Civil War Commanders' Correspondence: Debunking the Lost Cause Narrative Through Voices from the Battlefield

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Famous for its savagery, innovation, and bloodshed, the American Civil War was a defining chapter in the history of the United States. For the years following their defeat, the Confederate leaders maintained that they had fought a "noble war"—which immediately gave birth to the idea of the Lost Cause. The central tenets of the movement were threefold: that the war was a matter of protecting the rights of the states, that the South was moral and just, and that the South's surrender was a matter of graceful preservation of life and that they could have continued to fight—and ultimately win. The adoption of these tenets were the foundation upon which a century and a half of historical revision is based. Though much of the Lost Cause has been debunked in posterity, the words of the leaders themselves portray a different story even during the war. Prolific personal writing, reports, dispatches, and memoirs give specific insight into the thoughts of those that commanded it—that not only was the South beaten fairly, but that the leaders of both sides knew it, despite Confederate claims to the contrary.

To this end, this paper will examine correspondences from, memoirs by, and recorded events about the generals that characterized the Civil War. These offer a glimpse into the reality of their war. Crucial commanders such as Jubal Early, John Bell Hood, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Ulysses Grant offer insights about the shifts of morale and advantage during the war which had a direct correlation to the losses the Confederacy suffered—including a mounting, cumulative effect that foretold an ultimate defeat. I argue that from the writings of these generals, the Lost Cause's claim of ability to fight on at further cost of blood was not only incorrect, but disproven in the works of them and their contemporaries.

The father of the Lost Cause movement, and the author of the eponymous *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*, Edward Pollard, put the military conditions of a defeat in the Confederate South simply: That there was a "physical impossibility of the subjugation of the South at the hands of the North, as long as the integrity of the public resolution was maintained... In a geographical point of view, therefore, it may be asserted that the conquest of these Confederate States is impracticable."[1] The idea of countryside land's impenetrably difficult nature to capture and control, of course, was not at all a factor in their idealization of defeating the North. The South's immutable confidence in its ability to hold its ground against northern invaders was the cornerstone of its policy in maintaining its own defense against the Union. The Confederate Congress said as much in late 1864: "The passage of hostile armies through our country, though productive of cruel suffering...gives the enemy no permanent advantage or foothold."[2] Jefferson Davis' government maintained that so long as the will of the people remained to fight, that the Confederacy would too remain. It seemed an extremely bold and near-delusionally hopeful supposition that there might be vast swathes of the South's countryside falling to Northern armies without having any impact on morale, and more foolish still to suggest there was not a direct tie between the two. All the same, it forms the crux of Pollard's argument, and in turn, the last tenet of the Lost Cause:

[1] Edward Alfred Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York, E. B. Treat, 1867), 645.
[2] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 645

> There is but one conclusion that remains for the dispassionate student of history. Whatever may be the partial explanations of the downfall of the Southern Confederacy, and whatever may be the various excuses that passion and false pride, and flattery of demagogues, may offer, the great and melancholy fact remains that the Confederates, with an abler Government and more resolute spirit, might have accomplished their independence... The Confederates have gone out of this war, with the proud, secret, deathless, *dangerous* consciousness that they are THE BETTER MEN, and that there was nothing wanting but a change in a set of circumstances and a firmer resolve to make them the victors.[3]

The danger implied by Pollard is not one of it being a flawed mindset for the South to have—he is not, of course, a detractor from this better-men theory but rather its champion. The danger instead belonged to the North, who was now forced to contend with a "properly" educated South that, even in the wake of losing the war, would maintain the resolve to fight on their beliefs in the "wider arena" of the rest of the Union and its political struggles.[4] This attitude proved to be a landmark truth for the South—Pollard's work "became the standard Southern history of the war"[5] for its roles in downplaying the effect of slavery on the secession and for igniting the fires of the idea of a chivalric South. The defense of slavery in the name of states' rights is and has been easily debunked numerous times: "There is no logical connection between local autonomy and racial oppression."[6] But less obvious and more insidious is the argument about the knightly nature of the Southern generals and how it has influenced the view of the war so significantly.

Understanding the ideology of the Lost Cause is crucial when one looks at the end of the Civil War. Believing Southern generals to have conducted themselves with honor and dignity, with the ability to have carried on the struggle if not for a flagging homestead, and to be perfectly capable of having *defeated* the North if not undermined by the perfidy and "mis-government" of bureaucratic politicians are all crucial to the preservation of the myth of the Lost Cause. The South's defeat at the hands of the Union "distinguished them from the rest of American society" and called for what Simpson labeled a "total revision of the Southern role in American history."[7] This revision took the form of self-aggrandizement by the Confederate leadership, as well as the shift of blame in defeat away from themselves. Many Confederate generals pursued avid re-brandings of their image in the wake of the war. The defeat was to not be their fault—and in fact, they were the only reason that it was not a harsher defeat.[8] This culminated in regard for Jefferson Davis, who became seen as the ultimate martyr of the Lost Cause—the man who "kept the faith, who had endured years of imprisonment with dignity and integrity."[9] Despite his thrusting up onto a pedestal by his contemporaries, the quiet dignity with which Davis was lauded for also carried over to his personal life—he only ever engaged in one pro-Confederacy rally for the rest of his life, at the prompting of his daughter, and died in relative peace and quiet in 1889. His death solidified his image as a martyred "conquering hero."[10] He proved to be the blueprint around which the proponents of the Lost Cause could most easily gather.

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[3] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 729
[4] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 729
[5] Christopher Clausen, "America's Changeable Civil War," *The Wilson Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2010): 34.
[6] Clausen, "America's Changeable Civil War," 31.
[7] John A. Simpson, "The Cult of the 'Lost Cause,'" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Winter 1975): 350–61.
[8] Simpson, "The Cult of the 'Lost Cause,'" 352.
[9] Simpson, "The Cult of the 'Lost Cause,'" 353.
[10] Simpson, "The Cult of the 'Lost Cause,'" 354.

One of the first champions of the Lost Cause ideology amongst those that actually participated in the prosecution of the war was Jubal Anderson Early, once-Lieutenant General of the Confederate Army. In the opening introduction of his memoirs, he addresses rumors of himself "dressing like a stagecoach hand" during the war—claiming that were he not so busy in the camp or afield, he would have properly seen himself dressed "neatly and genteelly."[11] As per his own autobiographical sketch, he considered himself "often misjudged and thought to be haughty and disdainful [in] temperament... because of the preoccupation of my mind, this often gave offense."[12] He acknowledged that he "was never what is called a popular man" and yet, frequently concerned himself with the opinions of others—a part of why he wrote his memoirs in the first place was to combat the image of him that had been painted in the wake of the war as an ineffectual commander who snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. That he shared an oriflamme with the Lost Cause was in part what led him to becoming its greatest champion—especially his lurking, lingering frustration with Robert E. Lee's dismissal of him from the army before the war had run its course.

In Early's *Memoir of the Last Year of the War*, he noted that he considered Robert E. Lee as a "great captain, and perfect master of his art," as opposed to Grant who had "none of the requisites of a great captain, but merely possessed the most ordinary brute courage, and control of unlimited numbers and means."[13] However, years later in an interview with Martin Schmitt, he "admitted that it was the only way in which the South could have been beaten."[14] This dichotomy is the usual sounding board upon which most Confederate generals fall in the wake of the war—that they were not overpowered by superior command, but rather numbers; that the men under their command were the better soldiers, but instead were overwhelmed. It is a considerable coincidence to them that they didn't consider the mustering, arming, training, and fielding of massive breadths of men as a skill, but rather an arbitrary happenstance of the late war—nor too was it any measure of skill that the "brute courage" that gave Grant the nickname of "Butcher" led to the end of the war. Early was a noted supporter and defender of Robert E. Lee, holding him in regard for the rest of his life after the war.[15] Reflecting on the end of the 1864 campaign, he wrote, "General Lee had performed his task as a military commander, but the Government was unable to furnish him the means of properly continuing the war."[16] This was not, however, a condemnation of the ability of the leader of the Confederate government: "In my opinion, both President Davis and General Lee, in their respective spheres, did all for the success of our cause which it was possible for mortal men to do."[17] Early went on to state that "Four years of an unexampled struggle had destroyed the finances of the Confederate Government, and exhausted the material out of which an army could be raised."[18] Personal high regard for Jefferson Davis was a common trait for those under arms in the Confederacy, and Early was no

[11]Jubal Anderson Early, *Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1912), xxvi.
[12] Early, *Autobiographical Sketch*, xxv.
[13] Jubal Anderson Early, *A Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence* (United States: Blelock & Company, 1867), 30.
[14] Martin F. Schmitt, "An Interview with General Jubal A. Early in 1889," *The Journal of Southern History* 11, no. 4 (1945): 561.
[15] Schmitt, "An Interview with General Jubal A.," 563.
[16] Jubal Anderson Early, *A Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence, in the Confederate States of America: Containing an Account of the Operations of His Commands in the Years 1864 and 1865* (New York: Blelock & Company, 1867), 97.
[17] Early, *Autobiographical Sketch*, ix.
[18] Early, *Memoir of the Last Year*, 98.

different, easily absolving him of the sins that he found the Southern "Government" at large and its bureaucrats guilty of.

Contradictions between unrealistic expectations of Confederate performances and the Union's own performance are rife throughout Early's work. At Gettysburg, a commonly-viewed turning point of the war, the Army of Northern Virginia faced off with the Army of the Potomac, under the fresh command of George Gordon Meade. Four days of vicious fighting left both sides badly bloodied—but with the Confederate campaign on the offensive, they were forced to cede ground and pull away. In Meade's estimation, the Army of Northern Virginia was "superior in numbers and flushed with the pride of a successful invasion...utterly baffled and defeated, he has now withdrawn from the contest."[19] Though his performance at Gettysburg was admirable, Meade suffered from a lack of an understanding of his army—he had only been in command for less than a week before the battle, and in his pursuit of Lee he erred on the side of caution, frequently slowing his pursuit in order to wait for intelligence and scouting and, during times when it seemed like Lee might turn and fight again, called for the halt of the entire army.[20] This passivity was evinced in a later letter:

> Lee has not crossed and does not intend to cross [the Potomac], and I expect in a few days, if not sooner, again to hazard the fortune of war. I know so well that this is a fortune and that accidents, etc., turn the tide of victory, that, until the question is settled, I cannot but be very anxious.[21]

His anxiety was unfounded—Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia hastened over the Potomac, shortly before the rainy season left it an impassable blockade that trapped them in Union territory.[22] Meade's defense of the north was applauded, but the escape of Robert E. Lee and his army incensed President Abraham Lincoln to no end. Even Meade himself wrote, "[Lincoln] thought Lee's defeat was so certain that he felt no little impatience at his unexpected escape."[23] This "little impatience" might have, perhaps, been downplayed on his own behalf. According to Lincoln, it was not so little. In a letter he never wound up sending to Meade, Lincoln wrote, ""[Lee] was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war... Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am distressed immeasurably because of it."[24]

The Confederates, however, did not seemingly share this distress. Even as they escaped by the skin of their teeth, Early claimed that they retreated "not because our army had been demoralized by a defeat, but because our supply of ammunition had become short."[25] Despite that, and the claims of the entire army's readiness and willingness to fight, they continued to pull away until back to safety in Virginia. With the campaign's end, Early noted that: "Undoubtedly we did not accomplish all that we desired, but still I cannot regard the campaign in the light of a failure."[26] The Confederate ability to draw up some measure of victory in the wake of a defeat

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[19] George Gordon Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade: Major-General United States Army*, ed. George Meade (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 122.
[20] Meade, *Life and Letters*, 124.
[21] Meade, *Life and Letters*, 133.
[22] Early, *Autobiographical Sketch*, 282.
[23] Meade, *Life and Letters*, 139.
[24] Lincoln to George G. Meade, July 14, 1863, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (8 vols., New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 6: 327-329, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/.
[25] Early, *Autobiographical Sketch*, 279.
[26] Early, *Autobiographical Sketch*, 285.

and rout was impressive in that it demonstrated, at least, a hardiness for the rigors of the long war. Early's confidence in a successful series of maneuvers at the tail end of 1863 were absolutely contradicted by the North's dismay at having lost a surefire chance to crush the army and end the Civil War then and there. Absurd expectations of the abilities of their troops to single-handedly defeat the North hallmarked the Confederacy's belief in victory.

Nothing polarizes like William Tecumseh Sherman's famous Georgia campaign—or the performances of the generals who arrayed themselves against him. While the "main" battle between the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the Cumberland played out during the Overland Campaign, Sherman's famous eastern campaigns raged on as what seemed, at the time, a sideshow spectacle. If Grant's reputation as a butcher was properly lauded, then certainly the South regarded Sherman as nothing more than a marauder. Pollard's *The Lost Cause* fondly refers to him as "an example of the reputation achieved in the North by intrepid charlatanism and self assertion" who will "scarcely be known in the future...further than as the man who depopulated and destroyed Atlanta, essayed a new code of cruelty in war...[and] achieved much bad notoriety."[27] That his reputation after the war was so immediately grim is not surprising, and though Pollard's prediction of his infamy certainly persisted, so too has the importance of his "new code of cruelty" that he introduced. It, like Grant's butchery, ran directly counterpoint to the idea of the chivalric knights of the Confederacy that were its commanders. The concept of losing and yet being the better men is directly opposed by Sherman's campaign—by every (Southern) account he was an immoral rogue, and yet, despite being deep in enemy territory, cut off from his own lines of supply, he managed to duel and defeat two of the Confederacy's at-the-time beloved generals, both of which, like Early, fell into ignominy at home for their defeats. Sherman's battles against John Bell Hood and Joseph Johnston featured prominently in his campaigns—at the onset of the Georgia Campaign, he said that, "Neither Atlanta, nor Augusta, nor Savannah, was the objective, but the 'army of Jos. Johnston,' go where it might."[28] Despite that, his performance against these generals would not be what his expeditions became famous for.

When Sherman's Military Division of the Mississippi set out from Nashville, his muster rolls boasted an aggregate number of one hundred thousand.[29] His campaign began under the assumption that Johnston's army numbered "anywhere between forty and fifty thousand men" that were under reinforcement from Mississippi.[30] Johnston's accounting of his own numbers put it at 42,856 men.[31] To accomplish his end of trapping and destroying Johnston's force, Sherman divided his army into three, with one main contingent intent on engaging and pinning, and the others to flank and destroy, a modern strategic take on the tactical hammer and anvil. Johnston gave ground, skirmishing as a means of avoiding a drawn out conflict.[32] While his memoirs refer to this as a "masterly retrograde,"[33] Sherman considered it "cautious but prudent"—but, at the same time, played into his general strategy of wanting to keep Johnston's army occupied.[34] He

[27] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 615.
[28] William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman, vol. 2* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1891), 26.
[29] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman,* 24.
[30] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman,* 9.
[31] Joseph E. Johnston, *A Memoir of the Life and Public Service of Joseph E. Johnston* (Baltimore: R. H. Woodward Company, 1891), 115.
[32] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman,* 39.
[33] Johnston, *Memoir of the Life and Public Service*, 115
[34] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman,* 75.

had heard "news of the bloody and desperate battles of the Wilderness, in Virginia, and that General Grant was pushing his operations against Lee with terrific energy. I was therefore resolved to give my enemy no rest."[35] It fell to a state of constant skirmishing as Sherman pursued him further south, preventing him from seeking out or relieving Robert E. Lee. Johnston, in his reports, claimed that his army dealt five-to-one casualty ratios.[36] Sherman's reports contrast that with an equal number for both.[37] The slow fighting continued until the Military Division of the Mississippi reached Atlanta, where Johnston was sacked and replaced by John Bell Hood.[38]

This narrative is important because it sets the stage for what befell the Southeast. By his estimations, Sherman maintained his troops at either a 2:1 or a 5:3 ratio of superiority over Johnston. Johnston, in turn, claimed six times as many casualties as a means to better his position. Of course, it begs the question: Over the seventy-day period of fighting and bleeding Sherman's army, why not turn and fight in force once numerical superiority had been given? Sherman recounted, at one point, a tale from Johnston when they met years after the war: Johnston once held ground and planned to fight Sherman, but, because of his lacking trust in Generals Polk (later killed by cannon fire in this very campaign) and Hood, he decided to continue their retreat.[39] When one considers the Confederate government's proclamations, though, it becomes apparent enough—a constant push further south gives the indication of defeat, even if it is taxing for the enemies. Strategically sound or not, Johnston proved every day that his army was being defeated by Sherman's time and time again. Perceived as cowardly, his replacement by Hood was both an ideological and pragmatic statement. The only other ranking officer, Polk, had been killed. Thus, of those at Atlanta, only Hood was prepared or socially acceptable as commander—he also shared a near-opposite ethos when it came to fighting. When he was appointed, Sherman was told of his demeanor: "he was bold even to rashness, and courageous in the extreme; I inferred that the change of commanders meant 'fight'... all parts of the army [were] cautioned to be always prepared for battle in any shape."[40]

This, in turn, spelled disaster. Hood, assuming command of the army, had been told by Jefferson Davis to "hold Atlanta against all hazards."[41] An overreach with his cavalry drew his army out into a fight along the road to Macon, and it became clear that holding the city was no longer possible. Hood made immediate plans for retreat and evacuation—he launched a sally at the same time as the mass of his troops prepared to abandon Atlanta, where they were savaged by Sherman's army.[42] "This was just what we wanted...to fight in open ground, on any thing like open terms, instead of being forced to run up against prepared intrenchments [sic]."[43] Hood lost an estimated ten thousand to Sherman's three thousand and five hundred.[44] Johnston glumly pronounced that the fall of Atlanta was "naturally the subject of great rejoicing...on the successful side. It meant the downfall of the Confederacy."[45] Johnston, of course, had reason to

[35] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 42.
[36] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 49.
[37] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 49.
[38] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 72.
[39] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 41.
[40] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 72.
[41] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 581.
[42] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 82.
[43] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 72.
[44] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 84.
[45] Johnston, *Memoir of the Life and Public Service*, 120.

overstate the level of catastrophe—Hood had been his rival for the entirety of the campaign, and attributing the fall of Atlanta to the downfall of the entire Confederacy was hyperbolic. At the same time, equally hyperbolic (and dichotomous) is Pollard's *Lost Cause* stances on Sherman's campaign. Later, he noted that Sherman's campaign held "nothing fatal in a military point of view."[46] He contradicted himself, though, when directly describing the fall of the city itself:

> The fall of Atlanta was a terrible blow to the Southern Confederacy; a reanimation of the North; the death of "the peace party" there; the date of a new hope of the enemy and of a new prospect of subjugation...It was the most important manufacturing centre [sic] in the Confederacy; it was the key to the network of railroads extending to all portions of the Gulf States; it was "the gate City" from the north and west to the southeast; it was an important depot of supplies, and commanded the richest granaries of the South. Such was the prize of the enemy.[47]

Pollard gave no explanation of these differences in accounts. The idea that Sherman's strike to Atlanta was militarily unimportant, while also pointing out in great detail how devastating its loss was, can only be an example of the mental gymnastics required from the Lost Cause's proponents—that the efforts of the enemy are at the same dishonorable and incompetent, while also being devastating and cruel in effect. More than anything, it demonstrates just how crucial Sherman's first stint in Georgia was. The Army of Tennessee was left in tatters, Sherman held the reins of the workhorse of the Southeast, and Lee's command alone remained intact (and at this point, soon-to-be-besieged at Petersburg). While the Confederacy had not been ended at Atlanta, it certainly had been dealt a savage blow.

Sherman's victory was won by his aforementioned desire to meet the Army of Tennessee in any form of pitched battle. In Hood's memoirs, he made extensive note of his dislike of entrenchments—citing primarily that a soldier will gain "undue appreciation of breastworks" and look to defend himself rather than press onto an attack.[48] Instead, he noted the importance of soldiers who learned to "rely on their own courage" when it came to winning battles: "soldiers thus educated will ever prove a terror to the foe."[49] He then proceeded to cite the performance of the Army of Northern Virginia as an example of this, and their performances at Gaines's Mills, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg—but of course, if this is the case, then why the sudden change in temperament after Gettysburg? While supposing that the true proper way of conducting battle was avoiding fixed position and keeping one's troops reliant on "boldness and valor,"[50] Hood simultaneously equated Confederate victory to those tenets, as well as absolved him of the failures of his command, attributing it to having inherited an inferior army misled by Johnston. "The 'reckless' attacks around Atlanta—so designated by General Johnston—enabled us to hold that city forty-six days, whereas, he abandoned in sixty-six days one hundred miles of territory, and demoralized the army."[51]

A deeper study of Civil War tactics, "Civil War Infantry Assault Tactics" by John K. Mahon notes, however, the importance of entrenchment in the Civil War: "after

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[46] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 645.
[47] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 581.
[48] John Bell Hood, *Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States and Confederate States Armies* (New Orleans: Hood Orphan Memorial Fund, 1880), 131.
[49] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 132.
[50] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 132.
[51] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 140.

Antietam...nearly every force which defended against an assault usually protected itself with temporary earthworks."[52] While Hood attributed this to mis-training by generals that ruined an army, by the soldiers themselves it had become an important necessity. "Such habitual use of hasty field fortifications was one of the innovations in the craft of war"—which was an innovation that remained famously in place for World War I half a century later.[53] Mahon posits the reason for this: advancements in infantry arms had altered the state of battle, increasing the accurate range of rifled musket fire by nearly three times. Increased ranges and firepower meant that, more than ever, "attacking infantry was obliged to pass across extended areas scourged by fire."[54] Paired with the fact that "supporting cannon had not the capability to either do the defenders great harm or to follow the attacking lines and aid them efficiently," it meant that attacking forces under the old auspices of march-and-approach with the intent to use bayonet assaults were subjected to lethal circumstances and were "dreadfully at the mercy of defending troops."[55] The answer was found in a solution Grant and Sherman adopted—a main attack that was screened by an advance of a "skirmish line," not conducted by specially trained troops but rather the whole of his army, which became accustomed to "light as well as line training"[56] for the purpose of "preparing the way for the main battle line by throwing the enemy off balance and by drawing his fire."[57]

Tactics and strategy are malleable based on situation and, of course, tend to be taken with a grain of salt as a matter of opinion. That said, it seems impossible to not regard Grant and Sherman's methods as proper. Whether attributing it to greater numbers (which the South had overcome before) or the lackluster support of citizens and bureaucrats in the South, the Grant and Sherman still *won*. Their understanding of a numerically inferior enemy that based their battle tactics around mobility and daring attacks was to, in turn, force them into grueling, drawn-out fights in which Grant could make full use of his "ball-peg hammer" strategy. Seeing, identifying, and understanding the enemy's plans, and learning to properly attack against it, seems like the sign of a capable commander no matter how the Confederates might talk it down. By their enemies, Grant and Sherman both are considered poor commanders, especially when juxtaposed against Lee—never mind the fact that they actually succeeded in seeing victory done. Their tactics were seen as cruel, their overarching strategy as foolish and brutish, and that they were relieved only by the chance of superior numbers. Even if one makes the colossal logical leap of ignoring such as a viable strategy of war, it still fails to reflect positively on the generals of the Confederacy. Commanders throughout history, especially the most talented and famous, claim victory despite overwhelming enemy numbers. Lost Cause advocates gasp the name Lee alongside those such as Bonaparte, Wellington, Barca, and Caesar—and yet, all the great conquerors of history overcame dreadful odds to claim victory. It is, in fact, the common supposition of history that a smaller, better-trained force will prevail over a larger, lesser force. If the Confederacy's army was so superior in quality of training, leadership, morale, and grit… how did that differ from any other in history? Lost Cause supporters, of course, make no mention of such things.

In the wake of Atlanta, Johnston and Hood both pointed the finger of blame at each other. Johnston had claimed when departing the Army of Tennessee that Hood had been given a

[52] John K. Mahon, "Civil War Infantry Assault Tactics," *Military Affairs* 25, no. 2 (1961): 65.
[53] Mahon, "Civil War Infantry Assault Tactics," 66.
[54] Mahon, "Civil War Infantry Assault Tactics," 60.
[55] Mahon, "Civil War Infantry Assault Tactics," 60.
[56] Mahon, "Civil War Infantry Assault Tactics," 62.
[57] Mahon, "Civil War Infantry Assault Tactics," 62.

situation in which Atlanta could be held “forever,” "too strong to be taken by assault, and too extensive to be invested."[58] Hood, however, claimed that he was not properly informed of these plans, faulting Johnston for that—or if they truly *did* exist, then the fault lay with the Confederate government that reassigned Johnston and left him with the “heavy responsibility” of commanding an army with its back against the wall.[59] With his being “forced” into this position, he also then proceeds to lay the fault of having abandoned Atlanta at Johnston’s feet as well, claiming that given his retreat through Georgia to the city, he wouldn’t have been willing to fight a sustained siege there, either.[60] He later placed the blame at the feet of the Army of Tennessee for becoming "habituated to security behind breastworks... [and] wedded to the 'timid defensive' policy."[61] While said habituation is probably an unfair attribution, Hood’s disparagement of Johnston does seem defensible—at least until one looks at it from a Lost Cause standpoint. Johnston, Hood, and the Georgia campaign as a whole perfectly evinced the inherent untruths in the concept of a noble, chivalrous force that was worn down and overcome with sheer numbers. Hood and Sherman both noted multiple times in which Johnston could have turned and fought on equal terms—and then, after his replacement, Hood did exactly that and was so soundly defeated that it led to Pollard so vehemently speaking against the city’s fall in response.

Ironically, the condemnation laid at Johnston’s feet was, in turn, lauded when performed by Robert E. Lee. Lee's son recalled a description of their retreat from Richmond wherein they retreated "one hundred miles, before its overpowering antagonist, repeatedly presenting front to the latter and giving battle so as to check his progress."[62] He described the retreat as "harassed for seven days by incessant attacks on rear and flank, found itself completely hemmed in by overwhelming masses. Nothing remained to it but its stainless honour, its unbroken courage."[63] Johnston, of course, noted the disparity in their descriptions. "Why, then, should I be condemned for the defensive, while Gen. Lee was adding to his great fame by the same course?"[64] It was, of course, yet another example of an excuse for defeat in one case, and a laurel of honor in the *face* of defeat in another.

Jefferson Davis’ idea of the capabilities of the Army of Tennessee under General Hood surely can be given at least some measure of blame. Pollard makes special note of the way in which he “never spoke of military matters without a certain ludicrous boastfulness” and was “weak, fanciful to excess, and much too vain to keep his own counsels” in military matters.[65] Davis, even after the fall of Atlanta. encouraged Hood on into an offensive campaign with the ideal of recapturing and returning Atlanta to the Confederacy.[66] Hood, however, decided against taking his suggestion, knowing he couldn't take the well-defended Atlanta. He instead decided to "force back by maneuvers into the mountains...or attempt to defeat them upon their march forward."[67] He figured that Sherman would advance toward Richmond and prepared to operate behind the lines of his arm.[68] However, during his attempts to maneuver around Sherman's

[58] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 141.
[59] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 141.
[60] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 150.
[61] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 162.
[62] Robert Edward Lee, *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee*, ed. Robert E. Lee Jr. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1904), 148.
[63] Lee, *Recollections and Letters*, 150.
[64] Johnston, *Memoir of the Life and Public Service*, 297.
[65] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 581.
[66] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 582.
[67] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 244.
[68] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 246.

forces, Sherman instead realized a different course. To defend against Hood's marauding cavalry, he instead planned to forage supplies from the countryside, cutting off his reliance on the North; simultaneously, he burned the industrial capacity of Atlanta, rendering its recapture military pointless.[69] With those two acts he marched deeper into Georgia, toward Savannah, mostly unimpeded.[70]

Pollard again lambasted Hood for his decision, claiming that Sherman's march would have been "a perilous enterprise, if there had been any considerable force in [his] front" and that it was the fault of "the stupidity of the Davis-Hood campaign" that left it open to his attack; he excoriated Sherman for his vainglory in having "such a plain march entitled a grand exploit."[71] In the same breath, he admonished Hood and Davis for having been hoodwinked and outmaneuvered—facets of the campaign which he attributes to their failures rather than Sherman's success. That he speaks so harshly of Jefferson Davis while, in the same breath, calling the Confederacy the "better men" in the struggle is, of course, one of many instances of hypocrisy.

Aiming the finger of blame was a common circumstance for the South. The premise of being commanded by better men is only applicable for them when chosen to be—another prime example being that of General William Mahone in the aftermath of the war. Responsible for "[leading] the South's most successful independent coalition of black and white Republicans and white Democrats" known as Readjusters.[72] Renowned and reviled in the South for his role in party, which boasted "African Americans play[ing] a prominent role in shaping the party's platform." Mahone's political affiliations drew the ire of Lost Cause advocates, who "assailed him" by attacking his record in war.[73] It got to the point that Jubal Early nearly challenged Mahone to a duel over their exchanges in the newspapers—due to Mahone's own discrediting of Early and other Confederate officers as a means of elevating his own reputation.[74] Mahone's attempts to grant himself more importance as a result of his wartime career angered others who saw it as a slight on their military honor—while doing the exact same thing themselves, albeit for a separate cause.[75] This narrative is not so important in the grand scheme of a continued victory, but rather another example of the ways in which the Lost Cause's veneer of being the superior, morally upright, chivalric order of officers is easily stripped away to reveal them for the opportunists they, as many are, were.

The irony of the Confederate leadership in the wake of its defeat is palpable. When defeated, the fault was never with their own command, nor their own soldiers, but rather the performances of their fellow generals, or the government that backed them or the spirit of the populace behind them. These excuses were bandied around without any common acceptance of their target—Sherman and Grant and portrayed as thuggish, brutal generals with no grasp of strategy or tactics… who somehow managed to overcome the Confederates, not by any skill of their own, but rather the press of greater numbers. They tacitly ignored the fact that obtaining numerical superiority and maintaining it even while on extensive offensive operations *is* a skillful military maneuver, as well as ignored previous battles in which they did win against

[69] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman*, 169.
[70] Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman,* 201.
[71] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 583.
[72] Kevin M. Levin, "William Mahone, the Lost Cause, and Civil War History." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 113, no. 4 (2005), 380.
[73] Levin, "William Mahone, the Lost Cause, and Civil War History," 380.
[74] Levin, "William Mahone, the Lost Cause, and Civil War History," 385.
[75] Levin, "William Mahone, the Lost Cause, and Civil War History," 408.

superior numbers. They attributed so much to the superior ability of their soldiers that they maintained that, with a bit more support from the home front, victory was still within their grasp. Certainly, whether for the sake of troop morale or just to honor their fighters, Lee and nearly every other Confederate general claimed their men were the superior force under arms. But even if the spirit of the Confederacy remained firmly in place, how likely was it that they not only could have successfully fended off the Union but maintained their troops in the field? By what means could the Confederacy continue the fight and carry it on until the victory point?

Maintaining a war is expensive. This was a certain fact for both the North and the South—however, as the war went on, it became evident that the North had a far superior ability to maintain an economy while still equipping and fielding armies. A comprehensive study of the impact of the war on the economy of the South was made in a study by Marc D. Weidenmier. "During the American Civil War, both the United States and Confederate governments printed large amounts of fiat money to finance the war."[76] Tracking the price of a single Confederate note as it equated to a gold dollar, by the end of the war it had increased by nearly seven thousand percent.[77] Looking at the spikes in prices, the biggest changes occurred following Antietam and Gettysburg, respectively—suggesting that investors both North and South recognized the importance of the two battles: Antietam as "a crucial turning point that ended the prospect of a short war" and Gettysburg as "a turning point that increased the North's victory prospects while dealing a crushing blow to the Confederacy."[78] While a war is of course more than the money that investors are willing to trade, it does show the effects of the war on their economies—and, more importantly, the increasing financial strain on the South as the war carried on. Not only that, but monetary struggles carried over into every other aspect of the war. For one, it became inordinately clear that the effects of Sherman's Georgia campaign and the later March to the Sea devastated the Confederacy's interior beyond repair. Hood stated that:

> The size of Atlanta in no manner hindered the destruction of our railway line of communications which, in the exhausted condition of our resources the last year of war, we were no wise competent to re-establish when great damage had been committed. We had neither material nor the force to repair them.[79]

Paired with Pollard's own account of the import of Atlanta's fall, clearly it can be determined that Sherman's operations came at devastating loss—and, in addition, the South had no means of recuperating or recovering. Pollard summarized the total losses to stunning effect:

> [The] war closed on a spectacle of ruin, the greatest of modern times. There were eleven great States lying prostrate; their capital all absorbed; their fields desolate; their towns and cities ruined; their public works torn to pieces by armies; their system of labour [sic] overturned; the fruits of the toil of generations all swept into a chaos of destruction; their slave property taken away by a stroke of the pen; a pecuniary loss of two thousand millions of dollars...[80]

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[76] Marc D. Weidenmier, "Turning Points in the U.S. Civil War: Views from the Grayback Market," *Southern Economic Journal* 68, no. 4 (2002): 877.
[77] Weidenmier, "Turning Points," 879.
[78] Weidenmier, "Turning Points," 885.
[79] Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 148.
[80] Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 743.

Even with an army in full morale, even with a populace entirely behind them, there simply was no fight left in the Confederacy. Their ability to rely on being the better men, to carry on against the struggle at all odds, had been thrown in their face time and again with the campaigns of 1864 and 1865. Their infallible generals, for whatever reasons, had begun to fail in the face of the public. Quite literally everything fell apart for them in the end times of the war, where every soldier under arms faced starvation, and a severe lack of supply made maintaining a fight impossible. Had they chosen to carry on the struggle, it would have been with their bare hands. Such an ignoble end to what was thought to be a noble rebellion in the spirit of Washington was, of course, a colossal blow to the Southern ethos—and why they invented a fantasy world in which their defeat was not a matter of simple course, but rather a humanitarian, gallant effort through which they decided to spare the rest of the nation the long war. Fortunately for the sake of the citizens of the United States, they were quite wrong.