

The Top

Confederate Generals

by Michael Aubrecht, with special thanks to Thomas Aubrecht

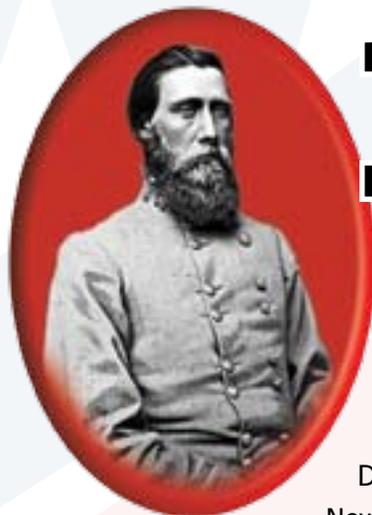
Americans love lists. From the Billboard music charts to late-night talk shows, nothing stirs up a discussion or debate like ranking things from first to last. Usually the criteria for such endeavors are based on something tangible, such as statistics; other times the selections solely reflect the personal tastes of individual judges. Regardless of the methods of measure, lists make people think and, in turn, form their own evaluations.

This month the good folks at *Civil War Historian* have asked me to rate my top ten Confederate generals. In turn, they hope that you will feel empowered to agree or disagree with my choices and sound off by emailing the magazine at Benjamin@ertelpublishing.com. Some readers will rightfully argue that certain generals—such as Joseph Wheeler, Wade Hampton, Richard Ewell, and P. G. T. Beauregard—should be added to the list. Others may want to trash my entire compilation and start over. Regardless, the point of this exercise is to stimulate thought and debate over the legacies of these great Confederate soldiers.

Please be advised that although I spend a great deal of my professional career studying and writing specifically about Confederate history, I am not a military historian who is versed in tactical analysis or battle strategies. This list contains personal favorites, several obvious candidates, and some not-so-obvious candidates. I intentionally tried to stir things up a bit in order to generate discussion, and I recognize that some of my choices may be hotly contested (it should be added that—if space permitted—John Brown Gordon, John Hunt Morgan, and Lewis Addison Armistead would have all received honorable mentions).

So, without further ado, here is my list.

Who is on yours? Let us know!



10

**General John
Bell Hood**

Born: June 1, 1831 in
Owingsville, Kentucky

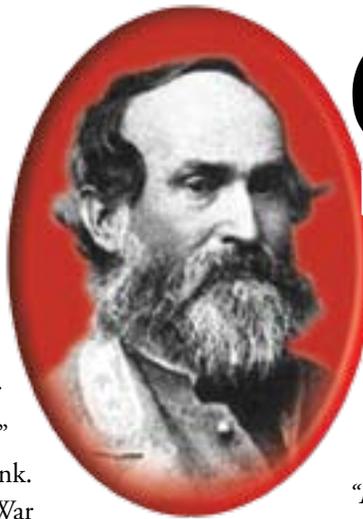
Died: August 30, 1879 in
New Orleans, Louisiana

“When the fortunes of war were against us, the same faithful [Army of Tennessee] soldiers remained true to their flag . . .”

Criteria: Hood was the brigade commander of the unit that became known as Hood’s Texas Brigade. At the Battle of Gaines’ Mill, he garnered distinction by leading a charge that broke the Union line. Every officer in his brigade was killed or wounded, but Hood remained unscathed. During the Battle of Antietam, Hood’s division came to the aid of “Stonewall” Jackson’s corps and rescued the Confederate left flank. Although his performance in the later years of the Civil War left something to be desired—at Franklin and Nashville, he managed to destroy the last effective Confederacy army in the Western Theater with but a little help from the Union forces—his contributions to some of the Confederacy’s greatest victories cannot be denied. Another admirable trait was Hood’s fearless admission of faults when defeated; in addition to accepting the blame for tactical failures, he routinely praised his men in after-action reports.

Biography: Hood was the nephew of United States Representative Richard French, who obtained an appointment for Hood at West Point; he graduated in 1853, ranked forty-four in a class of fifty-two cadets. Upon leaving the academy, Hood was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the 4th United States Infantry, and later transferred to the 2nd United States Cavalry. Following the attack on Fort Sumter in 1861, Hood resigned his commission in the United States Army, and, joining the newly-formed Confederate Army, he was quickly promoted to lieutenant colonel. Hood established himself as a gifted strategist over the next two years while serving in the Army of Northern Virginia, and he saw action at the Seven Days’ Battles, Second Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg—where he was wounded, losing the use of an arm. Hood was severely wounded again at the bloody Battle of Chickamauga, this time losing a leg to amputation. Following his recovery he was given a corps commander position in the Army of Tennessee and became a key player in the Atlanta campaign. After the war he entered the cotton brokerage and insurance businesses in New Orleans. He died from yellow fever in 1879.

Interesting Fact: Near the end of the war, President Jefferson Davis ordered Hood to travel to Texas to raise another army. However, General Edmund Kirby Smith surrendered the Texan forces to the Union before Hood’s arrival, prompting Hood to surrender in Natchez, Mississippi.



9 General Jubal Anderson Early

Born: November 3, 1816 in Franklin County, Virginia
Died: March 2, 1894 in Lynchburg, Virginia

“I believe that the world has never produced a body of men superior, in courage, patriotism, and endurance, to the private soldiers of the Confederate armies.”

Criteria: Often forgotten, Early’s contributions near the end of the war were very important. Some historians maintain that, due to his efforts at Washington, D.C. and in the Shenandoah Valley, the Confederacy was able to carry on for an additional six to nine months. At this point in the conflict the Confederate Army was unable to replenish itself with men, supplies, or munitions. Early’s tenacity was a testament to the unwavering southern spirit that continued to shine among the troops, despite the scales of war tipping against them.

Biography: Early was a diehard Unionist who fought tooth and nail to keep Virginia from seceding. Yet once the fighting started, he swiftly became one of the South’s hardest-hitting generals. He won high praise from Jackson and Robert E. Lee, who came to count on Early’s sound military judgment and his fighting spirit. As a general he was outspoken and opinionated; Lee often referred to him as “My Bad Old Man.” In 1864, when Lee wanted to threaten Washington, D.C. and take some of the pressure off the Army of Northern Virginia, it was Early who was chosen to lead an army down the Shenandoah Valley. Early got closer to the Union capital than any other Confederate general during the war, reaching the very gates of the city itself. He defeated General Philip Sheridan’s far-greater Union force in the Shenandoah Valley, only to experience disaster when Sheridan rallied his fleeing troops and smashed Early’s forces. Confederate authorities lost confidence in Early, and he rode southward, a beaten general. Early eventually practiced law in Lynchburg, Virginia, until his death in 1894.

Interesting Fact: Following the South’s surrender, Early refused to admit defeat. He rode to Texas, hoping to find a Confederate force that was still holding out. Finding none, he proceeded to Mexico, then to Cuba, and finally to Canada—where he wrote his memoirs.



8

General Turner Ashby, Junior

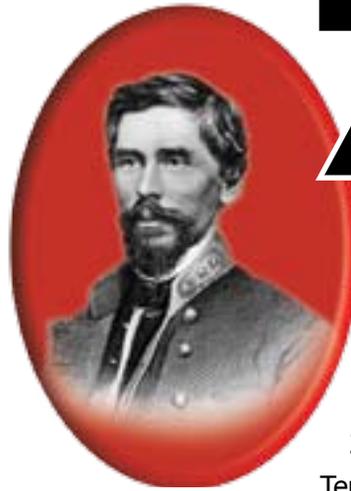
Born: October 23, 1828 in Fauquier County, Virginia
Died: June 6, 1862 in Harrisonburg, Virginia

“Charge, men. For God’s sake, charge!”

Criteria: Ashby was Jackson’s renowned cavalry commander in the Shenandoah Valley area. His forceful reconnaissance and screening tactics contributed greatly to the success of Jackson’s legendary Valley campaign.

Biography: Turner Ashby, Junior descended from a lineage of military men. His father fought as a colonel in the War of 1812 and his grandfather served as a captain in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. Ashby was known for his chivalry and was an accomplished horseman at an early age. In his twenties, he formed an independent cavalry company christened the Mountain Rangers. It was later absorbed into the Virginia State Militia following John Brown’s raid at Harpers Ferry in 1859, and the men performed guard duty at Charles Town during Brown’s trial and execution. On July 23, 1861, Brigadier General Joseph E. Johnston appointed Ashby as a lieutenant colonel of the 7th Cavalry, where he went on to form the first Confederate horse artillery unit—Chew’s Battery. On June 6, 1862, during an engagement near Harrisonburg, the 1st New Jersey attacked Ashby’s position. Although he defeated the cavalry attack, his horse was shot from under him during a sudden infantry charge. Ashby advanced on foot for a few yards and was shot through the heart. He died instantly. His last words were said to have been, “Forward, my brave men!” Tragically, he had been promoted to brigadier general just ten days prior to his death.

Interesting Fact: Ashby was called the “Black Knight of the Confederacy” by many. He generally rode horses that were either pure black or pure white. Witnesses have compared his impressive appearance to that of an early “Crusader.”



7

General Patrick Ronayne Cleburne

Born: March 16, 1828 in County Cork, Ireland
Died: November 30, 1864 in Franklin, Tennessee

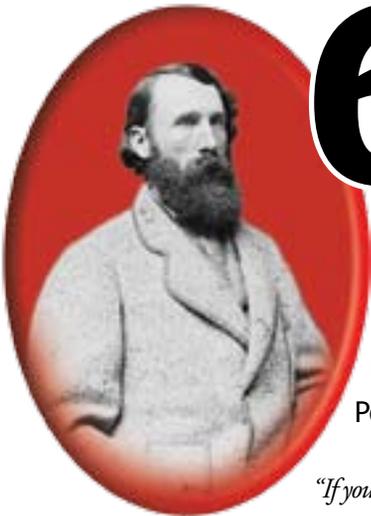
“The conqueror’s policy is to divide the conquered into factions and stir up animosity among them . . .”

Criteria: This prodigy is heralded as having a tremendous grasp of tactical warfare. From utilizing topography and terrain, to having a stubbornness on the field that enabled his men to hold their ground, Cleburne displayed a knack for troop maneuvering and positioning that earned him the nickname of the “Stonewall of the West.” Federal soldiers were said to have dreaded seeing the flag of the Irishman’s division in the distance. Cleburne was killed during an assault on Union fortifications at the Battle of Franklin, just south of Nashville, Tennessee, where he was last seen advancing on foot toward the Union entrenchment with his sword raised.

Biography: A proud immigrant who was living the “American Dream,” Cleburne sided firmly with the southern states following secession. His choice was not due to any political support of slavery, but out of gratitude for the people who had accepted him as one of their own. As the discord grew more intense, Cleburne joined a local militia—the Yell Rifles—and quickly became the captain. The Yell Rifles was eventually absorbed into 1st Arkansas Infantry, later renamed the 15th Arkansas. Cleburne was elected colonel, then promoted to brigadier general. His forces went on to fight admirably in the battles of Shiloh, Richmond (Kentucky), Perryville, and Chickamauga. Cleburne’s troops later saved the day for the Army of Tennessee by holding back a much larger Federal force in a desperate fight near Chattanooga. Before falling in the Battle of Franklin, Cleburne had proposed the notion of freeing slaves and enlisting them into the army. After his death, Cleburne was buried at St. John’s Episcopal Church near Mount Pleasant, Tennessee. In 1870 his remains were moved to Helena, Arkansas and interred in the Evergreen Confederate Cemetery.

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Interesting Fact: Just before the campaigning season of 1864, Cleburne became engaged to a woman from Mobile, Alabama named Susan Tarleton. Unfortunately, their marriage was never to be.



6 General Ambrose Powell Hill

Born: November 9, 1825 in Culpeper, Virginia
Died: April 2, 1865 in Petersburg, Virginia

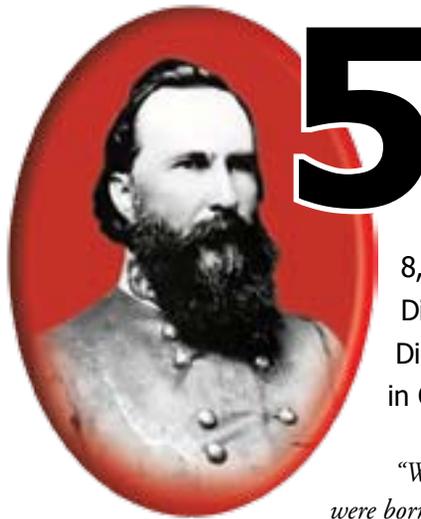
"If you will not follow me, I'll die alone!"

Criteria: Hill continues to be one of the Civil War's most under-appreciated commanders. He gained early fame as the commander of Hill's Light Division and later led his troops on an epic quickstep march from Harpers Ferry, (West) Virginia to Sharpsburg, Maryland, where he staved off a decisive Federal victory at the Battle of Antietam. Hill was personable and popular with the rank-and-file soldiers and was referred to by one officer as "the most lovable of all Lee's generals."

Biography: Hill attended West Point and graduated in 1847, ranked fifteen in a class of thirty-eight. He

was then appointed to the 1st United States Artillery as a second lieutenant and served in both the Mexican-American War and the Seminole Wars. Following the secession of his home state of Virginia, Hill officially resigned his commission in the United States Army and was appointed to lead the 13th Virginia Infantry Regiment on the field at First Bull Run. His troops distinguished themselves in the Seven Days' Battles, Cedar Mountain, Second Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. His division formed part of Jackson's corps and after his superior was mortally wounded at Chancellorsville in May of 1863, Hill briefly took command of the corps and was wounded himself. Only seven days before Lee's surrender, Hill was shot and killed as he rode to the front of the Petersburg lines.

Interesting Fact: While on his deathbed, Jackson called for Hill to "prepare for action." It has also been recorded that Lee requested Hill's presence in his final moments, saying "Tell Hill he must come up."



5 General James Longstreet

Born: January 8, 1821 in Edgefield District, South Carolina
Died: January 2, 1904 in Gainesville, Georgia

"Why do men fight who were born to be brothers?"

Criteria: Referred to as "Lee's Old War Horse," General James Longstreet was among the most respected of the Confederacy's top commanders. Known as a cautious tactician, he has been perhaps unfairly blamed for the defeat of the Army of Northern Virginia at the Battle of Gettysburg. Longstreet's troops fought tremendously at Fredericksburg, Chickamauga, and the horrific Battle of the Wilderness.

Biography: James Longstreet received his appointment to West Point and graduated in 1842, sixty out of a class of sixty-two cadets. A few years later he fought in the Mexican-American War. Afterwards he was reassigned to Albuquerque as a paymaster, where he remained until he resigned his commission from the United States Army in June of 1861. He joined the Confederate Army, accepted a commission as a brigadier general, and was assigned to Manassas Junction under the command of General

Beauregard. From this point forward, James Longstreet was quickly promoted to major general and then to lieutenant general. By the middle of 1862, he found himself under the command of Lee. A very brave but guarded commander, Longstreet remained one of the few high-ranking Confederate officers to survive the war, although he was severely wounded in the spring of 1864 during the Battle of the Wilderness, resulting in the partial paralysis of his right arm. He returned to Lee in the fall of 1864. For the remainder of the Siege of Petersburg he commanded the defenses in front of Richmond, including all forces north of the James River. Longstreet was with Lee when he surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattax Court House on April 9, 1865.

Interesting Fact: Through connections with the Republican Party, Longstreet obtained a number of political appointments after the South's surrender. His affiliation with Abraham Lincoln's party alienated the veteran from many of his former comrades.



4 General James Ewell Brown Stuart

Born: February 6, 1833 in Patrick County, Virginia
Died: May 12, 1864 in Richmond, Virginia

"I would rather be a private in Virginia's army than a general in any army that was going to coerce her."

Criteria: A true "cavalier" in every sense of the term, Stuart was a master of reconnaissance and the use of cavalry in offensive operations. Sporting a magnificent cinnamon beard, red cape, yellow sash, and a hat cocked to the side with a peacock feather, this horseman had as much flair as strength on the battlefield. Conducting raids and rides of epic proportions, Stuart is said to have never brought Lee a bad piece of information. On two different occasions he rode around General George McClellan's army undetected—once during the Peninsula campaign, and once after the Battle of Antietam. While these two missions were not tactically significant, they certainly boosted southern morale.

Biography: From 1848 to 1850, Stuart attended Emory and Henry College. In 1850 he entered West Point. Following the secession of his beloved home state of Virginia in 1861, Stuart resigned his commission in the United States Army and was appointed to serve as a cavalry commander under Jackson. According to Lee, Stuart was an ideal soldier—and because of his tremendous riding skills and sharp instincts as an intelligence officer, Lee regarded him as the "eyes of the army." On May 9, 1864, Federal cavalry headed for the Confederate capital to stage a siege. It was during this battle, on May 11, that Stuart was fatally wounded. He died the following day and was buried in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond.

Interesting Fact: During the Northern Virginia campaign, Stuart lost his signature hat to pursuing Federals—but managed to recover it later in a raid.



3 General Nathan Bedford Forrest

Born: July 13, 1821 in Chapel Hill, Tennessee
Died: October 29, 1877 in Memphis, Tennessee

"Get there first with the most."

Criteria: Technically, General Nathan Forrest was never defeated, and he is considered by many experts to be the greatest cavalry commander of the Confederacy even though he did not really command cavalry—he led mounted infantry troops who would dismount to do battle. As a result, the speed with which Forrest could dispatch his soldiers proved to be an invaluable asset and contributed greatly to his many successes. Both feared and revered by his own men, Forrest is said to have personally killed thirty troops, and had twenty-nine horses shot out from under him in battle. After the war, he bragged that he had come out one horse ahead. Tactically brilliant, Forrest possessed a street-smart approach to battlefield maneuvers, as opposed to the textbook procedures practiced by his opponents from West Point.

Biography: The oldest child in a poor family of twelve children, Forrest became the head of the household at age seventeen, upon the death of his father. He worked hard and at the age of twenty he went into business with an uncle in Hernando, Mississippi. When his uncle was killed during an argument with four brothers, Forrest avenged his death by killing two of the men and wounding the others with a knife. He went on to become a successful businessman, plantation owner, and slave trader in Memphis. Though functionally illiterate, he was a self-made millionaire by the time the war broke out in 1861. He joined the Confederate Army and fought with unequalled ferocity. In his farewell address at the conclusion of the war, Forrest told his troops to be good citizens, as they had been good soldiers. Unfortunately, carpetbaggers took advantage of the plight of the post-war South and helped to destroy the favorable resolution that Forrest had promised his men. He became associated with the Ku Klux Klan in an effort to reverse the damage done to the South by these northerners. In 1867 he was acclaimed the Grand Wizard of the KKK, but he resigned his post after serving less than five years. Forrest officially disbanded the Klan's earliest charter in retaliation for the group's violent attacks on African-Americans. His abandonment of the Klan showed a significant development in his views on race during his final years. Even today, Nathan Forrest remains one of the most highly debated and controversial figures of the entire war. He was called a "genius" by noted historian Shelby Foote and a "devil" by General William Tecumseh Sherman. Forrest has also been called a butcher, and is historically held responsible for a massacre of African-American troops at Fort Pillow, Tennessee.

Interesting Fact: Forrest is said to have made a remarkable speech on rebuilding race relations at a convention in Memphis, Tennessee for an African-American civic organization known as the "Independent Order of Pole-Bearers Association" on July 5, 1875. This group was a predecessor of the NAACP.

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2 General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson

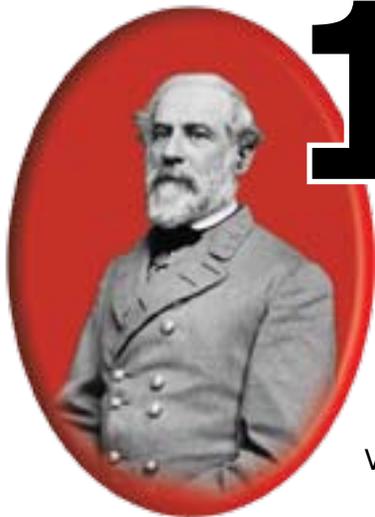
Born: January 21, 1824
in Clarksburg, (West)
Virginia
Died: May 10, 1863 in
Guinea Station, Virginia

"Who could not conquer with such troops as these?"

Criteria: Heralded as perhaps Lee's greatest subordinate, "Old Jack" was beloved and revered in the South—and detested and feared in the North. A brilliant tactician, he conducted some of the most successful military campaigns in American history. Jackson was also responsible for the spiritual strength of his men and initiated the formal establishment of chaplains in the Confederate Army. His Valley campaign is still taught at America's military academies, and his legacy at the Virginia Military Institute continues to thrive.

Biography: After a childhood that was fraught with tragedy and despair, Jackson entered West Point in July of 1842 and worked hard to finish seventeenth in the Class of 1846. Following graduation, Jackson was sent to fight in the war against Mexico. In 1851 he became a professor of artillery tactics and natural philosophy at the Virginia Military Institute. Perhaps best known as "Stonewall," Jackson earned his nickname at the First Battle of Bull Run after refusing to withdraw his troops in the face of total carnage. Inspired by the bravery of his subordinate, General Barnard Bee immediately rallied the remnants of his own brigade, shouting: "There is Jackson standing like a stone wall." Jackson later distinguished himself repeatedly in the Valley campaign, Second Bull Run, and Fredericksburg. A fervent "prayer warrior," his religious devotion was constant in all facets of his life. On May 2, 1863, Jackson was wounded by friendly fire at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Despite surviving the amputation of his left arm, he developed severe pneumonia and died eight days later. His death was a severe setback for the Confederacy. Lee stated, "He has lost his left arm; I have lost my right."

Interesting Fact: In November of 1859, Jackson was one of the officers who accompanied a contingent of VMI cadets to Charles Town, where they stood guard at the execution of abolitionist John Brown.



1 General Robert Edward Lee

Born: January 19, 1807 in Stratford Hall, Virginia
Died: October 12, 1870 in Lexington, Virginia

“Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more, you should never wish to do less.”

Criteria: Even today, Lee is still considered one of the greatest commanders in the history of warfare. Early in 1861, President Lincoln offered him the command of the United States forces. Though he was opposed to the secession of Virginia, Lee refused the offer. In April of 1861, Virginia seceded from the Union, and Lee chose to remain loyal to his home state. As the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, “Marse Robert” was able to inspire and sustain a force that was much smaller and not as well-equipped as its foe. His greatest victories were the Seven Days’ Battles, the Second Battle of Bull Run, the Battle of Fredericksburg, and the Battle of Chancellorsville.

Biography: The son of Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee—a favorite general of George Washington—Robert E. Lee entered West Point and finished second in the Class of 1829. In April of 1861, Lee (then a colonel) declined the opportunity to command an army that was about to take the field against the seceding states. Shortly afterward, he accepted a general’s position in the newly-formed Confederate Army, where he first served as a senior military advisor to Jefferson Davis. In June of 1862, Lee assumed the command of the Army of Northern Virginia and led it to numerous victories over the next three years, in spite of the Union’s overwhelming numbers and resources.

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However, in early April of 1865, it became obvious that continued efforts would prove futile and would result in an unacceptable amount of additional casualties. On April 9, Lee met with Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia, where he surrendered the once-great army that had defended the Confederate States of America so valiantly. On October 1, 1865, he assumed the presidency of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) and worked there until his death on October 12, 1870.

Interesting Fact: In 1900, Lee was one of the first twenty-nine individuals selected for the Hall of Fame for Great Americans—the first Hall of Fame in the United States.



About the Authors

Michael Aubrecht (right) is a Civil War and baseball historian from Fredericksburg, Virginia. He has published several books and many articles on the role of religion and the Confederacy, as well as the history of America’s National Pastime. He is currently working on a regional book for The History Press titled *Houses of the Holy: Historic Churches of Fredericksburg*. For more information, visit Michael’s website at www.pinstripepress.net. Thomas Aubrecht (left), Michael’s father, first introduced his son to the Civil War on a weekend trip to Gettysburg in 1978. Since then, he has accompanied Michael on visits to many hallowed grounds across the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

