

**AMERICAN CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF AUSTRALIA
(NEW SOUTH WALES CHAPTER)**

**WHO WAS THE CIVIL WAR'S
PREMIER CAVALRY COMMANDER?**

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It is generally accepted that at least for the first two years of the Civil War, the Confederate cavalry was far more effective than their Union counterparts and it was not until the appointment of Sheridan and Wilson that this began to change. This earlier superiority was mainly due to the efforts of Wade Hampton, Fitzhugh Lee, Rooney Lee, JEB Stuart and N B Forrest.

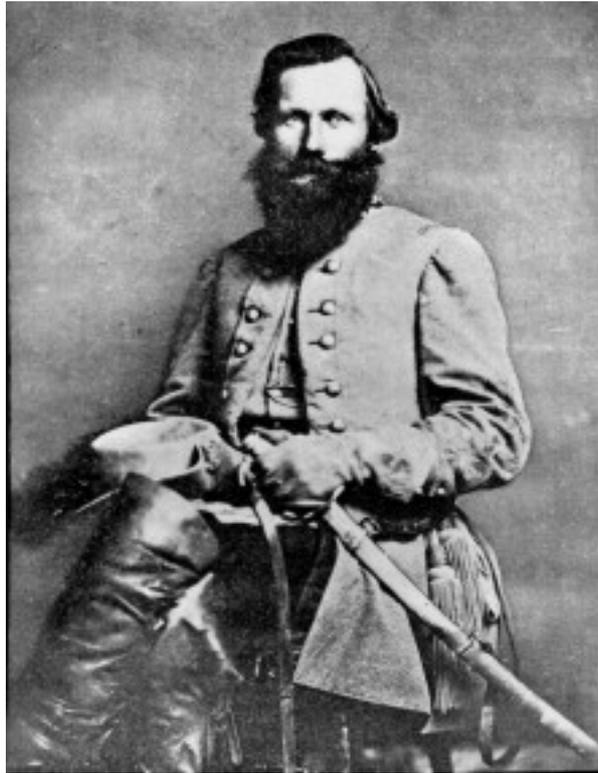
Of these Confederate generals two stand out, Major General JEB Stuart and Lieutenant General Nathan B Forrest, and what a contrast between these two commanders. Stuart the son of an influential Virginian family, graduate of West Point whose forebears had fought the British in the Revolutionary War whilst Forrest was the eldest of ten children whose father died shortly after the family moved to Marshall County, Mississippi. At thirteen, Forrest assumed the responsibility of supporting his mother and family.

Stuart's fame was initially influenced by his association with Jackson and later, and more importantly, with Lee. In contrast to these positive associations, Forrest had to deal with Generals Floyd, Pillow and Buckner at Fort Donelson, then later, Bragg and Hood.

In seeking to judge the relative effectiveness of each of these cavalry commanders it is essential that the quality of the Union leadership in the Eastern Theatre vis-à-vis that in the Western Theatre be considered. In this paper, the performances of these Confederate cavalry commanders are examined and an opinion presented as to who was the best leader of cavalry in the Civil War.

Terry Cartwright

THE CONTENDERS -



MAJOR GENERAL JEB STUART - BEAUTY



LIEUTENANT GENERAL NATHAN B FORREST – THE WIZARD

Major General J.E.B. Stuart – “Beauty”

James Ewell Brown (JEB) Stuart was born in Patrick County Virginia on February 6, 1833. The first of the Stuarts landed in America in 1726, his forebears fighting in the Revolutionary war and his father in the War of 1812. His father was a representative in the Virginia Legislature who married Elizabeth Letcher Pannill, a descendant of the distinguished Letcher family; actually Letcher was governor of Virginia at the outbreak of the war. In 1850, at the age of seventeen Stuart was appointed to West Point.

Stuart's classmates called him “Beauty Stuart” apparently in reverse to the compliment implied. Later, on service in Texas he let his whiskers grow and his fellow officers wrote back to friends saying that “Beauty” was the first man a beard ever improved. He graduated in 1854 and was commissioned Second Lieutenant in October of that year. During his time at West Point, one of his instructors was Captain George Thomas, later to earn fame as “The Rock of Chickamauga”, while the superintendent was Lieutenant Colonel Robert E Lee.

Stuart served in Texas with the mounted riflemen until transferred to the First Cavalry Regiment in May 1855. On 14th November of that year, he was married to Flora, the daughter of Colonel Philip St George Cooke and, in the following month was promoted First Lieutenant. Stuart remained on the frontier in Kansas and was wounded in a skirmish with the Indians at Solomons River in 1857. In Washington in 1859 he is ordered to carry secret instructions to Colonel Lee and then accompanied him to Harpers Ferry where the marines stormed the engine house and captured John Brown and his followers.

When war broke out, one of Flora's sisters went south while another went north, with her brother following Stuart to the Confederacy. Colonel Cooke, although he was born a Virginian, remained loyal to the Union becoming a general in the United States Cavalry. Stuart received a US commission as captain in April 1861 but he had decided to go with Virginia and resigned this commission. He was commissioned a major of infantry by Governor Letcher on 6th May 1861. Shortly afterwards he was made a lieutenant colonel, and in July 1861 a colonel of cavalry.

First Manassas and The Peninsula Battles

Both Jackson and Johnston used Stuart extensively and he became the eyes of the army. He screened Johnston's movement to Manassas and in the fighting on 21st July 1861 his men made a very effective charge on the Union's forces at Henry Hill. Jubal Early later wrote:

“Stuart did as much toward saving the Battle of First Manassas as any subordinate who participated in it.”

After the battle Johnston kept Stuart with him at Centreville, holding a high opinion of the cavalryman's abilities as an outpost officer and considered him a man upon whom he could depend to furnish early and accurate information of the enemy's movements. On August, 10 Johnston sent to Jefferson Davis a recommendation that Stuart be promoted. This request was endorsed by General Longstreet and Governor Letcher of Virginia and Stuart was promoted to Brigadier General of Cavalry in the Provisional Army of the Confederate States on September 24, 1861. Following some minor actions he was transferred to the Peninsula covering the retreat from Yorktown, opening the fighting at Williamsburg and securing the Confederate Army's retreat to the outskirts of Richmond.

On 31 May 1862 Johnston attacked the Federals at Seven Pines where he was wounded and General Lee was appointed to command in his place. On June 11, Lee gave orders to

Stuart to conduct movements to the rear of the enemy's position on the Chickahominy River with a view to gathering intelligence. History now records the admiration of both North and South at his brilliant ride around McClellan's army. The ride itself was not of great tactical significance but it gave the South a great boost in morale while it humiliated General McClellan in his ability to contain the efforts of the Confederacy. Lincoln was not impressed by what happened and his regard for McClellan began to diminish.

The Seven Days Battles

Stuart's cavalry was actively engaged in this conflict covering Jackson's approach. They engaged infantry detachments and artillery and were continuously involved from June 26 until July 10, when Lee withdrew towards Richmond behind the regular cavalry screen. At the White House Stuart's men actually attacked the gunboat USS Marblehead with Pelham's battery.

The Second Manassas

On 25 July 1862 Stuart is promoted to Major General and placed in command of all the cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia. Stuart observed that the Union cavalry under Buford and Bayard began to be more aggressive under General Pope's instructions. At Verdiersville on August 18 he was nearly captured by the 1st Michigan Cavalry leaving behind his red-lined cloak and plumed hat. Stuart is alleged to have said:

"I intend to make the Yankees pay dearly for that hat."

Cavalry skirmishing continued before Stuart was given permission to demonstrate in the rear of Pope's army, capturing Catlett's Station and later Pope's headquarters securing the general's correspondence together with his uniforms. Pope was fortunate in being absent from his headquarters.

On August 27, Stuart and the regiments of General Trimble captured the Federal's depot at Manassas Junction with its huge stores of armaments, ammunition and foodstuffs. What was not taken away was destroyed. Apart from a small clash at Brandy Station there was little conflict of cavalry with cavalry. Stuart's men were predominantly involved in screening the movements of Jackson's troops as well as gathering intelligence for his superiors.

Antietam

In early September, the Confederate army moved into Maryland hoping that the residents of that state would join the Confederate cause. At Antietam, Stuart's men were engaged principally in protecting the army's flanks and gathering intelligence.

Fredericksburg

Again at Fredericksburg the cavalry had little to do. Between the Antietam and Fredericksburg campaigns, however, Stuart carried out what is now known as the Chambersburg raid. On 9 October 1862, he set out on a daring raid in which he got all the way to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania where his forces destroyed supply depots, rail lines seizing one thousand horses and getting back safely without a man killed. Once again he had ridden around McClellan's army. Unfortunately for McClellan he had made a request at this time for more horses, saying his cavalry mounts were:

"Absolutely broken down from fatigue and want of flesh"

Lincoln was said to reply:

“Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army had done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything?”

Chancellorsville

At Chancellorsville Stuart's cavalry was instrumental in providing the intelligence that allowed Jackson to completely surprise the Union army. When Jackson was mortally wounded and A P Hill injured, Stuart took command of the 2nd Corps. With courage and brilliant leadership he continued to drive the Union troops and remained in command of the corps until Hooker retreated across the Rappahannock. On Jackson's death Lee appointed General R S Ewell as commander of the corps. Many considered that Stuart should have been given the position but perhaps Lee wished to have Stuart continue as the eyes and ears of the Army. After the battle Lee undertook a reorganisation of the Army of Northern Virginia in which he had A P Hill promoted Lieutenant General and placed in charge of the 3rd Corps of the Army.

On 8 May 1863, Stuart organised a review of the cavalry between Brandy Station and Culpeper at which General Lee was present. The next day Union cavalry under Pleasanton crossed the Rappahannock and attacked Stuart's division in the vicinity of the reviewing grounds. The battle continued throughout the day until Pleasanton, on receiving reports of approaching Confederate infantry, ordered a withdrawal which was carried out in good order. For the first time Stuart suffered a surprise both in attack and the quality of fighting skill of the Union cavalry that was to be a foretaste of Sheridan and Yellow Tavern.

Gettysburg

Shortly after the Battle of Brandy Station, Lee's Confederate army moved north again. Stuart's cavalry was constantly involved in skirmishing with the Union horsemen while screening the movements of Lee's forces. Stuart's conduct at Gettysburg has long been a subject of controversy. He was ordered by Lee to continue screening the advance while gathering intelligence. He went off on raids, however, was delayed and arrived at Gettysburg too late to provide Lee with vital information on the position and movements of the Union troops. When Stuart rejoined Lee late on July 2, the battle was already raging with his exhausted men being of little help. Lee ordered Stuart to attack Meade's rear echelons but General Pleasanton was able to negate any efforts by Stuart. In the following retreat from Gettysburg, Stuart's men performed admirably and at great cost in saving the Confederate ambulances and supply trains.

During the winter of 1863/64 Stuart continued to supply intelligence concerning Northern troop movements. There was little contact between the cavalry units of both armies until Sheridan commenced his drive towards Richmond. One target of Sheridan's attack was Stuart's cavalry itself and with 12,000 men he did not intend to manoeuvre but to “crash straight through”. On 11 May 1864 Stuart's men were defeated and Stuart himself mortally wounded at Yellow Tavern. Taken by ambulance back to Richmond, Stuart died late in the afternoon of the following day.

Stuart possessed the resolute character of the true cavalry leader. He was fortunate to command men who were born horsemen and natives of Virginia, opposed for at least two years by less enterprising forces that were recruited in more ordinary circumstances. Yet it is undeniable that he possessed the gift of a great leader. Sometimes his energies were

wasted on unnecessary raids, but in regard to his performance in the exhausting and vital service of security and reconnaissance, General Joseph Johnson could ask:

“How can I sleep unless he is on the outpost?”

or General Lee could say:

“He never brought me a false report.”

It is said that Stuart believed a man couldn't be whipped until he admitted that he was whipped. He could never acknowledge defeat as letters to his wife would show. After Brandy Station he wrote:

“God has spared me through another bloody battle and blessed with victory our arms.”

After Gettysburg:

“... we got the better of the fight at Gettysburg, but retired because the position could not be held.”

After the Wilderness:

“... We have beaten the enemy badly but he is not yet in full retreat.”

This and other correspondence seemed to indicate he lived in another world completely unaware of reality and prone to exaggeration. He was super-sensitive and always rose to criticism particularly after Virginian newspapers wrote critically about the Brandy Station battle.

He loved pomp, music, with a laugh always at his lips. He dressed exotically and preserved under all circumstances the gaiety of a cavalier. No doubt he was one of the most brilliant leaders of cavalry in the Civil War.

In 1907 an equestrian statue of him was unveiled on Monument Avenue in Richmond. Like Jackson the statue faces north indicating he died in the service of the Confederacy.

Lieutenant-General Nathan Bedford Forest – The Wizard of the Saddle

Nathan Bedford Forrest was born on 13 July 1821 in the hamlet of Chapel Hill in Middle Tennessee, the first son of William Forrest, blacksmith, and Miriam Beck. In 1834, the family moved to Tippah County in northern Mississippi. When his father died, Forrest, at sixteen, had to take over the responsibility of providing for the family. In 1842 he joined his uncle in a livestock and livery stable business. Three years later his uncle was killed in a dispute with four men in Hernando Mississippi. Nathan involved himself in this fight, killing one and wounding two others before driving them off and capturing the fourth member of the gang.

In 1845 he met, courted and in September of that year married Mary Ann Montgomery, a well educated young woman. Six years later he moved the family to Memphis and within ten years made his fortune dealing in cotton, plantations, livestock and slaves, becoming one of the richest men in Tennessee.

On 1 July 1861, six days after Tennessee joined the Confederacy, Forrest enlisted as a private in Captain White's troop. However on August 10, Governor Harris of Tennessee approached Forrest to recruit a battalion of Mounted Rangers under the authority of the Confederate States. Forrest equipped the troops out of his own resources and was later elected Lieutenant Colonel of the battalion.

Fort Donelson

Forrest was ordered to Fort Donelson and his men were heavily involved in the attack on the right wing of Grant's army, meeting with success in driving the Union's forces back. The Union's left wing struck, however, and drove the Confederates out making a good lodgment in their works. That night, Generals Lloyd, Pillow and Buckner decided to surrender, but not before Lloyd and Pillow got out with some of their troops. Forrest advised the generals that he was not surrendering and was able to take his own men and other troops out to safety. It was then left to General Buckner to surrender the command. On leaving the fort, Forrest lead his men to Nashville some eighty miles away where he was involved in ensuring the transfer of huge quantities of Confederate armaments, stores and supplies to their headquarters at Murfreesborough.

Shiloh

On 4 April 1862 Forrest advanced with his men slowly towards Shiloh. He was involved in screening and guarding the right wing of the army but later was involved in the attack on Prentiss's division at the Hornets Nest where his men performed well. On the second day of the battle, the Union Army, reinforced by Buell's, began to push the Confederates back until General Beauregard ordered the withdrawal. Forrest was placed in charge of the cavalry covering the retreat and, although outnumbered, he saw an opportunity to attack when the Union line became disorganised. He continued to attack even though the rest of his command had stopped. Surrounded, he continued fighting from horseback even after being shot at point blank range, the bullet lodging in his spine. Nevertheless, he seized a Union soldier, pulled him up on to his horse behind him, dropping him when he was out of range. He was sent back to Memphis but the bullet was not removed at that time. Some weeks later the bullet moved and had to be removed by an operation without anaesthetics. Again, within two weeks, he was back at Corinth Mississippi.

Independent Operations

From early June 1862 until January 1863 Forrest was involved in operations in Tennessee. He had been ordered to Chattanooga to take command of various state formations and to train them for excursions into Tennessee and Kentucky. At Murfreesborough, the Union garrison surrendered to Forrest. The bag of prisoners was some 1400 with a considerable quantity of arms and equipment. Forrest even made sorties virtually to the outskirts of Nashville drawing off considerable enemy forces to chase him.

In late September, Forrest was ordered to meet General Bragg, who instructed him to go back into Tennessee to raise infantry and cavalry and to operate against the enemy in all practicable ways. He was promoted Brigadier General effective from 21 July 1862.

Again, near Murfreesborough, Forrest began the work of making raw troops into soldiers – Forrest's type of soldier! His force was acutely short of arms and equipment and his appeals to authorities were in vain, so Forrest came to the conclusion that his best source of supply was to be the Union army.

On January 3, Forrest's force rejoined the Army of Tennessee after the retreat from the battle of Stones River. Fifteen days earlier they had gone into West Tennessee ill-equipped and green in their organisation. They came back equipped with the best the Federals afforded and even a surplus stock of equipment. They were now keen and trained! They had demolished miles of rail lines, captured stores and munitions and virtually destroyed Grant's line of supply, thereby delaying his campaign against Vicksburg and saving valuable time for the Confederacy. They had killed or captured more Union troops than they themselves had. In fact Forrest returned to the Army with more men than he started with. Their exploits received official congratulations from the Confederate Congress and even from General Bragg.

Without much rest Forrest and his men were ordered to assist in further action. They were constantly engaged in skirmishes and battles around Spring Hill and Thompson Station. On 24 March 1863, Forrest captured Brentwood with 759 prisoners. Shortly after he was advised that Union Colonel Streight with 2200 cavalry was moving through Alabama. On March 29, Forrest commenced the pursuit of Streight which lasted four days and nights with constant skirmishing and often serious fights. On May 3, after brilliant maneuvering, he stopped Streight at Lawrence some twenty miles west of Rome Georgia, forcing him to accept terms of surrender. In fact, 1700 Federals were captured by no more than 600 Confederates.

Chickamauga

From this time to the battle of Chickamauga in September 1863, Forrest and his men were constantly engaged in Middle and Eastern Tennessee. In late June, Rosecrans commenced his advance from around Murfreesborough against Bragg and Forrest was heavily involved in screening Bragg's retreat and gathering intelligence to assist in predicting Rosecrans's intentions. At the battle of Chickamauga his men, now dismounted, fought with the infantry on the Confederate's right wing until the Union retreat began. Mounting his men, Forrest followed the retreat until within three miles of Chattanooga. He communicated with headquarters urging an immediate advance by the Confederates to take advantage of the confusion and chaos within the Union ranks, but to no avail. On the last day of the battle General DH Hill, recently transferred from Virginia, rode by where Forrest's men were fighting. He asked "*What infantry is that?*" "*Forrest's cavalry, sir*" was the reply. Hill, not known for his appreciation of cavalry, was impressed. Hard, slogging fighting was the domain of the infantry but there was little of the orthodox about the cavalry Forrest led.

Further Independent Operations

On October 3, Forrest was ordered by Bragg to relinquish the majority of his command to General Wheeler. Regarding this as a slight on his competence, he resigned his commission, giving Bragg a tongue lashing and thereby ending his career in Bragg's army.

Jefferson Davis refused to accept his resignation, but promoted him to the rank of Major General and assigned him to the command of North Mississippi and West Tennessee and gave him permission to take with him his old battalion, now known as McDonald's, and Morton's battery, which he had organised, and whose guns he had captured – the whole force amounting to three hundred men and four guns. He reached Mississippi with this force on 15 November 1863. After reporting to General Joseph E Johnston and receiving the assistance of Major General S D Lee to pass the enemy's line on the Memphis and the Charleston railroad, he reached Jackson in Tennessee on December 6, 1863 and, for the fourth time during the War, began to organise a new command. At this time, West Tennessee was full of small companies of ten to thirty men, willing to fight, but unwilling to go far from home or into the infantry service. The arrival of Forrest was the signal for all these men to rally around him, and by December 23, he had collected a force of about 3,000 men, all but about 200 unarmed.

From here Forrest concentrated on turning these new recruits into a cohesive fighting unit. On 21 February 1864, he encountered Brigadier William Sooy Smith on the Union commander's advance into Eastern Mississippi. For three days of fighting, Forrest, with 2500 men, the majority of whom were fighting their first battle, routed the Union force comprising 7500 of the Union's best cavalry in the west, sending them retreating rapidly back to Memphis. The next year would be the pinnacle of Forrest's military career, commencing his embarrassment to the many Union commanders sent to fight against him.

On March 16, Forrest moved towards West Tennessee and Kentucky. On March 24, his troops captured Union City in Northern Tennessee taking 500 prisoners, again more than the men Forrest used against the city. Later, the Confederate cavalry threatened Columbus and Paducah in Kentucky, picking up much needed horses and supplies.

Fort Pillow was located sixty kilometres north of Memphis. It had been built and occupied originally by the Confederates but, after the fall of Fort Donelson, was abandoned and later occupied by the Federals. On 12 April 1864 Forrest's men began their assault on the fort. Subsequently, Forrest demanded unconditional surrender but was refused. The Confederates renewed their attack and overran the fort. Of the 262 coloured troops only 62 survived. Of the total Union garrison of 557 there were 231 killed, 100 wounded and the remainder captured. The Confederates suffered only 14 killed and 86 wounded. From all reports it is obvious that numerous coloured troops and some white troops were massacred. The controversy of what actually happened at the fort continues to the present day. Whether Forrest ordered or condoned the atrocities will never be known for sure, but as commander he must be held responsible for what happened.

After the Fort Pillow attack and prior to his return to Jackson, Tennessee, Forrest learnt of the death of his brother Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Forrest, the second of his brothers to meet his death in the service of the Confederacy. His other brother Colonel Jeffrey Forrest had fallen near Okolona, Mississippi.

Prior to Sherman commencing his drive to Atlanta, his worst fear was not so much the Confederate forces but Forrest cutting the railroad lines from Louisville Kentucky through Nashville to Chattanooga, stopping forward movement of his supplies.

Battle of Brice's Cross Roads

On 1 June 1864, Brigadier General Sturgis left Memphis with 3000 cavalry and 5000 infantry with the instruction to "smash things" in North Mississippi, arriving on June 9 at Stubbs Farm near Brice's Cross Roads. On the following day Forrest arrived at the crossroads to find the Union cavalry had already occupied the location.

Forrest attacked and after a fierce battle that raged for some hours broke the Union cavalry which in disorder fell back on the infantry before it could be formed. General panic ensued and the Confederates fiercely pursued the Union troops for sixty miles. The Union losses were approximately 620 killed and wounded with in excess of 1600 prisoners taken. Confederate losses amounted to 500 killed and wounded. In addition, the Federals lost all their guns, huge amounts of munitions and more than 200 wagons of foodstuffs, medical supplies and other stores. While it can be agreed that Union tactics were poor, by all accounts, whether Union or Confederate, the battle was the most brilliant and emphatic victory of the War on either side.

On June 26, Major General A J Smith moved out of Memphis with 14,000 troops arriving at Harrisburg near Tupelo on July 13 and readied themselves for attack which came at 7.30 am the following day. The Confederates commenced their advance but were repulsed with great loss; 1259 were killed or wounded, approximately 45% of those actually involved in the attack. Owing to shortages in supplies Smith moved back to Memphis. The Union casualties were less than half of those suffered by the Confederates. During fighting Forrest was wounded in the foot and was forced to relinquish command to General Chalmers.

General Smith again left Memphis on July 26 and through atrocious weather moved to a position near Oxford, Mississippi. His forces totalled 15000, whereas Forrest could only bring about 5000 men to oppose him. Forrest, knowing he could not successfully oppose Smith, decided on another tactic. With approximately 2000 troopers he slipped away from Oxford without the knowledge of Smith and made for Memphis. On August 21, his force made a raid into Memphis nearly capturing General Washburn, the area commander. As Forrest predicted, his raid had the effect of Smith's command being recalled to Memphis. The only benefit to the Union command of these offensives against Forrest was that up to that time they kept him from interfering with Sherman's supply lines to his armies in Georgia.

In September 1864, Forrest met with Lieutenant General Richard Taylor in Mobile. Atlanta had fallen to Sherman on the second day of that month and it was decided to use all efforts to assist Hood's army. Forrest was ordered to again move north of the Tennessee River and harrass Sherman's communications. On September 16, Forrest began his move and with great rapidity crossed the Tennessee River, captured stockades and their garrisons, burned bridges, destroyed railways, drove away gunboats, captured and destroyed transports with huge quantities of stores and spread alarm over a wide region. The Union forces concentrated on him from all directions but he eluded them and captured over 1500 prisoners and much needed ordinance, medical and commissary supplies. However, the expedition "failed" in that it came too late. Sherman was able to concentrate at Atlanta and was ready to begin his epic march through Georgia to the sea. No sooner had Forrest returned, when he was ordered back to Western Tennessee. On November 4, he arrived at Johnsville on the Tennessee River and proceeded to destroy the town which was a major depot for storing supplies. The expedition resulted in a loss to the Union of four gunboats, fourteen steamboats, barges and quartermaster's stores estimated in excess of 75,000 tons. The next day, Forrest received orders to join General Hood in his march to Nashville.

All these raids confirmed several aspects of Forrest's leadership. First, he was a master of topography and had a great knowledge of the huge areas in which he operated. It is difficult to see how he would have operated in charge of a large army but, above all, he excelled in carrying out the many independent expeditions he led. He was aggressive in attack but

always ready to improvise and change his tactics. On all occasions, his marches were preceded by clouds of scouts roaming the country in all directions keeping him constantly informed as to the resources and dispositions of the enemy. He was to become leader of cavalry acting as part of an army of mixed forces. In this campaign, both on the advance and the retreat, however, Forrest proved that he could cover the movements of the infantry as brilliantly as he performed his independent raids.

Spring Hill, Franklin and Nashville

On the advance to Spring Hill and Franklin, Forrest's men carried out the normal duties of cavalry covering the army's flanks and harassing the rearguard of the Union forces. At Franklin it was clear to all that the Union troops occupied an extremely strong position. Forrest strongly urged Hood to:

"... give me one strong division of infantry with my cavalry and within two hours time I can flank the Federals from their works."

Hood refused and it is now history what happened. The Army of Tennessee was crippled by the loss of 6000 men and the cream of its leadership.

In early December Forrest was ordered to Murfreesboro to attack the strong garrison there. Forrest immediately concluded that the Federals were so strongly entrenched that the position could not be attacked directly with any hope of success. On December 15, Thomas advanced against Hood. On the following day Forrest moved back to join the Confederate army after it had given way in one of the few routs of the War. On December 25, Forrest was placed in charge of the rearguard with 4000 cavalry and approximately 2000 infantry. For eight days and over eighty miles Forrest's command shepherded what was left of Hood's army from Columbia to the Tennessee River. Forrest's efforts have been compared to those of Marshal Ney in the French army's retreat from Moscow.

Since 28 February 1865, Forrest had been a lieutenant general, a rank more in keeping with the size and difficulties of his responsibilities than with the strength of the forces and resources available to do what was expected of him. On 18 March 1865, General Wilson crossed the Tennessee River with 12,500 mounted men armed with Spencer repeating carbines. Forrest attempted to defend Alabama but Wilson with these forces overpowered the Confederate defenders and captured Selma on April 2, destroying all the Confederate manufacturing facilities. The flag of the United States was raised on April 10, over the original Capitol of the Confederate States at Montgomery, Alabama. Forrest, in the meantime, retreated to Gainesville near the Mississippi border where the news of Lee's surrender reached him. He was urged to flee to Mexico but chose to share the fate of his men and surrendered and on 9 May 1865 farewelled his troops saying:

"...You have been good soldiers, you can be good citizens. Obey the laws, preserve your honour, and the government to which you have surrendered can afford to be and will be magnanimous."

So ended the military career of Forrest – The Wizard of the Saddle.

Wiped out financially by the War, he resumed planting, but for a man who was a millionaire when war broke out, he filed for bankruptcy in February 1868 giving up his property for the benefit of his creditors. Joining the Ku Klux Klan in 1867, he apparently was appointed Grand Wizard, but is said to have disbanded the organisation in 1869 because of its violence. In 1868 he became president of a railroad which he had helped promote. He resigned in 1874 and in his last years struggled with debts arising from the railroad ventures.

On 29 October 1877 he died, probably of diabetes, aged 56. He was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Memphis but was removed in 1905 to his final resting place with his wife beneath the equestrian statue of him in Forrest Park.

Conclusion

When endeavouring to make comparisons of these two generals, account should be given to the views of their respective friends and foes.

Certainly Generals Joseph Johnston and Lee thought highly of Stuart as did Stonewall Jackson and the rest of the Confederate hierarchy in Richmond. Little or no reference or comment can be found to the views by Union generals as to their opinions of Stuart.

In Forrest's case, bearing in mind the bias in favour of West Point graduates in the Confederate mind, General Joseph Johnston has said:

"...if Forrest had been an educated soldier no other Confederate general would have been heard of."

Johnston was later reported to say:

"General Forrest was the greatest soldier the Civil War produced even according to Lee and Jackson the full measure of their fame."

Again, it is reported that after the surrender at Appamattox, when asked by a Union officer who he thought his greatest general was, Lee is alleged to have replied:

"Sir, a gentleman I have never had the pleasure to meet, General Nathan Bedford Forrest."

Those who came against Forrest came to an early realisation that this was no common soldier and no ordinary commander. Grant reflecting upon the whole course of the Civil War he rated Forrest as:

"about the ablest cavalry general in the South."

Sherman made many comments about Forrest including:

"...that devil Forrest who must be hunted down and killed if it costs ten thousand lives and bankrupts the Federal treasury"

"...the most remarkable man our civil war produced on either side"

Again, Sherman who was considered to be a great strategist said of Forrest:

"...he had a genius for strategy which was original, and to me incomprehensible. There was no theory or art of war by which I could calculate with any degree of certainty what Forrest was up to. He always seemed to know what I was going to do next."

Thomas speaking of Hood's army after the battle of Nashville, said:

"With the exception of his rearguard his army had become a disheartened and disorganised rabble... The rearguard was undaunted and firm and did its work bravely to the last."

Hardly could a soldier have won more sincere recognition from those against whom he fought.

Perhaps the most unbiased opinion of Forrest came out of a meeting during the First World War when a British officer and US Colonel Seviars met in a rare bookshop in London. The British officer remarked that he was looking for a copy of Wyeth's life of Forrest. He went on to say that officers of the British cavalry service studied Forrest's campaigns and methods and regarded him as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of English speaking commanders of mounted troops. The British officer was Sir Douglas Haig whose troops had just fought and won the first battle of Ypres in France.

Based on all available information including various opinions expressed from both sides of the conflict, the most reasonable conclusion that can be drawn is that the Wizard of the Saddle, Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest, was the best commander of cavalry, both in the Confederate Army and throughout the Civil War itself.

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