



OBSTINATE HEROISM: THE CONFEDERATE SURRENDERS AFTER APPOMATTOX

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Obstinate Heroism: The Confederate Surrenders after Appomattox presents a compelling tableau of the final days of the rebellion after the surrender of General Robert E. Lee to Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House. Most Americans view Lee's surrender as the climactic end of the Civil War, and in many ways it was. However, many history buffs know there is more to the story, but even their knowledge is often fragmentary and incomplete. There were elements of three Confederate armies still on the field, each of which had the potential to continue the war for an indeterminate period. These armies had to be brought to heel and subdued before victory could be considered complete and the Union could be guaranteed. This fascinating volume closes many critical gaps in our knowledge about these crucial face-offs, which if bungled by any of the parties involved could have led to the appalling specter of guerrilla warfare for years to come.

Even before Lee's surrender, the South was in desperate shape. Dissent was wide-

spread and desertion was almost epidemic, far worse than generally known. The North's preponderance of men and supplies, combined with the strategy of Grant (finally a general who fights) and President Abraham Lincoln to apply pressure simultaneously to all compass points, made continued resistance seem hopeless and futile. Despite some incredible victories and brilliant generalship, the South was hampered by a series of factors that contributed to the eventual hopelessness of its situation.

Military reversals, bad economic decisions (the cotton boycott), some incompetent generals (Lt. Gen. John Bell Hood and General Braxton Bragg), no navy, little industry, no allies, internal states' rights arguments with governors, inadequate supplies of food and uniforms due to ineffective logistics and deficient rail lines, and a worthless currency, all contributed to the desertion of thousands of troops. Many of these deserters left the service to go back to support their homes and families, who already were devastated economically. But many hundreds more turned to organized banditry to support themselves, thereby adding to the ever-expanding woes of the South.

General Joseph E. Johnston was one of the best defensive generals of the war, perhaps only rivaled by U.S. Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas. Cagey and cautious, Johnston repeatedly had delayed and annoyed Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's army for months on their march to Atlanta. But Confederate President Jefferson Davis was looking for a general to beat Sherman back from Atlanta, not delay him, and he made the disastrous decision to replace Johnston with Hood, a stand-up fighter who disdained a war of maneuver in favor of slashing direct attacks. Hood wrecked his army first against Sherman and then incredibly against Thomas until he was finally relieved of commanding the pitiful, broken remnants. In the meantime, Lee had become General in Chief of the armies of the Confederate States and over Davis's objections, reinstated Johnston to his old command. The degree of animosity and misunderstanding between Johnston and Davis is illustrated by the incredible revelation that Johnston almost spurned the command because he believed that Davis only allowed him the position so that he could serve as the scapegoat for Southern failure and defeat. Johnston's new command was reduced to the remnants of Hood's army, combined with scattered

elements of militias, units assigned garrison duty, stragglers, and other assorted riff-raff. Previously, Johnston could delay and annoy Sherman. Now, Johnston could do nothing but annoy.

Once Lee surrendered, Johnston and Davis reached an accord. Davis was unwilling to surrender the cause while there was still any chance of success with forces willing to fight. But he bowed to reality and Johnston's insistence that he be allowed to surrender his army only, while at the same time, Davis personally would escape across the Mississippi to continue the war with General Edmund Kirby Smith. As we shall see, this was a forlorn hope, but it was the hope of a man of fierce determination and dauntless courage. These two qualities had served Davis well during the conflict, and now they only served to prolong a lost cause.

In the wake of Lincoln's assassination, the terms of Johnston's surrender to Sherman triggered a diplomatic crisis that endangered the surrender and set two natural allies, Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, at each other's throats. This is because Sherman's terms deviated into the political realm from Grant's purely military terms and were therefore unacceptable. Stanton, a hard, uncompromising man, overreacted in his denunciation of Sherman and his terms. The cease-fire was halted, the terms renegotiated, and the surrender was renewed, but the personal relationship between Sherman and Stanton was never to be the same.

Simultaneously, Lt. Gen. Richard Taylor was tasked with defending Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana with a small garrison at Mobile and an outnumbered cavalry force. The eventual and inevitable fall of Mobile closed another window to the outside world and added another Southern defeat to the long-growing list. Meanwhile, Federal cavalry forces under Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson and infantry forces under Maj. Gen. Edward R. S. Canby were doing to Alabama what Sherman's troops did in Georgia, demonstrating that the South could not effectively defend itself.

Even Lt. Gen. Nathan B. Forrest, widely recognized as a cavalry wizard extraordinaire, was unable to stem the tide of the seemingly inexhaustible supply of men and supplies. Forrest agreed with Taylor on the need for surrender. The generals were in fitful communication with a fleeing Jefferson Davis, who naturally wanted to

fight on to the end. He eventually bowed to the inevitable and allowed Taylor to reach his terms with Canby, putting an end to all his hopes to escape to the trans-Mississippi region and continue the fight there. When negotiations commenced, Taylor was not surrounded and conceivably could have fought on, but he realized that nothing could be gained by doing so. A cease-fire was called, and surrender negotiations commenced in a respectful atmosphere that surprised the Southern participants. Unfortunately, the cease-fire occurred just as Sherman's initial peace terms to Johnson were rejected, prompting President Andrew Johnson to order the cease-fire to end and the terms of surrender to be the same for Taylor as they were for Lee and Johnson. Taylor had little recourse, and the terms were generous, so the negotiations and subsequent surrender recommenced on those terms. Included in the surrender was Forrest, who was urged to continue fighting or escape to Mexico with other officers but decided to stay as an example to his men. He felt that continuing the fight would be tantamount to murder, and to his everlasting credit he decided he wanted to go home rather than continue the slaughter. This was a bigger risk for him than for most officers because Forrest was a commander of "irregulars," and no one could be sure how the Yankees might treat such a character. But surrender he did, and the Federals respected their bargain, and he was unmolested after the war. The war was over for these men, and all that remained was the daunting task of demobilizing a mass of men with few supplies, no transportation, and little hope.

Meanwhile, General Smith was doing his level best to improve the fortunes of the Trans-Mississippi Department under his command. He commanded few troops, a battered economy, and a fractured government and had no hope of receiving troops or supplies that might alleviate the situation. Once Vicksburg and New Orleans fell, any Confederate forces based west of the Mississippi were rendered helpless in the war. Unable to safely cross the Mississippi in the face of Union control of the river, Smith's army was nullified as an effective fighting force. Losing control of the river effectively bottled-up Smith's troops the same way that selected Japanese forces were bypassed during World War II. They successfully "island hopped" seventy years before the term was coined.

The Confederate armies could not cross the Mississippi, but the Federals could and did cross the river. Small actions occurred throughout the theater, and the garrison at Shreveport was surrendered by Brig. Gen. M. Jeff Thompson without Smith's approval or even knowledge. Desertions were now rampant, with hundreds of soldiers "self-demobilizing." There were no funds to pay the soldiery or purchase supplies, no chance of reinforcement, or reasonable chance of victory. Even so, Smith continued to resist when his subordinate, Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, surrendered the army on his authority. Whether Buckner acted on his own initiative or was confused by his orders and/or command structure is open to debate. But the terms of surrender were similar to Lee's; they would not get any better and were the best that could be hoped for. Smith was faced with this reality and with the increasing levels of desertion and disorder that were verging on anarchy. So, the terms eventually were agreed to by all parties, and the final deed was done. The isolation of the trans-Mississippi, combined with the delayed surrender, eventually led to the Federal holiday of Juneteenth, commemorating the day (19 June 1865) when enslaved people in Texas learned that they were free, which is a fitting way to end this review.

Obstinate Heroism: The Confederate Surrenders after Appomattox is highly recommended to anyone who wishes to learn more about the last days of the Confederacy and how the first steps were taken to heal the nation by instigating surrenders that were just and fair. Just as Lincoln would have wished.

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