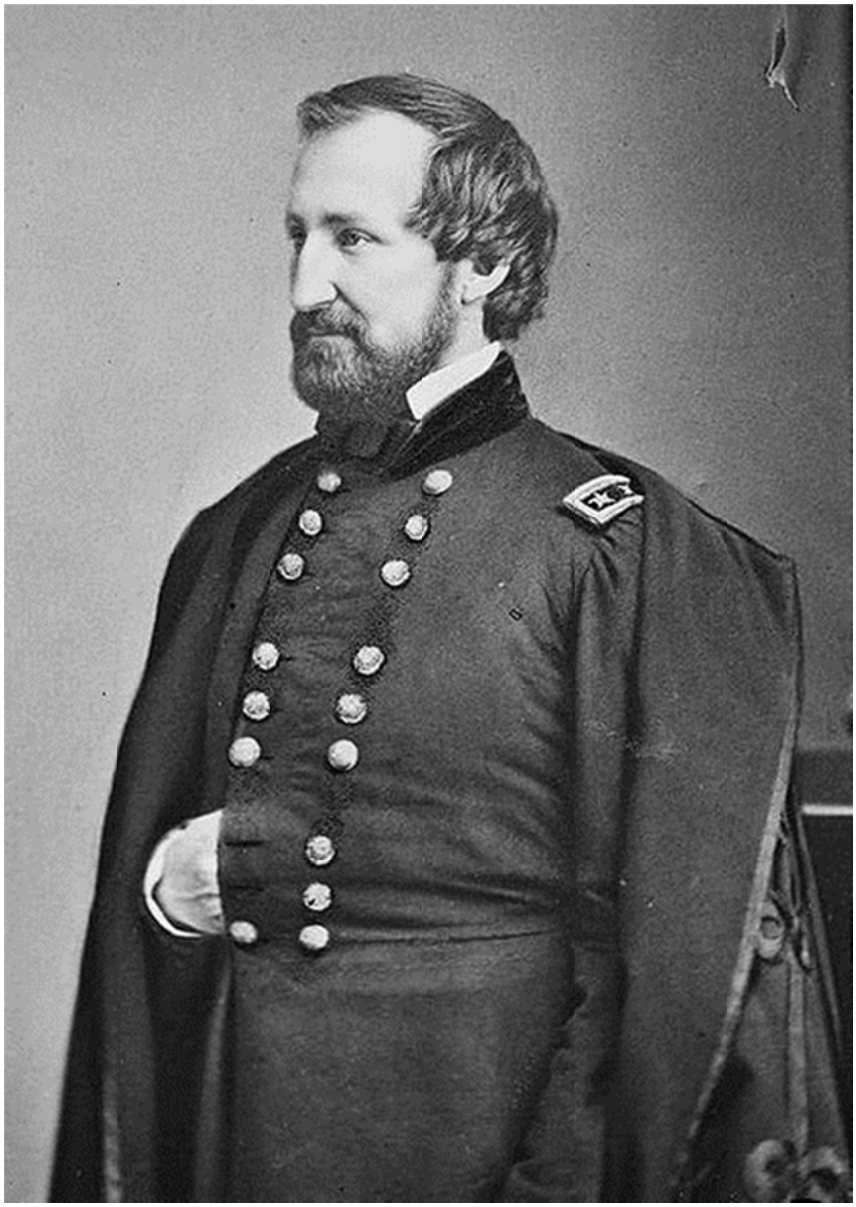
The Battle of Stones River: A Contrast in Leadership Styles

Source Document Excerpts

William S. Rosecrans Biography



Short Biography:

William Starke Rosecrans (September 6, 1819 – March 11, 1898) was an inventor, coal-oil company executive, diplomat, politician, and United States Army officer. He gained fame for his role as a Union general during the American Civil War. He was the victor at prominent Western Theater battles, but his military career was effectively ended following his disastrous defeat at the Battle of Chickamauga in 1863.

Rosecrans was a graduate of West Point who served as a professor at the academy and in engineering assignments before leaving the Army to pursue a career in civil engineering. At the start of the Civil War, leading troops from Ohio, he achieved early combat success in western Virginia. In 1862 in the Western Theater, he won the battles of Iuka and Corinth while under the command of Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. His brusque, outspoken manner and willingness to quarrel openly with superiors caused a professional rivalry with Grant (as well as with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton) that would adversely affect Rosecrans's career.

Given command of the Army of the Cumberland, he fought against Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg at Stones River, and later outmaneuvered him in the brilliant Tullahoma Campaign, driving the Confederates from Middle Tennessee. His strategic movements then caused Bragg to abandon the critical city of Chattanooga, but Rosecrans's pursuit of Bragg ended during the bloody Battle of Chickamauga, where his unfortunately worded order mistakenly opened a gap in the Union line and Rosecrans and a third of his army were swept from the field. Besieged in Chattanooga, Rosecrans was relieved of command by Grant.

Following his humiliating defeat, Rosecrans was reassigned to command the Department of Missouri, where he opposed Price's Raid. He was briefly considered as a vice presidential running mate for Abraham Lincoln in 1864. After the war he served in diplomatic and appointed political positions and in 1881 was elected to Congress, representing California.

Edge of Glory by William Lamers

Paperback: 520 pages; **Publisher:** Louisiana State University Press; Louisiana pbk. ed edition (May 1, 1999); **Language:** English; **ISBN-10:** 080712396X; **ISBN-13:** 978-0807123966.

As a youth Rosecrans was an avid reader. He was a very smart outstanding Cadet at West Point graduated fifth in his class – Class of 1842 and qualified for the elite Engineer Corps, the first westerner to ever achieve that distinction.

His early military carrier included being an Engineer Professor at West Point, Engineering Supervisor of multiple projects including Newport, Rhode Island, and Bedford, Massachusetts harbor installation which saw the Navy Department use his ideas for buildings in the future. He later sought a professorship at Virginia Military Institute, but Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson won that appointment. He resigned his Army commission in 1853 and went into the private sector where he was a engineer and architect. He became involved in the petroleum business with patents regarding refining petroleum.

After the Civil War began he was an aide to George McClellan in Ohio. He achieved early combat success in western Virginia. In 1862 in the Western Theater, he won the battles of **Iuka** and

Corinth while under the command of Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. His brusque, outspoken manner and willingness to quarrel openly with superiors caused a professional rivalry with Grant (as well as with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton) that would adversely affect Rosecrans's career.

Confederate General Daniel H. Hill was asked, who of the Federal officers are to be the most feared. He stated, " Sherman, Rosecrans, McClellan. Rosecrans has a fine practical sense, and is of tough, tenacious fiber."

Rosecrans had trouble with those in the chain of command above him. Lamers states on pg. 79,"with his inferiors he was uniformly kind and considerate, to those above him he was always punctilious, often testy, and at time deplorably indiscreet….This sturdy honesty, which led him to take upon himself the weighted responsibilities, and incur the gravest displeasure rather than do that which in his conviction, would prove injurious to the Cause, was at once one of the most striking features of his character, and one of his most potent reasons for his constant embarrassments."

Rosecrans proved himself skillful and resourceful in planning, and rapid and able in execution, active, energetic, and industrious as a commander. He had displayed conspicuous personal bravery in battle, and until Chickamauga, an able commander qualifying for a top assignment to give him a chance to test and prove his full abilities. He stressed discipline and when given the Command of the Army of the Cumberland he increased chaplains both Protestant and Catholic. He was of the Catholic faith, being converted through the influence of his friend Julius Garesche', who would become his Chief of Staff, and endlessly talked regarding his faith at many opportunities.

Rosecrans thrived at "multitasking." An example that Lamers quotes on page 193, "Rosecrans sometimes called his three aides and dictated 3 letters simultaneously, while he conversed with a fourth person and puffed on his cigar."

When General Halleck pushed Rosecrans to get on the offensive out of Nashville he replied in mid-December 1862, "…I need no other stimulus to make me do my duty than the knowledge of what it is . To threats of removal or the like, I must be permitted to say I am insensible."

Meeting with his three wing commanders the night before the battle, Rosecrans stated, "Press them hard! Drive them out of their nests! Make tem fight or run! Fight them! Fight them! Fight I say!"

1st Day of the Battle of Stones River
Union General William S. Rosecrans and Confederate General Braxton Bragg came up with the same battle plan for December 31st, 1862 – to attack the opposite's right flank. However, Bragg would attack earlier that morning at dawn. Rosecrans would be initially reacting to Bragg's attack most of the first day of the battle. On page 223, Lamer states, "All day he clinched an unlit cigar in his mouth. His reaction to Bragg's attack on the Union right – " General Rosecrans had to conform his plan of attack to General Bragg's…He did it so well that ultimately he held the field, and if he had never done anything else, his conduct at Murfreesboro should secure him a high place as a commanding general."

As the Union Right Flank is pressed in retreat toward the Nashville Pike and Railroad tracks leading to Nashville, Rosecrans rode up and down the reformed line along the railroad, "Shells whistled close, all but Rosecrans ducked to saddle the blows. Garesche' begged him

not to expose himself, Rosecrans dug his spurs into his horse and replied, 'Never mind me. Make the sign of the cross and go in! The only way to be safe is to destroy the enemy!'

One incident that occurred on the left flank was at McFadden's Ford. This ford in Stone's River was exposed and he asked those in Crittenden's 3rd Brigade – Colonel Price a question, "Will you hold this ford?" The reply, "I will try sir." Again Rosecrans asked, "Will you hold this ford?" the reply, " I will die right here!" Rosecrans asked the third time, "Will you hold this ford?" The reply, "Yes Sir!" Rosecrans agreed to that answer and said, "That will do." He then wheeled away and went toward the Round Forest.

He then moved toward the fighting urging troops toward the lines. "He was doing what Cox called 'wagonmaster's work' – supervising details that normally should be left to those of lower rank. Yet some personal supervision was imperative and his display of courage inspired thousands. During the assault on Hazen, Surgeon Eben Swift saw Rosecrans ride to the front to direct the movements of troops and batteries. Swift saw him draw enemy fire 'almost at point-blank range,' but he 'moved calmly, cheering and inspiring our faltering troops and throughout the day, wherever the battle raged most fiercely, General Rosecrans bore his charmed life.'" One person – J. L. Yaryan later recalled, "Rosecrans was at all parts of the field mounted on a large grey horse, his old blue overcoat buttoned to his chin, a stump of cigar caught between his teeth. He left the position usually occupied by the Chief and came to the line of battle, and by his presence and words cheered and encouraged the men of the center and left." One veteran recalled, "He is brave as Julius Ceasar." And another, Colonel Heg, stated " I saw him while riding to and fro at furious rates, the sweat pouring down his face, his clothes splattered over with blood, and I could not help expressing my gratitude to Providence for having given us a man that was equal to the occasion – a general in fact as well as in name." Whitlow Reid stated, "When disaster had enveloped half the army, and from that time to the end, Rosecrans was magnificient. Rising superior to the disaster that in a single moment had annihilated his carefully prepared plans, he grasped in his single hands the fortunes of the day. He stemmed the tide of retreat, hurried brigades and divisions to the point of danger, massed artillery, infused into them his own dauntless spirit, and out of defeat itself, fashioned the weapons of victory. As at Rich Mountain, Iuka, and Corinth, it was his personal presence that magnetized his plans into success."

During this part of the First Day of the Battle of Stones River, Confederate General Hardee hit the Union line, "an orderly fell at Rosecrans' feet. Staff officers shouted encouragement, waving hats and brandishing words. 'now let the whole line charge!' Rosecrans cried. "Shoot low! Be sure of your aim!' a cheer rose. Even scholarly Garesche' caught the fever. When bugles blew, he shoved his hat jauntily back on his head, and brandished his sword. By noon heavy fighting on the re-formed right and center subsided; while the Confederates massed before it in strength, they made no further full-scale attack."

The attacks now would center on the point of the letter "V" or as some historians have called it like a pocket knife and the Round Forest being the intersecting of the two blades. "Rosecrans was assembling fifty pieces of artillery on high ground covering the salient." General Polk continued his assault on the Round Forest again, and asked for reinforcements from Breckenridge, but they did not come until much later. Rosecrans anticipated this final, desperate charge, and strengthened his line by inserting relatively unhurt regiments where needed….he toured his lines, encouraging his troops." Breckenridge, the former Vice President of the United States, would charge the Union position at the Round Forest while Rosecrans and his Subordinate Generals watched from the high ground. "Fifty guns spewed case shot and grape into compact formations, while below the guns, the division of Wood and Palmer fired volleys of musketry. Soldiers plucked cotton to stuff it in their ears against

the thundering sound. Rosecrans saw that Hazen's brigade needing rallying, and, with Garesche' at his heels, he plunged down through heavy fire to the right of the tracks. Garesche' was struck full in the face by an unexploded shell, leaving only his lower jaw. The headless body rode on for almost twenty paces, until the horse jerked, and it slid off." When Rosecrans stopped and "told of Garesche's death, 'We cannot help it, brave men die in battle. Let us push on, this battle must be won." Some later asked Rosecrans if he was wounded noticing blood on his uniform, and Rosecrans stated, "Oh no, poor Garesche' has just been killed." He commented afterwards, 'I had no sensations under fire at Stones River, I was absorbed in planning how to beat the enemy.' But later he cut the buttons from his uniform and saved them in an envelope, marked: 'Buttons I wore the day Garesche' was killed."

At the end of the First Day – December 31st, 1862, "Rosecrans had suffered 7,000 casualties. Three of Sheridan's brigadiers were dead; two of Johnson's. Twenty-eight pieces of artillery were captured by the Confederates. Wheeler's raid left the Union Army with insufficient rations, though with enough ammunition for another battle. Rosecrans could count these as debits. Rosecrans would now face a crucial decision – to retreat or stay at Stones River?

During the night Rosecrans assembled his commanders to his headquarters on the Nashville Pike. He asked them, "Shall we fight it out here, or withdraw to an advantageous position covering our depots at Nashville? According to our custom the junior in rank will please answer first? " After receiving various opinions, Rosecrans then went out with a subordinate to inspect the ground to the rear toward Nashville. He saw numerous campfires and presumed it was the Confederates, since he had given orders not to have any campfires, that was not the case as Union Calvarymen had made numerous fires along the Nashville Pike. Rosecrans returned to his headquarters and said to his commanders, "Well, gentlemen, we shall not retreat, but fight it out here and to the front. Go at once to your posts and hold your commands ready to receive any attack from the enemy. We shall not attempt to attack him until the arrival of our ammunition which I have ordered up from Nashville." Rosecrans ordered, "Go to your commands and prepare to fight and die here." It was reported that his statement to the group was "electric". "One officer said, 'General, I did not know you were so game a man.'"

The 2nd Day – January 1st, 1863 of the Battle of Stones River was basically a day of truce, while each Army looked to their dead and wounded, and simply waited for each other to make a move. Night came and both armies slept on their arms. Rosecrans used this time to consolidate his lines, and he waited for his supply trains to return from Nashville with the hopes that the Confederate Calvary would not disturb them.

On the Third Day of the Battle – January 2nd, 1863, Rosecrans had sent units on his left flank across Stones River. Bragg sent Gen John C. Breckinridge's Division to attack the Union left. "Rosecrans personally checked the positions at his left." The Confederates attacked and Union forces under Beatty retreated back across Stones River pursued by Breckinridge's forces. "Rosecrans had anticipated this attack, and, to cover the troops across the river, had gathered fifty-eight guns under Crittenden's artillery chief, Captain John Mendenhall…..they withheld fire until Beatty's men were out of range. Then all fifty-eight guns sounded, and the oncoming Confederates, most of them in a brigade of Kentuckians, were ripped with solid shot, grape, and spherical case, until the woods about the knoll seemed 'bursting with agony. Breckinridge had suspected a trap, concluding an assault would be suicidal. Nevertheless, Bragg's orders were followed…'The firing was terrific and the havoc terrible,' Rosecrans reported. Heg wrote that 'The rebels were put to flight and old Rosy came galloping down the Pike where we lay, the sweat pouring down his face,

and sent for Colonel Carlin. He told Carlin the enemy was routed and ordered him to advance with his brigade and pursue them. His exact words to Carlin were: 'I beg you, for the sake of the Country and for my own sake to go at them with all your might. Go at them with a whoop and yell' his men had left –'out of 2,000, the last three days has left me only 700 effective'- yet his men cheered and trotted off at double quick. Rosecrans sent in also two of Negley's brigade, followed by Hazen's. Beatty's men joined the chase. Just as the fighting ceased, Colonel Dan McCook arrived from Nashville with a heavily escorted ammunition and hospital train of ninety-five wagons." Rosecrans created a diversion of fresh troops arriving during the night. Stones River began to rise and Bragg chose to retreat toward Tullahoma and leave Murfreesboro. The Battle of Stones river was over.

Rosecrans moved into Murfreesboro on Monday, January 5th. He occupied the Keeble House and for the first time in nine days he rested. "The next day a doctor decided he was more than weary; he was suffering from 'lung fever.' As Rosecrans sat propped up in bed he studied his casualty reports: 1,630 killed, 7,397 wounded, and 3,673 captured or missing, an aggregate of 13,249 out of 41,000 to 43,000 effectives. Union casualties were the heaviest of any major battle of the war – 223 out of every 1,000 engaged….. But Rosecrans had taught his fellow commanders an important military lesson: get the whole army into the fight. Spectators don't win battles."

Even his rival commander, Braxton Bragg, complimented Rosecrans "allowing that Rosecrans had displayed much firmness, and was the only man in the Yankee Army who was not badly beaten. In his Official Report Bragg stated, 'Rosecrans was enabled to bring fresh troops at every point to resist our progress, and he did so with a skill and judgment which has ever characterized this able commander."

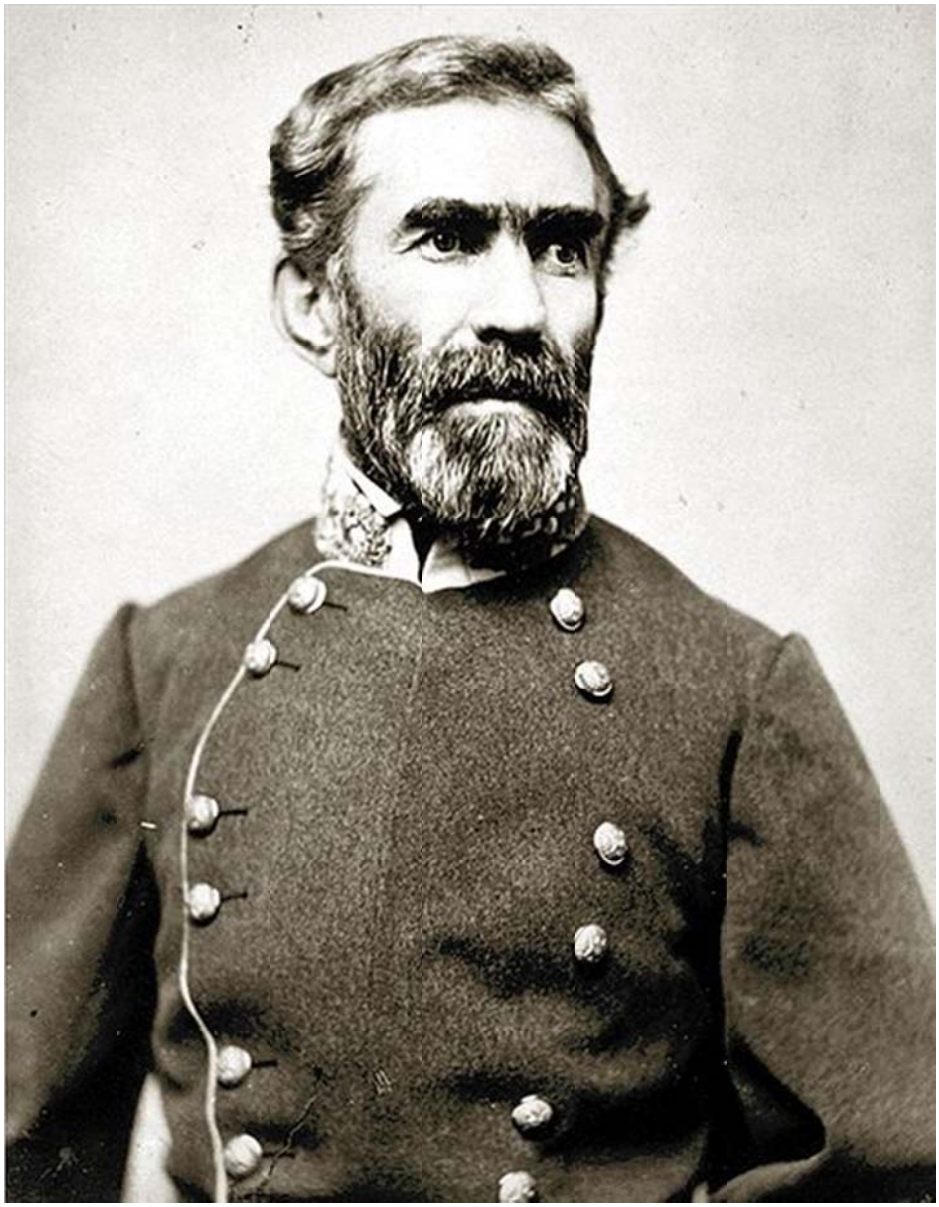
After the battle, Rosecrans received much praise from various sources, including President Lincoln, "God Bless you and all with you. Please tender to all, and accept for yourself, the nation's gratitude for your and their skill, endurance, and dauntless courage." Perhaps the most important were from the men that served under him at the battle. "General John M. Palmer declared that 'Rosecrans whose courage upon a battlefield was always magnificent, exposed himself at many points to rally his forces, and exhibited the greatest personal bravery. If I was to fight a battle for the dominion of the universe, I would give Rosecrans the command of as many men as he could see and who could see him.' From Colonel Peg came 'gratitude to Providence for having given us at last a man who was equal to the occasion, a general in fact as well as in name.' In a letter to his wife Heg boasted: 'Old Rosecrans can and will whip them every time. He will be the great man in this war yet. I think he is the bravest, biggest general we have got.' From Illinois, Private William Gale: 'Our entire brigade must have suffered terribly but stood firm. Rosecrans led it on to a furious charge in person. He is a perfect tiger and certainly bears a charmed life. He has our perfect confidence and so long as he is out of the reach of political warriors will do well." Conspicuously absent were any congratulations from General U. S. Grant.

Now the pressure was on Rosecrans to move south and southeast and continue to pressure Bragg. Rosecrans outmaneuvered him in the Tullahoma Campaign which lasted through the Spring and early Summer of 1863. He received Brigadier General James A. Garfield, later President of the United States, as his Chief of Staff to replace Garesche' who was killed during the battle. Murfreesboro, Tennessee became a citadel and major supply base with the construction of earthen Fortress Rosecrans.

As his nature, Rosecrans disputed with his superiors during this time regarding several matters including cavalry, an honor guard, and supplies. Tactfulness or lack there of with those above him cost Rosecrans. With his defeat at the Battle of Chickamauga by Bragg

and Longstreet, Rosecrans was replaced by U. S. Grant and eventually transferred to the Department of Missouri. Rosecrans resigned from the Army in 1867 to resume his career in business. He eventually would become Minister to Mexico, serve in Congress representing California, and register of the Treasury. William S. Rosecrans died March 11, 1898 at Redondo, California and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Braxton Bragg Biography



Short Biography:

Braxton Bragg (March 22, 1817 – September 27, 1876) was a career United States Army officer, and then a general in the Confederate States Army—a principal commander in the Western Theater of the American Civil War and later the military adviser to the Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

Bragg, a native of North Carolina, was educated at West Point and became an artillery officer. He served in Florida and then received three brevet promotions for distinguished service in the Mexican-American War, most notably the Battle of Buena Vista. He established a reputation as a strict disciplinarian, but also as a junior officer willing to publicly argue with and criticize his superior officers, including those at the highest levels of the Army. After a series of posts in the Indian Territory, he resigned from the U.S. Army in 1856 to become a sugar plantation owner in Louisiana.

During the Civil War, Bragg trained soldiers in the Gulf Coast region. He was a corps commander at the Battle of Shiloh and subsequently was named to command the Army of Mississippi (later known as the Army of Tennessee). He and Edmund Kirby Smith attempted an invasion of Kentucky in 1862, but Bragg retreated following the inconclusive Battle of Perryville in October. In December, he fought another inconclusive battle at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, the Battle of Stones River, but once again withdrew his army. In 1863, he fought a series of battles against Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans and the Union Army of the Cumberland. In June, he was outmaneuvered in the Tullahoma Campaign and retreated into Chattanooga. In September, he was forced to evacuate Chattanooga, but counterattacked Rosecrans and defeated him at the Battle of Chickamauga, the bloodiest battle in the Western Theater, and the only major Confederate victory therein. In November, Bragg's army was routed in turn by Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in the Battles for Chattanooga.

Throughout these campaigns, Bragg fought almost as bitterly against some of his uncooperative subordinates as he did against the enemy, and they made multiple attempts to have him replaced as army commander. The defeat at Chattanooga was the last straw and Bragg was recalled in early 1864 to Richmond, where he became the military adviser to Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Near the end of the war, he defended Wilmington, North Carolina, and served as a corps commander in the Carolinas Campaign. After the war Bragg worked as the superintendent of the New Orleans waterworks, a supervisor of harbor improvements at Mobile, Alabama, and as a railroad engineer and inspector in Texas.

General Braxton Bragg, C.S.A. by Samuel J. Martin

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Braxton Bragg grew up in Warrenton, North Carolina. His teachers remarked his was very smart for his age, and outside of school his passion was horses. He was not very athletic, but at the age of ten his father decided that he would go to West Point, and begun contacting influential leaders. His brother, John, influenced Senator Willie P. Mangum to sponsor Braxton's appointment to West Point, but his Representative Micajah T. Hawkins was the actual sponsor to the Academy. He started West Point in 1833 and graduated fifth in the Class of 1837. He was offered a post as Second Lieutenant with the 3rd Artillery at Fort Monroe, Hampton Roads, Virginia.

As a young officer, Bragg became one of the hardest working young officers in the army. Bragg became very strait-laced and followed the regulations without exception. He was involved in the Seminole War; the Trail of Tears – Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Tennessee to Oklahoma; Base Commander at Fort Marion, Florida; was friends with future federal generals – William T. Sherman, John Reynolds, and George Thomas; Bragg wrote several articles regarding the army that were published during this time under a pen name; served in South Carolina, and was court-martialed for disobeying orders and given a small reprimand, suspension in rank, and forfeiture of pay. Bragg saw service in the Mexican War, serving as an artillery officer at Corpus Christi, Fort Brown, Monterrey, and Buena Vista. He was known as a strict disciplinarian and thought to be the "best disciplinarian in the US Army." Although, he was a strict disciplinarian, he showed several times that he cared for those under his command. After the war he returned to New Orleans and married Elise Ellis on June 7th, 1849. He served at Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri. He resigned his commission on the Army on December 31st, 1855 after disagreeing with Secretary of War Jefferson Davis on his assignment to the frontier. Bragg became a Louisiana Planter during this time before the Civil War.

When Louisiana seceded from the Union, Bragg was selected by the Governor to command the Louisiana forces as a Brigadier General with his second in command PGT Beauregard. Bragg would later be named a Brigadier General by Confederate President Jefferson Davis and assigned to Pensacola, Florida then later promoted to Major General of Western Florida and Alabama. He would then participate as a corps commander under Albert Sidney Johnston, who was "appreciative of Bragg's talents and gave him broad responsibilities" at the Battle of Shiloh. Bragg had ordered several assaults, which subordinates had disagreed, and anger toward Bragg was the result. This resentment would continue to gain momentum precipitated by General Leonidas Polk – the fighting Bishop of Louisiana, but Bragg was noted of his courage and duty at the Battle. On June 20th, 1862 Bragg was placed by President Jefferson Davis as the Commander for Department Number 2. He began to re-form the army, dismissing generals and building infrastructure. Bragg led the Army into Kentucky with General Kirby Smith's independent command. The Kentucky Campaign resulted in the Battle of Perryville, which resulted again in disagreements with Leonidas Polk who did not follow orders, which led to the battle. "The Bishop continued to defy Bragg." This defiance was probably the result of his political connections in Richmond, and would prove to be hazardous to Bragg for the remainder of his time with the Army of Tennessee. The battle proved a draw and Bragg ordered a retreat through the Cumberland Gap and back into Tennessee. He would then go the Richmond for additional orders, but many would blame Bragg for the failure in Kentucky. With consultations from Davis, "he planned to establish a new base in **Murfreesboro, Tennessee** and then assault Buell in Nashville." Kirby Smith blamed Bragg for the loss in Kentucky, but Leonidas Polk was asked to go to Richmond by President Davis after a letter criticizing Bragg. Davis promoted both Polk and Kirby Smith to Lieutenant General, and they returned to their commands. Bragg received formal orders to begin starting a campaign against Nashville.

Union General Buell was replaced by General William S. Rosecrans, "who began organizing, outfitting, and refreshing his men." Bragg was doing the same in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He divided his army into two corps – Polk and Hardee, Smith would later arrive with two divisions. President Davis came to Murfreesboro on December 12th, 1862 to consult with Bragg and formally reviewed the troops. Davis ordered that a division under Stevenson be transferred to Pemberton in Mississippi, and then left to go back to Richmond. Bragg consolidated forces and prepared for winter camp in Murfreesboro.

One incident that Biographer Martin relates is the execution of Private Asa Lewis of Kentucky. He was caught, convicted by court martialed, and sentenced to die by firing squad. His execution was to take place on December 26th, so Asa's division Commander John C. Breckinridge approached Bragg to intervene, to spare this man's life. Bragg refused and on December 25th, Breckinridge approached Bragg again with a petition signed by all his officers, requesting that this matter be referred to President Davis. Bragg refused again and ordered the sentence be carried out and that "an example is needed." Breckinridge came back to Bragg just before the sentence was to be carried out and Bragg stated, "You Kentuckians are too independent for the good of the army, I'll shoot every one of them if I have to." "My men will not be treated like animals. This execution will be murder," shouted Breckinridge. Bragg would not change his mind and at 11:00 AM the sentence was carried out. Biographer Martin continues, "Although Bragg was probably justified in allowing the execution of Lewis, he was foolish to have ignored the resulting political implications. He was already hated by the 'Kentucky clique,' and by taking the life of a soldier from their state, Bragg had intensified their resolve to have him removed from command. He obviously failed to consider that Breckinridge and his powerful friends in Richmond were liable to cause him harm." Bragg's two major cavalry units, Nathan Bedford Forrest and John Hunt Morgan were on assignments away from Murfreesboro, Rosecrans seeing the reduction on the Confederate forces decided to head southeast out of Nashville.

Bragg placed his troops astride the Stones River to the northwest of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Rosecrans thought that Bragg would fight further northwest near Stewart's Creek, but Bragg had other plans. He sent his three corps toward Murfreesboro and encountered bad fog and muddy roads. On the morning of December 31st, both commanders decided to attack each other right flanks. "Bragg's battle plan was identical to Rosecrans'" The Confederates struck at 6:30 AM by McCowan's brigade. They forced the Federals back, but proceeded too far northwest and thus a hole is placed in the Confederate line, that Cleburne's division of reserves had to fill too soon. Martin states, "Bragg should have anticipated that MCowan would not carry out his orders. When planning his Kentucky campaign, he had apprised Kirby Smith that this general 'cannot be trusted,' that he lacked both 'capacity and nerve.' Bragg should have assigned the role of opening the battle to one more capable. Relying on an inexperienced officer in a crucial situation was a mistake he would repeat again and again throughout the war."

The second mistake of the battle by the Confederates occurred when Cheatham did not advance as ordered. This created another hole in the line and another unit of the reserve had to fill the void. The battle strategy became unraveled as these reserve units had to be committed to the battle much earlier than they should have been. Cheatham had not deliberately disobeyed orders, but was somewhat "intoxicated" and had not paid close attention to detail. The Federals proved very stubborn in their resistance as Sheridan continued to hold just north of the Wilkinson Pike. "The Reels had driven McCook's entire corps and two of their five brigades assigned to Thomas from the field. The rout of these Union troops had been decisive. Rosecrans' right had been pushed backward for almost three miles. His line,that had once faced east, had been bent ninety degrees, and now looked south." "A critical point in the battle was now at hand. If Cleburne's men could

pierce the Federal line along the Nashville Pike they would gain the rear of those facing Wither's troops to the east. With his army severed, and those still fighting trapped between two Confederate forces, Rosecrans must either surrender or see his command destroyed." This would not to be as Cleburne's troops were too exhausted to continue, but no relief came and the attack stalled. Bragg then chose to attack a position known as "The Round Forest" repeatedly in piecemeal attacks. This position located at the apex of the closing pocketknife occurred three times and failed to budge the Union, with their reinforced interior lines. The attacks should have waited on Breckinridge to help in the attack, but it did not occur, another crucial Confederate mistake.

"The sun was now setting, and Bragg was content to end hostilities for that day. He presumed that Rosecrans was whipped, and that coming evening would begin to withdraw back to Nashville. 'God has granted us a happy New Year,' Bragg claimed in a wire to Richmond that night. 'We attacked Rosecrans' army near Murfreesboro, and gained a great victory. We drove him from all his positions, except the extreme left, and after ten hours' fighting occupy the whole of the field, except the point named.' He ended with a list of trophies: 'thirty-one guns, two generals, 4,000 prisoners, and 200 wagons." The battle however was not won.

Braxton Bragg was at his headquarters at the Murfree house, an elegant mansion located in the central part of the town. Rosecrans had decided not to retreat, but stay and fight. January 1st was used to care for the wounded and dead on the battlefield. On January 2nd about noon, Breckinridge was summoned to Bragg's tent headquarters, located between the Nashville Pike and Stones River. "He reviewed a report then noted that because the Kentuckian's force had seen the least action so far in the battle, he must carry out the mission to drive the Union from the knoll. Breckinridge, who had spent that morning on a personal reconnaissance of the area, objected to Bragg's plans. Using a stick to scratch a map of the ground, he pointed out that a series of hills, west of the river, overlooked the position that he was being asked to attack and occupy. Even if his brigades captured this elevation, Breckinridge argued, he could not remain there. Federal cannons emplaced on top of the heights to the west would soon force him to give way. Bragg was not impressed. After Breckinridge's dalliance two days ago, which had most likely cost the Confederates a victory, he had little confidence in this Kentuckian's military expertise. 'Sir, my information is different,' Bragg observed, probably with his usual disdain. 'I have given the order to attack the enemy in your front,' he said, 'and I expect it to be obeyed.'"

Breckinridge continued to object, but left to inform his command of their duty, he stated, "We must all do our duty, and fight the best we can. If it should result that I be among the slain, I want you to do justice to my memory…tell the people I believed this attack to be very unwise, and tried to prevent it."

At 4 PM the attack began, the Confederates dislodged the Federals on the east bank of Stones River and they retreated across the river, however massed Federal artillery – forty-five guns was assembled on the opposite hill, lined hub to hub. The Confederate artillery was very limited and could not answer the Federals. "Breckinridge had been correct in claiming that the Federal position, west of Stones River commanded the hills that Bragg had ordered him to assault. His prophecy that an attempt to take these slopes would result in disaster had come true. But if he had halted at the crest (per Bragg's instructions), and used the cover of darkness (which was now at hand) to emplace his artillery, the Union's advantage might have been offset. Bragg , of course, would point this out when defending his position to attack. His words, however, were lost in the din that rose because of Breckinridge's casualties. About 1,300 of those he had sent into action, almost 30 percent of his force, had either been killed or wounded."

Biographer Martin shares, “Bragg shared the fault for the fiasco that followed. He gave Breckinridge his orders, but then failed to ensure they were executed correctly. He had learned on the first day of the fray this inexperienced officer was not reliable. Bragg should have accompanied him to the front and guided him through the necessary steps toward mounting an assault. But he instead left the Kentuckian on his own. Bragg had opted to remain in the rear, where he could be easily found during the battle, receive reports from the field, and then make his decisions. Other generals followed this same procedure, perhaps taught at West Point, but Bragg should have discovered by now that he was needed on the front. Breckinridge in this instance could not be relied upon to carry out his mission. Others (e.g. Polk) had repeatedly disobeyed their orders. If Bragg was to succeed in combat, he had to be close to the scene, directly supervising operations. Though most likely aware of this necessity, Bragg had evidently decided against taking a more active role in battle. The reason appears to go back to first Shiloh and then Perryville. He could no longer endure watching the holocaust in combat, the gore of war. Bragg was strict with his troops, even a martinet at times, but he loved them too dearly to see them suffer.”

With Stones River rising after heavy rain, Bragg decided that an offensive was not permitted, so he decides to retreat to the Shelbyville/Tullahoma area of southern Middle Tennessee. General Liddell went to Bragg in protest, and Bragg stated to him, “General, I know that you will fight, but others will not.” Although Bragg probably did not mention any names, Liddell was aware that some of the generals were dissatisfied Bragg’s leadership. ‘It struck me,’ he wrote later, ‘that Bragg did not know whom he could trust…zealous cooperation on their part was wanting.’”

Bragg checked regarding the retreat with Dr. A.J. Foard and he proposed that Dr. W.B. Avent be assigned to stay with those unable to travel (about 2,000 men.) “Bragg personally experienced this dissatisfaction while on the road southward. He stopped to ask a gray clad soldier for directions. After receiving the information he had requested, suspecting this man might be a straggler, he then inquired, ‘Do you belong to Bragg’s army?’ ‘Bragg’s army!’ the rustic soldier sniffed. ‘He’s got none; he shot half of them in Kentucky, and the other got killed up at Murfreesboro.’ Although the content must have hurt, Bragg laughed and rode on.”

In June 1863, he was outmaneuvered in the Tullahoma Campaign and retreated into Chattanooga. In September, he was forced to evacuate Chattanooga, but counterattacked Rosecrans and defeated him at the Battle of Chickamauga, the bloodiest battle in the Western Theater, and the only major Confederate victory therein. In November, Bragg's army was routed in turn by Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in the Battles for Chattanooga.

Throughout these campaigns, Bragg fought almost as bitterly against some of his uncooperative subordinates as he did against the enemy, and they made multiple attempts to have him replaced as army commander. The defeat at Chattanooga was the last straw and Bragg was recalled in early 1864 to Richmond, where he became the military adviser to Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Near the end of the war, he defended Wilmington, North Carolina, and served as a corps commander in the Carolinas Campaign. After the war Bragg worked as the superintendent of the New Orleans waterworks, a supervisor of harbor improvements at Mobile, Alabama, and as a railroad engineer and inspector in Texas.

Stones River – Bloody Winter in Tennessee by James Lee McDonough

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The following excerpts from James Lee McDonough's book, Stones River – Bloody Winter in Tennessee will deal specifically with the leadership styles of William S. Rosecrans and Braxton Bragg during the Battle of Stones River. Students that are especially interested in the battle are encouraged to read this excellent source.

McDonough states regarding Commanding Confederate General Braxton Bragg:
"Possibly there was not a more controversial high-ranking general in the Rebel army than Braxton Bragg. One may read the contrasting comments of ladies who knew little about generalship but nevertheless offered their opinions, such as Mrs. Mary B. Chestnut, who denounced Bragg as 'a worthless general,' or Mrs. Bettie B. Blackmore, who claimed that Bragg did 'more with his men and mean than any other general.' Or one may set in opposition the evaluations of high-ranking men like Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk who, after the Battle of Chickamauga, wrote to President Davis that Bragg had 'let us down as usual and allowed the fruits of….victory to pass from him by the most criminal incapacity….'while Brigadier James R. Chalmers told Bragg: 'I have seen no man in this war who looked, talked and acted on all occasions so much like my beau ideal of a General: you have shown yourself a great military chieftain….' When the gamut has been run from the derogatory to the laudatory evaluations, both of which become rather lengthy, the reasonable conclusion from the conflicting statements is that Bragg, from beginning to end, was just what he seemed in his first great battle at Shiloh, a puzzling mixture of competence and ineptness.

Probably his greatest military talent was logistical, not tactical. A tireless worker and rigid disciplinarian, Bragg, according to his biographer, 'actually enjoyed managing detailed affairs.' Rather than leading a corps or army in battle, he would have been more valuable behind the lines directing communications, organizing stragglers, and sending reinforcements and ammunition to critical points. Perhaps also he listened to much to his interfering wife, who seemed to have a ready answer for every question. For instance, believing Tennessee troops were disloyal, she urged Bragg to place them where he could shoot them down if they ran. The Mississippi and Louisiana troops, she prognosticated, 'will never fail you.' The general's response about Tennessee troops was: 'I never realized the full correctness of your appreciation until now.'

Bragg possessed a lowering brow and a haggard, austere, no-nonsense look. He may not have deserved the description of the Georgia girl who wrote that if John C. Breckinridge was the handsomest man in the Confederate army, Bragg, who 'looks like an old porcupine, might be the ugliest,' but certainly was not good-looking. And a general's appearance is a facto, even if a minor one, in determining his ability to inspire confidence in the soldiers.

Hampered by ill health all his life, which was probably psychosomatic and seemed to become more pronounced when his responsibilities increased, Bragg was frequently despondent and

frustrated. He was as Grady McWhiney has observed, too ambitious to be satisfied with himself or others and represented ' an unusual combination of potentially dangerous eccentricities and high ability.' For better or worse, Bragg would command the Confederacy's main western army longer than any other general.

For a while Bragg's good qualities of organizational ability, energy, and a strong sense of duty came to the fore as he capably planned and began to execute a campaign to carry the war into Kentucky. Then it happened. That 'fatal hesitancy at critical moments' as one writer described Bragg's behavior, that 'loss of nerve,' as others have suggested, that 'lack of resolution,' as still another student characterized it, had taken hold of the general."

Upon the retreat into Tennessee, McDonough continues, "Some of the rebels were vehement in their criticism of Bragg. W.E. Yeatman, Second Tennessee Infantry, lost several of his schoolmates and friends in the battle of Perryville. He called the order to fall back to Tennessee 'cowardly' and reported that he nearly starved to death on the march to Knoxville. Many other men felt the same way.

If the men in the ranks were angry – and some of the, as Allan Nevins has writer, 'would gladly have burned [Bragg] at the stake' – so were the generals. John C. Breckinridge, Patrick R. Cleburne, William J. Hardee, and Leonidas Polk all criticized Bragg, not so much for what he had done as for what he had not done. They seemed to sense that a great opportunity had been frittered away. The most vocal of all was Kirby Smith, who wrote to the War Department bitterly complaining of Bragg's direction of the campaign and requesting a transfer, preferably to Mobile, but anywhere, if staying where he was would require further cooperation with Bragg. He was summoned to Richmond to meet with Jefferson Davis face to face. It was only the beginning of the problem that would never be resolved as long as Braxton Bragg commanded the Army of Tennessee."

On December 14th, 1862, Braxton Bragg served as a groomsman at the wedding of General John Hunt Morgan and Mattie Ready in Murfreesboro, Tennessee where the Army of Tennessee had moved to oppose the Union army in Nashville, Tennessee advance further into Middle Tennessee. President Jefferson Davis had just a few days prior visited the Army of Tennessee and consulted with Bragg and his subordinates. "Ultimately Davis concluded that the army was in good condition and that the enemy in Nashville had only defensive purposes in mind. Then Davis, without consulting Regional Commander General Joseph Johnston, made a strategic decision, possibly a fateful decision. Convinced that Pemberton's Mississippi army was in a more seriously threatened position than Bragg's force, Davis detached Carter Stevenson's three-brigade division of seventy-five hundred officers and men and ordered it to Mississippi to reinforce Pemberton. Bragg protested that this would encourage the Union Army at Nashville to attack him, but his words were to no avail. Davis told Bragg that is necessary he must fall back beyond the Tennessee River.

During the Christmas season of 1862 in Murfreesboro, General Bragg, seemingly never one to be influenced by sentiment, chose this season to sentence three men to death before firing squads. While the Confederate commander celebrated the Christmas season with his wife in a palatial residence south of town, James A. Hall was writing his father in Montgomery, Alabama, about

one of the executions. ‘A man in our Brigade was condemned to be shot for desertion,’ Hall said. The whole brigade was turned out to witness. It was horrible. Owing to some blunder, the squad fired three volleys into him before he was killed. It made a deep impression. I think any man who witnessed it would resolve never to die such a death.”

Another one of the three was released and the sentence reversed, when the sentence was just about to be executed, a witness was brought to Murfreesboro. The third case was the most intense, involving a Kentucky soldier named Asa Lewis. McDonough relates’ “A member of the Sixth Kentucky, Asa Lewis, was not so fortunate. Lewis, an only son whose father’s death had occurred only a few months earlier, had asked for permission to visit his mother, whose whom had been burned by the Yankees. The permission was refused, but Lewis left Murfreesboro anyway. On the road to Kentucky the young man was captured, brought back to Murfreesboro, and warned not to try it again. Lewis left for the second time and was again apprehended. That time he was sentenced to die before a firing squad.

Johnny Green, a fellow soldier who witnessed the execution, wrote: ‘The whole division was formed in three sides of a square. Poor Lewis was brought from prison in a wagon riding on his coffin and a detail of twelve men was made to shoot him…..All was ready. He asked General Breckinridge for permission to say only a few words to the detail.’ Calmly he said, ‘Comrades I know you are all grieved to do this work but don’t be distressed; none of you will know who kills me for you know one of your guns has no ball in it. Each man may think his was the harmless gun. But I beg of you to aim to kill when the command ‘fire’ is given; it will be merciful to me. Good bye.’

In a moment twelve guns flashed and the lifeless body of the Kentucky soldier, who according to one source had ‘displayed more than ordinary gallantry at Shiloh,’ lay upon the ground. ‘All was over and a gloom settled over the command,’ concluded Johnny Green. The resentment that the execution aroused among Kentucky soldiers was long-lasting. Bragg had increased the number of those within his army who hated him.”

McDonough states regarding Commanding Union General William S. Rosecrans:
“This time Lincoln would not be placated (after the Kentucky Campaign.) Buell was removed and ‘Old Rosy,’ as the men called him (Rosecrans), became the new commander of the Union forces concentrating on Nashville.

Forty-three-year-old Major General William Starke Rosecrans was nearly six feet tall, compact with little wasted flesh, a large red nose, and somewhat impulsive, excitable personality. Graduated fifth in his class at West Point, the general was a heavy drinker and freely employed profanity, but he was also a devoted Roman Catholic who carried a crucifix on his watch chain and a rosary in his pocket and enjoyed religious discussions that might keep his staff up half the night. Tearing and chewing a cigar, from which he seemed inseparable and derived immense satisfaction, he would sometimes defend his firm religious convictions to the point that his righteousness seemed to be come self-righteousness. He also had, as his biographer suggested, ‘the dubious good fortune to be both articulate and talkative.

From religion, his conversation might be turned to display a vast theoretical knowledge of war. He often quoted authorities and cited maxims of war, comparing the problem at hand to similar cases in military history. Always he was energetic and apparently needed little sleep. In battle he became restless, likely to talk so fast that he could hardly be understood. In fact, any time he was excited his speech was apt to grow hurried and difficult to comprehend.

No one ever seemed to think he was the least bit afraid of a fight, and generally he was highly popular. James Garfield said once that he 'loved every bone in [Rosecrans'] body.' The general was, wrote Jacob Cox, 'altogether an attractive and companionable man,' and Whitelaw Reid concluded that 'few officers have been more popular with their commands, or inspired more confidence in the rank and file.'

There were factors other than his religion, however, that caused him more serious problems. The general, usually very kind to subordinates, had an unfortunate tendency to irritate his superiors. Independent, outspoken, occasionally short of temper, and with an uncompromising moral sense, he sometimes made enemies needlessly and unwisely – enemies in high places.

William Hartpence of the Fifty-first Indiana Infantry told about a song that was popular shortly before the Battle of Stones River. 'Old Rosy is the man, Old Rosy is the man; We'll show our deeds where'er he leads; Old Rosy is the man."

Ira S. Owens of the Seventy-fourth Ohio Infantry was impressed by Rosecrans. He remembered the general's reviewing the troops and telling them: 'Boys, when you drill, drill like thunder. It is not the number of bullets you shoot, but the accuracy of the aim that kills more men in battle.' And in the Eighth Kansas Infantry, Colonel John A. Martin concluded, 'On a whole, the army rejoiced to learn that Rosecrans had been assigned to command. To those who served under him in Mississippi, his presence was particularly gratifying, and the enthusiasm with which they hailed his coming was unbounded…..The glory of his recent victories gave a fresher and greater charm to his name.'

There was no doubt about it; the presence of William S. Rosecrans as the new commander of the Union army assembled at Nashville inspired hope and confidence and held forth the promise of significant action against Bragg's Rebel forces gathered around Murfreesboro.

General-in-Chief Henry Halleck lost patience with Rosecrans not moving out of Nashville in early December and telegraphed 'Old Rosy' that if he remained one more week in Nashville, 'I cannot prevent your removal.' Halleck said that already he had twice been asked to designate a successor for the Nashville commander. Rosecrans was not moved, but his temper flared. 'I need no other stimulus to make me do my duty,' he curtly informed Halleck, 'than the knowledge of what it is. To threats of removal or the like I must be permitted to say that I am insensible.'

After a few weeks, with Stevenson's division diverted to Mississippi, Morgan's Cavalry on the move to Kentucky, and General Nathan Bedford Forrest's Cavalry in West Tennessee not be in range to render assistance to Bragg, Rosecrans decided to move southeast toward Murfreesboro. "Rosecrans' own army was in excellent condition. Now he determined, was the time to strike! Becoming animated at a conference with his corps commanders, the effervescent Rosecrans

finally sprang to his feet, slammed his mug of toddy down on the table, and, with face glowing, spoke rapidly and with intense feeling: 'We move tomorrow, Gentlemen! Press them hard! Drive them out of their nests! Make tem fight or run! Fight them! Fight, I say!'

McDonough describes both generals actions during the Battle of Stones River:
"Now, as the battle of Murfreesboro approached, there were more reasons to question Bragg's leadership. A critic could well start with the general's decision to hold the position at Murfreesboro. The advantages usually cited are not impressive when carefully appraised. The normally rich Stones River valley had already been depleted of much food and cattle by Buell's army and the Yankee garrison at Nashville. Although the Confederates at Murfreesboro were astride the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad, leading to the Rebel supply base at Chattanooga, a Federal advance necessitated a supply line, whether by pike or rail, of only thirty miles from their Nashville base, while the Confederate rail link with Chattanooga was one hundred miles long, and there was no direct pike for wagon transportation.

But worst of all Murfreesboro could easily be flanked. If Rosecrans had been uncertain about Bragg's plans, the Rebel commander had experienced a worse quandary in evaluating the intentions of the Union general. Bragg had not expected the Federals to advance in the first place. Seemingly overconfident and lacking any well-organized group of scouts, he relied for intelligence upon such dubious sources as reports from citizens, newspapers, and rumors. His intelligence reports were confusing and misleading. When the Yankees began moving out of Nashville the day after Christmas, Bragg grouped for information, not yet sure this was anything but a demonstration in force, rather than a major campaign, As the cold drizzle soaked the ground in the dawn hours of December 27, the general, still uncertain of Rosecrans' aim, realized his army was in a perilous position and began drawing it together.

For about three days, Bragg did not know where Rosecrans' army was or from which direction the Federals would approach. His cavalry was too badly scattered to provide the necessary information. When at last he succeeded in concentrating his army, Bragg's position west of Murfreesboro left much to be desired. Probably worst of all, potentially, was the split in half of Bragg's line by Stones River, which flowed north and slightly northeast just west of Murfreesboro. Bragg had to place part of his army on each side of the river, an awkward position with the river rising.

Regardless of the misgivings concerning Bragg's leadership that troubled Hardee and Polk, he was their commander. And by some quirk of fate, Both Rosecrans and Bragg, in their blind groping, decided upon the same strategy, to attack each other's right flanks."

McDonough demonstrates great precision in this book characterizing the battle and the events that occurred. Our focus on the leadership styles of the two commanding generals, will not detail specifics but generalities during the conflict.

On the first day, Bragg's army crushes the Union right, but glaring mistakes are made, which Bragg does not correct readily. Cleburne's Brigade is originally placed in reserve, but has to be committed much too early in the process.

"General Rosecrans was taking effective action to stop the Rebel onslaught. Ordering General McCook to 'contest every inch of ground… we must win this fight!' Rosecrans cancelled his own attack plans.

Rosecrans seemed to be everywhere, trying to see personally to all his dispositions. Those who saw him in the heat of the fight at Stones River were impressed. Henry Freeman rembered him 'every inch a soldier,' and as the general passed with part of his staff riding to the front, Freeman said that 'the crisis seemed to rouse his every energy.' Rosecrans was 'the embodiment of strength, courage, coolness, and determination.' Surgeon Eben Swift recalled him as 'moving calmly, cheering and inspiring our faltering troops….and wherever the battle raged most fiercely, General Rosecrans bore his charmed life.' Wearing his old blue overcoat, with a cigar stump clamped between Aryan, 'he left the position usually occupied by the Chief, came to the line of battle, and by his presence and words cheered and encouraged the men of the center and left.' Whitelaw Reid said that 'when disaster had enveloped half the army….Rosecrans was magnificent. He grasped in his….hands the fortunes of the day' and 'stemmed the tide of retreat.'

Rosecrans assistant adjutant general and highly respected companion, Lieutenant Colonel Julius Garesche', thought the general was recklessly exposing himself to death and pleaded with him to be more careful. 'Never mind me,' Rosecrans replied. 'Make the sign of the cross and go in.' The only way to be safe, he said was to destroy the enemy. 'This battle must be won,' he kept repeating.

Rosecrans was now in the midst of the battle, hurrying up ammunition that was needed at many points, planting Captain James H. Stokes' Chicago Board of Trade Battery on a rise of ground, and placing the Pioneer Brigade in position for its support, the first battalion on the left and the others on the right of the battery. He rode from place to place; posted other batteries; directed the formation of new lines; conferred with his corps, division, and brigade commanders; and observed the terrain and enemy positions. Sometimes he was up front, right at the battle line, as when, later in the day, the Rebels struck Van Cleve's position and Rosecrans directed a counterattack. An orderly had already been struck and killed beside him, but the general seemed totally without fear. Staff officers were waving hats, shouting encouragement to the line, and flashing their swords. Then Rosecrans shouted, 'Now, let the whole line charge! Shoot low! Be sure of your aim! He admonished, as a cheer rose, bugles blew, and the Union line moved forward, pushing the Rebels back in that sector.

At such times the general was more nearly performing the role of a division commander than an army commander, but his obvious presence at the front, as he probably realized, helped to reanimate the hard-pressed Yankee soldiers. Rosecrans seemed infused with the grim determination that comes when one is shocked, almost sickened, by the realization that he is on the verge of being beaten, and then begins to fight back with everything that he has. Undoubtedly his example, as well as his decisions, were factors in steeling the Federal forces to fight, regardless of the consequences, to stop the Rebel avalanche – or die trying.

But late in the day, in spurring from one part of the field to another, the general narrowly escaped being hit by a cannonball that decapitated one of the men riding with him. It was his friend

Garesche'. Rosecrans' coat was bespattered by the blood, causing many people who saw him afterward to assume he was wounded. 'Oh no,' he would say, 'That is the blood of poor Garesche'' Regardless of how heartsick he may have felt, there was no time to stop.

Meanwhile, Bragg had problems of his own. Reports from General Breckinridge were that Federals were attacking on the Confederate right near Stones River. This report was incorrect and "Breckinridge was ordered to send four of his brigades across the river at once. Polk was to be reinforced. Bragg's attention was by this time stubbornly fixed upon the Round Forest. He ordered Polk, when the brigades from Breckinridge arrived, to drive out the Union left center by throwing all force he could collect against Hell's Half Acre. Even if the assault failed, Bragg thought it would force Rosecrans to withdraw enough men from the Union right to allow Hardee to reach the Nashville Pike.

Poor leadership, such as by Bragg and Polk, was disheartening and severely limited the chances for a Rebel victory. It should have been evident, after the failure of Chalmers and Donelson, that piecemeal assaults, one brigade after another, could not succeed against the Yankee salient. By the time Breckinridge's soldiers started coming on the field, the Union had been given significant time, an hour or more, in which to strengthen their alignments in the Round Forest and resupply the ammunition for the artillery posted just behind it. Rebel charge after charge could not budge the Yankees and then very quickly, it was over.

Others have said if Stevenson's Division had been present at the battle the outcome would have been different. Perhaps, but Bragg's conduct of the battle does not warrant optimism that he would have used Stevenson's division effectively. Probably he could have won the battle on December 31 with the troops at hand, if he had employed them to the best advantage. The Rebels missed several opportunities.

It is an established maxim in military tactics that an attacker should always press his advantage. The commander of the Union left, General Crittenden, later wrote: 'Every time the right was driven in I thought (and now think) that nothing but a most extraordinary blunder on the part of the soldier of the experience of Bragg hindered him from breaking Rosecrans' army in two and leaving me standing with my troops looking at Murfreesboro….Bragg had the advantage; all he had to do….was to pursue it…' Hardee, who did attack the Union right three times in the afternoon, was of the same opinion. 'If a fresh division could have replaced Cleburne's exhausted troops, ' the general contended, 'the rout of Rosecrans' army would have been complete.' Decisive action by Bragg to assist Hardee would have been required no later than mid-morning.

But perhaps the worst Rebel mistake was the piecemeal manner in which Breckinridge's units were fed into the slaughter. One can freely acknowledge the benefit of hindsight and still marvel that Bragg and Polk, after their experience at Shiloh against the Hornet's Nest, were making the same mistake again. Bragg was nearby and must certainly be censured too. As the commander of the army, his was the responsibility to stop a piecemeal attack if he did not approve.

Actually, Bragg's problem was not so much with the attack plan itself, because no plan in war can be expected to work precisely without modifications, and the Confederate attack di take the

Federals by surprise, but rather his abdication of command control once the battle was underway, Bragg either had not given sufficient forethought to coping with the type of situation McWhiney described, which did in fact occur, or assuming he had envisioned the whole spectrum of battle and considered the possible developments and his alternatives, then he lacked the necessary decisiveness to make a firm commitment in the heat of the fight.

Some Rebels later commented about never seeing Bragg throughout the course of the day's struggle. The general was present, but during the morning hours when critical, decisive actions might have been taken by a commanding general, Bragg could just as well have left the field. Having set the holocaust in motion, he simply allowed it to run its own course, taking no significant action until afternoon, when he brought Breckenridge's troops across the river for the piecemeal assaults against Hell's Half Acre.

New Year's Day, the 2nd Day of the Battle of Stones River, probably was not what either army expected. Neither Bragg nor Rosecrans planned an attack or a withdrawal. Just as, before the battle, both commanders prepared to assault the enemy's right wing, so now both simply waited to learn what the other would do.

The most significant tactical occurrence of January 1 was on the east bank of Stones River. While Bragg did not think about occupying the hill east of the river that overlooked McFadden's Ford, the Federals were sending a division across the stream to claim that strategic ground. If Bragg intended to renew the attack he should have taken action, because guns on this elevation would be within easy range of the Union position west of the river. And, if for no other reason than to protect his own army from flanking fire, he needed to control this hill. Unfortunately for the Rebels, it was the Yankees who thought of it first. The Federals were then on the scene of the last major struggle at Stones River. Meanwhile, at Bragg's command, the Rebels had reoccupied Wayne's Hill, almost a mile southeast.

During the night and morning Bragg had sent several cavalry patrols around the Union rear. After initial reports that Rosecrans was withdrawing, Bragg was stunned by later dispatches revealing the enemy was still present, might be receiving reinforcements, and worse yet, had occupied the ridge in front of Wayne's Hill. Now suddenly, Bragg was keenly aware of the threat across the river. The Confederates must control that ground. Bragg decided to attack. Breckinridge's division he said, had suffered little in the battle of December 31 and therefore was being given the assignment.

The commanding general of the Confederate army was not familiar with either the terrain involved or troop positions. Apparently he had not consulted Hardee, Breckinridge's immediate superior, nor Polk, whose soldiers were supposedly threatened by the Yankee guns. Nor had he summoned Breckinridge for the purpose of soliciting the Kentuckian's opinion, but simply to tell that officer what to do. It seems, in fact, that Bragg probably did not want advice from any of the army's high-ranking officers and particularly not from Breckinridge.

The Kentuckian gave his opinion, nevertheless, protesting at once and strongly that the attack would be suicidal. Fresh from observing the position with his own staff, Breckinridge argued

that high ground west of McFadden's Ford commanded the hill on the east bank. Yankee artillery would rip the Rebel flank as they advanced, and the assault would be disastrous, he said. Bragg, who characteristically bristled whenever his judgment was questioned or even examined, replied with a curt arrogance, 'Sir, my information is different. I have given the order to attack the enemy in your front and expected it to be obeyed.'

Later, supporters of Breckinridge would say that Bragg resented the manner in which the general had defended the Kentuckians against charges of cowardice and stood up to him about the Asa Lewis execution. They maintained that Bragg choose Breckinridge for the assault in the hope that he would be killed.

Obviously, any further attempt by Breckinridge at discussion or protest was useless. Breckinridge listened as Bragg explained that the attack was to begin less than an hour before sunset, thus giving the Federals no time to recognize or bring up reinforcements before dark. Then the next morning, with his flank secure, Bragg would resume the offensive by sending Polk's troops against the Union center.

Dismayed by his orders, the dejected Breckinridge returned to his command and began making preparations for the attack. He told General William Preston, 'General Preston, this attack is made against my judgment and by special orders of General Bragg. Of course we all must try to do our duty and fight the best we can. But if it should result in disaster and I be among the slain, I want you to do justice to my memory and tell the people that I believed this attack to be very unwise and tried to prevent it.'

None of Breckinridge's brigade commanders approved of Bragg's order. In fact, Breckinridge's attitude was mild when compared with one of his brigadiers. Brigadier General Roger W. Hanson wanted to kill Bragg. Clifton Breckinridge later said Hanson denounced the attack as 'murderous' and was so infuriated because of the division being ordered to do the impossible that he wanted to go at once to headquarters and shoot Bragg. Breckinridge and Preston talked him out of it. Hanson had only a short time to live. He would die in the assault."

The attack on a gloomy Friday afternoon on January 2nd, 1862 went just as Breckinridge predicted. The Confederates pushed the Federals back across Stones River and occupied the ridge with casualties, but continued the assault toward McFadden's Ford and " drew the hotly pursuing Rebels down the forward slope and within range of some forty-five cannon massed on the hill west of Stones River. Now the Union artillerists had the chance they had been waiting for, to shoot at the foe without harming their comrades. Unleashing a fierce cannonade, darkening the sky with smoke, and striking across the river into the ranks of the Confederates, the Federal guns dealt destruction up and down the lines. The soggy river bottom over which the Yankees had been driven had become a death trap as the Federal gunners blazed away with deadly effect.

It was over and it was tragic – tragic because the Confederate brigade commanders and the division commander had known it would not succeed. But having overwhelmed the infantry, the Rebels still confronted the Yankee artillery, which Breckinridge had thought would doom the attack to failure p and it did. The assault was one more example in the long disheartening history

of battle commanders' gambling with the lives of thousands, contrary to all reasonable calculations of success." The Battle of Stones River was over.

The next day at 10 am Bragg "sent for Polk and Hardee. There was no disagreement: all three men were convinced the army must withdraw. Later when writing his report, Bragg stated, 'Common prudence and safety of my army, upon which even the safety of our cause depended, left no doubt in my mind as to the necessity of my withdrawal from so unequal a contest."'

Bragg's retreat into southern Middle Tennessee was commenced on January 3 in a pouring rain. There was no Union pursuit "and were perhaps no more anxious for further bloodshed than were the Confederates."

"With the exception of the devastating opening flank attack on the morning of December 31, Bragg fought the Battle of Stones River badly. Having developed neither an efficient intelligence system nor an adequate staff to access information and make plans, he had been both surprised by the Federal advance and, for the better part of three days, uncertain of the direction from which the enemy was approaching. In selecting Murfreesboro as a point of concentration, Bragg had chosen a position that could easily be flanked and necessitated spreading his army over too wide an area. The position that he choose to fight, along the banks of Stones River, was not particularly suited for either defensive or offensive warfare. Bragg failed to entrench his army, proving that he had missed the obvious lessons of Shiloh and Perryville: that defenders in a strong position usually suffered significantly fewer losses than attackers.

Oblivious to the technological changes that made prewar assault tactics into a formula for self-destruction, decisively strengthening the advantages of defensive combat, Bragg again showed a disastrous penchant for frontal attacks. He did not demonstrate ability, in any sense, to modify his tactics to meet a new situation on the battlefield. In fact, he seemed almost paralyzed, making virtually no decision of consequence after sending some of Breckinridge's troops against the Round Forest in mid-afternoon December 31 until about noon of January 2. Perhaps Bragg lost his nerve under the strain of combat, as some have suggested; maybe, as seems more likely, his mind was simply too narrow and lacking in imaginative power.

What of his Union opponent? Overall, Rosecrans appears to better advantage than Bragg, but in fighting strictly on the defensive, he had fewer chances to make mistakes. Possibly there are still chinks in his armor. For example, his is the responsibility for an apparently hazy attack plan, particularly as it involved Alexander McD. McCook. In his official report and elsewhere, Rosecrans speaks of calling a meeting of all corps commanders at his headquarters where the battle plan was fully explained. This seems a bit grandiose. In reality the meeting was almost embarrassingly informal. Particularly, McCook may never have understood exactly what part his attack was to have in the total picture of Federal operations on December 31. Admittedly, there is not much evidence upon which to base a conclusion as the historian would desire, but that which is available suggests the likelihood that Rosecrans' attack plan may have been somewhat carelessly and loosely conveyed to his subordinates. This in turn indicates a possibility that the plan might not have been clearly formulated in Rosecrans' mind.

What was Rosecrans intentions anyway? Was he merely trying to drive the Rebels back on their line of communications? He was not marshaling troops in a fashion, or giving instructions that would indicate a prime goal either to get in the Rebel rear or cut the Confederates off from their railroad communications. On this score Bragg's performance compares with Rosecrans'. It is clear that the Rebel commander intended to cut the Union communications to Nashville, but precisely what Rosecrans intended and how he intended to do it are rather murky. Another interesting question is whether or not Rosecrans might have launched a counterattack on December 31.

Rosecrans reported the battle to Washington as a Federal victory. The enemy had fallen back, but the Union general had not destroyed the Rebel army or gained any really important territory. Actually, the Battle of Stones River was a victory in only a narrow sense, but, considering overall conditions, politically and diplomatically as well as military, Rosecrans' victory pronouncement was welcome news to President Lincoln. After Fredericksburg and Chickasaw Bayou, the President needed some good military news and so did the country. 'God Bless you and all with you,' Lincoln telegraphed Rosecrans on January 5, 1863. Stones River raised popular morale and strengthened the government at home and abroad. Lincoln was deeply grateful to Rosecrans.

While the public estimate of Rosecrans rose in the aftermath of Stones River, Bragg's image reached a new low. Criticism had been heavy following Perryville, but the attacks were even more severe when the truth was learned about Murfreesboro. The general's dispatches on the night of December 31 had encouraged people to anticipate a great victory. Later many felt that they had been cheated or misled and their bitter sentiments were focused upon Bragg. Newspaper editorials were aggressive and highly critical.

Clearly, the Rebel high command in the aftermath of Stones River reeked with dissention. And, in fact, Davis finally ordered Joe Johnston to replace Bragg. Johnston seemed extraordinarily concerned that he would be criticized for having sought, perhaps even intrigued, to gain the position. He also seemed sympathetic with Bragg because of the serious illness which his wife was then undergoing. Besides, Johnston's old wound, suffered in the Fair Oaks engagement, was paining him severely. Johnston reported to the president that he was physically unfit for field duty and that Bragg's presence with the army was therefore required.

Thus Bragg remained in command, and the Army of Tennessee continued to be plagued with discord. Unfortunately for the Rebels, Bragg would command through two more battles, at Chickamauga and Chattanooga.

Stones River had cost more than twenty-four thousand casualties and most soldiers wondered what, if anything, had been accomplished by the sacrifice. Both sides awaited the renewal of the dance of death, knowing that the war would go on almost as if the massive carnage in the little town southeast of Nashville had never occurred.

Perhaps the greatest significance of the Battle of Stones River, in the perspective of history, was not that the Union had advance another few mile to the southeast, or inflicted nearly twelve thousand casualties, or compelled the Rebels to retreat, but simply that the Federal army had

prevented a Confederate victory at a time when the Union cause could hardly stand another defeat and Rebel morale, especially in the Western theater, so desperately needed both the psychologically and material boost of a great triumph. The Confederate Army of Tennessee would not attack again and, in the summer of 1863, would be flanked and forced all the way into north Georgia. In his inimitable style, even allowing for a bit of exaggeration, Lincoln probably best expressed the significance of Stones River in a letter to Rosecrans on August 31, 1863:

'I can never forget,' the president said, 'whilst I remember anything, that about the end of last year and beginning of this, you gave us a hard-earned victory, which, had there been a defeat instead, the nation could have scarcely have lived over.'