarters of the Virginia Forces" printed at the top of the page. When he began to exercise some authorized but ill-defined authority over Confederate troops as well as those of the State, clerks or staff officers lined out the word "Virginia." The altered stationery also provoked Johnston.

"I rank Genl. Lee," Johnston maintained to Cooper, ". . . and can admit the power of no officer of the Army to annul my order nor can I admit the claim of any officer to the command of 'the forces,' being myself the ranking General of the Confederate Army." When President Davis read this protest, he wrote one word on it: "Insubordinate." On July 29 Johnston again addressed a letter to Cooper:

> I had the honor to write you on the 24th instant on the subject of my rank compared with that of other officers of the C. S. Army. Since then I have received daily orders purporting to come from the 'Headquarters of the Forces,' some of them in relation to the internal affairs of this army. Such orders I cannot regard because they are illegal.
>
> Permit me to suggest that orders to me should come from your office [because, as Adjutant and Inspector General, Cooper communicated with troop commanders on behalf of the President and the secretary of war].

Davis also scrawled the word "Insubordinate" on this letter.[38]

38 J. Davis, *Papers*, vol. 7, 335n3; 2 *OR,* 1007; Maury, *Recollections*, 143-146; Symonds, *Johnston,* 126. Symonds commented that Johnston "went out of his way to make the point that he did not consider himself within the command structure in Virginia presided over by . . . Lee." A few years after the war, Johnston declared that he had been the ranking Confederate general and that he "would not have obeyed his [Lee's] order, but would have insisted on his seniority." Entry (date unknown, but 1870s) in diary of Susan H. Mims, Atlanta *Constitution*, Feb. 1, 1914. Maury also quotes Johnston as saying that for him to accept Lee's order would be to acquiesce "in so unlawful an assignment of rank of the Confederate generals as has been made." The

AUGUST passed relatively quietly. Lee had left Richmond on July 28 to command troops in western Virginia, so no more communications from him or from the "Headquarters of the Forces" arrived to upset the touchy general at Manassas. Events elsewhere, notably in Missouri and along the Outer Banks of North Carolina, drew attention away from northern Virginia where the hostile armies remained quiet.

Most of the August communications between Johnston and the government dealt with humdrum matters of army organization, weapons, the use and misuse of railroad freight cars, the quantity and quality of food issued to the troops, medical care for the soldiers, and so on. The tone of Johnston's correspondence with President Davis himself remained friendly—indeed, some of it could be called sycophantic.

On August 23, for example, Johnston ended a letter to Davis, most of which he had devoted to a discussion of rations, soldiers' health, and army organization, with "leave for two months the drudgery of you[r] civil duties. Command the army leaving the burden of administration to Generals—Occupy yourself merely with the [military] Campaign itself—& win the high glory of achieving the independence of our country. Your friend & obt servt."

So friendly had the summer's Davis-Johnston correspondence become that on July 13 the President wrote to the general, "Mrs. Johnson [sic] bears up very well under all her [medical] troubles, but frequently exhibits the anxiety which is common with the rest of us but even more intensely she feels for your safety." Two days later Johnston replied, "The kindness of your tone Gave this pleasure [of receiving your letter]."[39]

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assignment of rank of the Confederate generals was something that Johnston could not have known at the time if, for no other reason than that no such assignment of rank of the Confederate generals had yet been made. The quotation doubtless reflects Maury's knowledge of later events at the time he penned his *Recollections*. Nor would Johnston's August correspondence with the Chief Executive have been as friendly as it was had he then known of the rankings. For examples of this correspondence, see 5 *OR,* 777 and 779, and the next section of this chapter. Confederate grade/rank structure could be as complex as that of the Union. Maury then held three grades: as a colonel in the Virginia State Army, as a captain in the Confederate Regular Army, and as a lieutenant colonel in the Confederate Provisional Army. His meeting with Johnston is often dated Jul. 24 (the date of Johnston's protest). Maury's account, however, shows that he reached Manassas on Jul. 23, the day President Davis returned to Richmond from a visit to the army.

39 J. Davis, *Papers*, vol. 7, 305-306. For other examples, see 5 *OR, passim.*

THE thirty-first of August—the day Congress confirmed the President's ranking of the full generals—marked Joseph E. Johnston's one hundredth day as commander of a Confederate field army. His disputes with the authorities during that period concerned his official status and had been with Cooper and Lee—his juniors in rank, as he then believed.

As the calendar turned over into September, Johnston was about to take his quarrels with the Richmond government to what psychologically, linguistically, and bureaucratically would be a whole different level.

Part III

"... the wrong which I conceive has been done me."
— Joseph E. Johnston, September 12, 1861

JOHNSTON probably labored for several days on his letter to President Davis protesting his rank among the Confederate generals. It seems unlikely that he consulted anyone else. If he did, no record of such consultations is known to survive.

The first version of his letter ran to about 2,300 words, but Johnston quickly realized that parts of it were too harsh even for him. He therefore cut it by about fifteen percent, deleting many of the most caustic passages. The normal day-to-day hassles of army command doubtless interrupted work on the protest from time to time, but the general completed the document sometime on September 10. When satisfied with what he had written, Johnston put the letter in final form and set it aside to give himself a couple of days to collect his thoughts.[40]

40 If Johnston did in fact discuss the matter with anyone else, it was probably with his brother Beverley (spelled "Beverly" in some records), who on occasion visited him at Manassas. See Newton, *Johnston*, 221 n15. The passage Johnston excised is available, ibid., 213-214. See also Johnston's *Narrative*, 72-73. The manuscript version of the letter ran to nine pages. See Johnston, "Responsibilities of the First Bull Run." The general's draft of the letter can be found in the Hughes Papers.