Historian's Corner

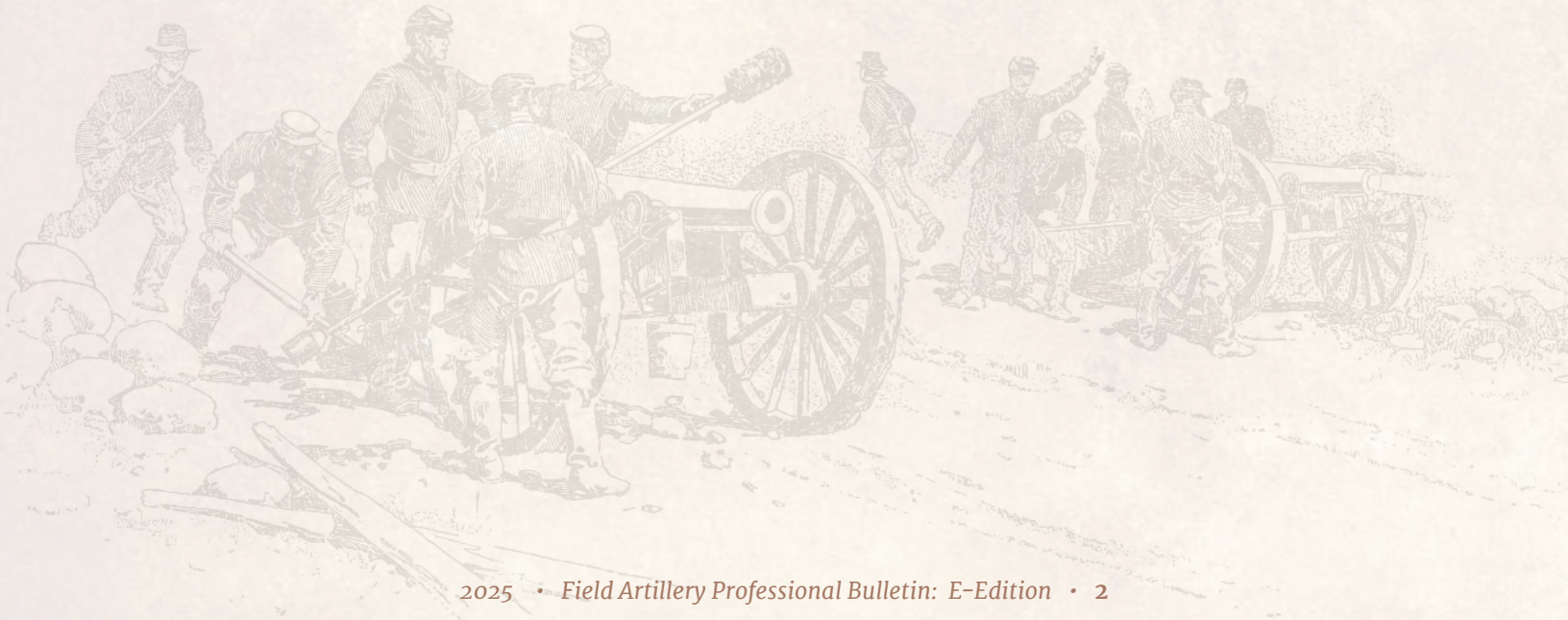
- Part 6 -

DOTMLPF Artillery Insights from the American Civil War: Leadership

An eight-part series by Dr. John Grenier, the FA Branch Historian

Federal Redlegs labored for a large part of the war under leaders ("L" stands for leadership and education in DOTMLPF) above the battery level who knew next to nothing about the efficient and effective employment of artillery. The highly technical nature of their enterprise forced artillery officers to focus more than their Infantry or Cavalry peers on matériel. This led some to question Redlegs' skills as leaders and disparage them as "mechanics"—the mid-nineteenth century's word for "technicians." More significantly, Redlegs faced executing orders to employ their guns from any Infantry or Cavalry commander of the same or higher rank. In an Infantry regiment or brigade, the highest-ranking Redleg was a captain who served at his battery, not as a field-grade officer at the commander's side, and who could direct the actions of a Field Artillery battalion. Neither the federals nor the confederates, moreover, created permanent FA units larger than a regiment (though they occasionally put battalions temporarily in "artillery groups"). This meant that except for a handful of officers who received "special" (usually brevet) rank to perform administrative duties on staffs, no Redlegs served at or above the grade of colonel in "combat" units. The sound leadership that enabled Infantry-artillery cooperation, thus, depended on individual personalities rather than on a formal rank structure. The macro-level question continually popped up: would field-grade Infantry officers heed the advice and recommendations of their company-grade artillerymen—men whom they saw more as technicians sent to support them than as colleagues? Far too often, the answer was a resounding "No." Henry Hunt thus complained because "the operations of Field Artillery are in the main auxiliary to those of other troops, in annals are comparatively prosaic, especially when its action is controlled, not by its own officers, but by those of other arms."

The inherent flaws of the arrangement that Hunt decried became apparent for all to see in the spring of 1863, or two years into the war. General Joseph Hooker's artillery management at Chancellorsville in May was, according to Dr. Hess, "a disaster." Fighting Joe, as his troops and the media knew him, directed his Chief of Staff, Major General Daniel Butterfield—a pre-war executive of the American Express Company with no artillery experience—to "handle" the artillery in the week-long battle. Butterfield "ordered the batteries around without expertise," which allowed Robert E. Lee to compose and perform his Jominian masterpiece before the Army of the Potomac's (AoP) eyes. General George Meade, Hooker's replacement, made Hunt his Chief of Artillery in August 1863 (after Gettysburg), but he also insisted that Hunt's duties were solely "administrative and executive" in nature. Hunt became "responsible for

the condition of all the artillery" and commanded them when not attached to Infantry units. Once battle was joined, though, operational control and tactical control of the guns returned to the Infantry commanders. A British Army observer who traveled with the AoP explained to Hunt that his army used a "single corps [as in a body, not a corps of multiple divisions] for administration and promotion" of its artillery officers. In February 1864, Hunt, then a brevet major general and the federal army's most experienced Redleg, attempted to form a similar organization for the artillerymen of the AoP. Meade rejected the idea out of hand, as did Meade's boss, General Ulysses S. Grant. They simply did not see the "value added" in creating a billet on the AoP's staff. When the rounds started flying, the Redlegs would be back serving at their batteries, anyways. Things proved marginally better for officers in the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Their commander as of late December 1863, General Joseph E. Johnston, created one artillery battalion for each of his divisions in early 1864, and he detailed officers from those batteries to serve on an artillery-battalion staff. However, no organizational/leadership changes could slow William T. Sherman's juggernaut as it rolled out of eastern Tennessee toward Atlanta in the spring of 1864, and Johnston's reforms in his artillery arms' leadership became a footnote to history.

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