



John Bell Hood: A Bid For Fame

LTC Daniel C. Warren

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John Bell Hood was appointed to the United States Military Academy from Kentucky and graduated 44th in a class of 52 in July 1853. The next eight years were spent in infantry duties in California and cavalry service in Texas. With the outbreak of the Civil War Hood resigned his commission and entered the Confederate Army as a resident of Texas.

Originally appointed a first lieutenant he served on the Virginia peninsula in 1861 and received rapid promotion to major from Brigadier General John Magruder. By September 30, 1861, he was the Colonel of the Fourth Texas Regiment under Brigadier Louis T. Wigfall. When the latter resigned, Hood, who was engaged to Wigfall's daughter, was promoted in March 1862 to brigade command, over more experienced officers.

During the Peninsular Campaign, Hood actively sought opportunities for combat and established a reputation as an offensively-minded, daring combat leader. He received favorable mentions in official reports, especially at Gaines' Mill, though taking heavy casualties. At Second Manassas, it became necessary for the Corps commander, Longstreet, to caution him against over-rapid advancement. His first clash with a fellow officer (Evans) also occurred at this time, resulting in Hood's arrest. He was released by General Robert E. Lee just prior to Antietam, and the matter dropped. As the result of his efforts he was promoted to major general.

He received a wound in the left arm at Gettysburg after protesting the orders which he received to advance on Little Round Top. Upon recovery he went west with Longstreet, but lost his right leg from a wound at Chickamauga. During his convalescence, he was introduced to Richmond society, and became well acquainted with Jefferson Davis, an enemy of Wigfall. He broke his engagement to Louise Wigfall, and transferred his affections to socialite Sally Preston.

Despite his incapacitating wounds, which necessitated his being strapped to a horse in order to ride, Hood was promoted to lieutenant general and sent as a Corps commander to the Army of Tennessee, apparently with a prior understanding with President Davis by which Hood would urge Johnston to the offensive.

During his service under Johnston, Hood systematically undermined the latter's already tenuous relationship with Richmond. He was named a full general and replaced Johnston as commander of the Army of Tennessee July 18, 1864.

Assessment of his subsequent performance as a commander is buried in a mountain of post-war charges and recriminations. Sustaining a series of defeats, he constantly fought with his subordinate commanders and disparaged his troops. In late 1864 he invaded Tennessee, an operation which culminated in the total destruction of his army at Nashville in December 1864. He was subsequently relieved of command at his own request.

Hood's career is characterized by ambition, bravery, and the use of influential friends to gain positions of high responsibility. While his tactical conceptions were sound, they failed at higher levels of command because of his inability to work with subordinates. On various occasions he circumvented or ignored his own superiors. His style of command was modeled after that of Lee but was unsuitable to the Army of Tennessee,

and he demonstrated a lack of managerial and logistical understanding. These factors, with his early successes which carried him to a level beyond his ability, account for his defeat with the Army of Tennessee.

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