

Christian Cavalier

By Michael Aubrecht

Chapter 1 SAMPLE

“I will rely upon the guidance of Him whose judgment cannot err, for ‘it is not with man that walketh to direct his steps.’”

Unlike many other traditional biographies, the intention of this book is to serve, not only as a tribute to one man’s life, but also as a testament to his death. For non-believers, death is often considered the end of all things, but, to Christians, it represents a new beginning. Our time here on Earth is short compared to eternity in Heaven, and what we do with this time determines our reward in the afterlife. Unfortunately, many people today waste their precious time focusing on self-fulfillment. Sadly, few leave behind a meaningful legacy.

A legacy is the memory of who we were and the ways in which we touched the lives of others. It is our children and our friends—and their children and friends—who keep our spirit alive here on Earth. It is what we did and didn’t do, how we served, and whom we served. When this is accomplished, our service often inspires others to serve.

History has recorded countless men who served their time on Earth in such an inspirational way. Their legacy continues to live on, years and years after their death. Ironically, it is when one does not seek fame that he inevitably receives it. Such is the story of J.E.B. Stuart: soldier, servant, and Southern hero.

James Ewell Brown Stuart was born in Patrick County, Virginia, on February 6, 1833. His lineage was that of a Scotch Presbyterian, his forebears having immigrated to the Americas seeking refuge from religious persecution. The first Stuart to escape to the states was Archibald Stuart, Sr., a native of Londonderry, Ireland. He first settled in Western Pennsylvania and spent almost seven years in seclusion before reuniting with his family. A highly educated and motivated man, Archibald was able to rapidly establish himself after relocating to Augusta County, Virginia, in 1738. After acquiring several large estates, the family patriarch divided his properties between all four of his children.

Descending from a long line of veterans, J.E.B.’s grandfather, Major Alexander Stuart, distinguished himself while serving proudly in the American Revolutionary War. Initially commissioned as a major, he was later called upon to serve as a regimental commander following the incapacitation of his superior officer, Colonel Samuel McDowell. Rising to the challenge, as all Stuart men would later do, Alexander took charge during the battle of Guilford Courthouse. During the mêlée, the major had not one but two horses shot out from under him before he himself was seriously wounded. After being overrun by the King’s army, Alexander was captured and taken as a prisoner of war. Thankfully, he was later exchanged along with his sword, which was later passed down to his grandson, the Honorable Alexander H.H. Stuart.

Alexander’s eldest son, the Honorable Archibald Stuart (J.E.B.’s father) faithfully followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, answering the call to arms during the War of 1812. After victory for America was once again declared, he returned home to pursue a

successful career in the profession of law. Later, his civil service moved into the political arena, where he served the county of Campbell in the Virginia legislature and, afterward, served an additional term in the same body for Patrick County. He was also a member of the famous Convention of 1829-30 and of the Convention of 1850, when he represented his district in the Federal Congress. His younger brother, Judge Alexander Stuart, also boasted a career as a successful attorney and eventually became a judge, holding office in the states of Virginia, Illinois, and Missouri.

With such a distinguished ancestry, it's not surprising that Stuart men were widely known as gentleman of great virtue. Both their Christian roots and their sincere appreciation for their religious freedoms inspired them to give back to the community whenever possible. Their undying commitment to serve God and country provided a foundation of values and morality that benefited their family for generations to come. In a tribute to the late General Stuart, Major H. B. McClellan quoted an associate of Archibald in reference to his character. He stated:

Archibald Stuart was known far and wide, both for his splendid talents and his wonderful versatility. A powerful orator and advocate, he charmed the multitude on the hustings, and convinced juries and courts. In addition to these gifts, he was one of the most charming social companions the state ever produced. Possessing wonderful wit and humor, combined with rare gift for song, he at once became the center of attraction at every social gathering. Among the people of the counties where he practiced, his name is held in great respect, and his memory is cherished with an affection rarely equaled in the history of any public man.

Archibald's wife, Elizabeth Letcher Pannill of Pennsylvania, was also a woman of great virtue and blessed her husband with a large Christian family, numbering four sons and six daughters. J.E.B. was the seventh child and youngest son of the Stuarts. His boyhood was one of great prosperity, and he grew up amidst the mountains of Patrick, Virginia, not far from the North Carolina line.

After turning fourteen, J.E.B. enrolled in school at Wytheville and was accepted into Emory and Henry College in Washington County in 1848. Named for Bishop John Emory of the Methodist Church and Patrick Henry, E.H.C. is still one of the few colleges in the South to have operated for more than 160 years under the same name and with the same affiliation, the United Methodist Church. During his time there, Stuart participated actively in a revival of religion among the students. Although his mother was a member of the Episcopal Church and his father a Presbyterian, J.E.B. enthusiastically professed a conversion to the Methodist faith. Ten years later, in 1859, he returned to his mother's church and was confirmed as an Episcopalian by Bishop Hawks of St. Louis. Regardless of his denomination, Stuart remained a committed and devout Christian for the rest of his life. It was also during this period that he composed a series of thirty-four poems, later entitled *Poems and Prayers of Love and Friendship*.

It has since been written that J.E.B.'s dashing demeanor was an inherited gift from above. Many credit his joyous temperament and magnetic personality to his father. Others credit

his sense of duty and gallantry to a grandfather who was reported to have yielded his sword at Guilford Courthouse “only after being disabled by wounds and deserted by his men.” As the product of such a principled and purpose-driven legacy, Stuart routinely excelled in both social and academic circles.

With a family tree firmly rooted in distinguished military service, it was only logical that J.E.B. would follow in the footsteps of his predecessors. In June of 1850, the Honorable T.H. Averett of Virginia nominated Stuart as a candidate for West Point. Considered to be the “most important strategic position in America” by former president George Washington, the military academy pledged itself to developing cadets in four critical areas: intellectual, physical, military, and moral-ethical. To this day, the college still refers to its four-year program as “the West Point Experience.” Surprisingly, J.E.B. initially rejected the notion of becoming a successful military officer. In a letter sent from Washington to a relative while en route to school, he noted the pains of his immaturity, stating, “I am as green as a gourd vine yet.” Despite his reluctance, Stuart reported to the academy on July 1st and quickly adapted to his new surroundings.

As a good student and a skilled horseman, J.E.B. applied himself diligently and rose successively through the ranks, reaching both cavalry sergeant and second captain. After graduating thirteenth in a class of forty-six, Stuart was immediately commissioned as a second lieutenant in the prestigious regiment of Mounted Rifles. Other noteworthy graduates at the time of J.E.B.’s attendance included George Washington Lee, Thomas Ruger, Oliver Howard, James Deshler, John Pegram, Stephen Lee, William Pender, Archibald Gracie, and Stephen Weed. The class of ’54 was a tightly knit group of cadets who shared a loyalty to their nation and to each other. This bond would inevitably be broken as the classmates later found themselves reunited on opposite sides of the battlefield.

In choosing to specialize in the cavalry, J.E.B. was required to drill incessantly with horses. He soon developed a close bond with a particular mount named Tony who carried him on all exercises until a sad day in March of 1853, when J.E.B. wrote:

Tony was condemned by a board of officers as being unfit, and suffered “the penalty.” But there is consolation in the thought that such is the fortune of war, and we are all victims ready for sacrifice when it shall please the U.S. I propose therefore that we wear mourning on the little finger for one week. His loss I deeply deplore.

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