

GENERAL JOHN BELL HOOD

excerpt taken from “The Generals of Gettysburg: The Leaders of America's Greatest Battle” by Larry Tagg

On July 1, while the men of Hill's and Ewell's corps were fighting the battle on the first day, Hood was with his division (minus Law's brigade, which was detached) in Greenwood, about 17 miles west of Gettysburg, on the west slope of South Mountain. After waiting all day for Ewell's wagons to pass on the lone road toward Gettysburg, Hood's men finally got moving from Greenwood around 4:00 P.M. and trod 13 miles over the mountain, halting at midnight at Marsh Creek, about 3_ miles west of Gettysburg.



Early the next morning, July 2, Hood's division led McLaws's as both approached Gettysburg. They fell out in the fields west of Seminary Ridge near the Chambersburg Pike while Hood went a short distance forward to Lee's headquarters to confer with Lee and others. Lee's plan was for Hood to follow behind McLaws's men in an attack up the Emmitsburg Road toward Gettysburg, driving in the Union left after a two-mile march to the south to get astride the Union flank--a reprise of Chancellorsville. (This was a curious aspect of the

plan, placing Hood's hard-driving division behind McLaws's, who were not noted for the potency of their attacks.) Hood's men spent the rest of the morning filing back toward Herr Ridge, then indulging the dawdling Longstreet in a three-hour wait while he fretted and waited for Law's brigade.

At noon Law arrived, and Longstreet's two divisions began what was to be a hidden march toward their jump-off positions. They moved south, along the west side of Herr Ridge, with Hood at the rear of the column with Lee and Longstreet. Shortly after the march started, the column stopped. Evidently the head of the column had come to a place at the Black Horse Tavern where the road was visible to enemy scouts on Little Round Top. McLaws suggested starting over and using a new route, and insisted on keeping his place at the head of the procession. So Hood and his men waited while McLaws's men filed back along the column.

The march began again using the new route, south down Willoughby Run. As he neared the end of the march, Hood sent some of his Texan scouts ahead to locate the enemy flank. It soon became clear that the Union left was not where Lee had said it would be--the Yankee line extended much further south than expected. To adjust to the new situation, Longstreet sent Hood and his men further south, into Biesecker's Woods, and changed the attack plan. Hood's division would now attack first up the Emmitsburg Road, drive in the Yankee left, and assist McLaws's men when they attacked later.

Hood deployed his division in Biesecker's Woods in two lines of two brigades each, one line behind the other. In the front, Law's brigade was on the right, Robertson's Texans on the left. Behind them, Benning's brigade was on the right, with "Tige" Anderson's brigade on the left. Hood's scouts had returned with

news that the enemy line ended just north of Little Round Top. With this news, Hood requested a change in the attack order for the first time in his life. He asked Longstreet to be allowed to skirt the enemy left and come in behind the Union defenders.

Longstreet refused--Lee's plan would be adhered to. Hood thought the Union position so strong that he asked a second time to be allowed to improvise a move around the enemy left. Again Longstreet refused. A third time Hood asked, and Longstreet's reply was a peremptory demand to attack immediately as ordered. (Afterward, Hood's proposed flank attack would remain one of the great "what ifs" of the battle of Gettysburg.)

Hood rode to his accustomed place in front of the Texas Brigade and gave a short speech, then stood in his stirrups and boomed, "*Fix bayonets, my brave Texans; forward and take those heights!*" Law's and Robertson's Brigades boiled out of the woods--not north along the Emmitsburg Road as Lee intended, but east toward the Round Tops, on their own initiative. Hood rode forward with Robertson for a short distance and stopped in a peach orchard to watch the progress of his brigades. There, a shell from the Union batteries about 1300 yards to the north exploded above his head, and fragments shredded the entire length of his left arm. Hood reeled in the saddle from the shock, and was lowered to the ground by his aides. He was taken to an ambulance in the Rebel rear and his arm wrapped in bandages. While there, he was so insensible from shock that he did not even notice another shell which exploded almost in his face. The blond giant was out of the battle. Lee would later refer to Hood's wounding as the moment the battle was lost.

Though he lost the use of his arm, Hood's legend was magnified by his

Gettysburg wound. In September, when Hood's division passed through Richmond on their way to reinforce Bragg's Army of Tennessee in the West, Hood joined his troops at the urging of his brigadiers, with his arm in a sling. In the following Battle of Chickamauga, he lost his right leg to a bullet in the thigh. With his mangled body thus hewn by combat, his aura of unbowed ferocity burned at its brightest, as Mary Chesnut attested breathlessly in her diary. Placed at the head of the Army of Tennessee in front of Atlanta in 1864, he finished the war a victim of the Peter Principle. He led that proud army into disaster after disaster, until it was left with only a cadre. Heartbroken after the Battle of Nashville in December 1864, he resigned his commission the next month.

Following are quotes from General Hood which tell us more about his own feelings after the Battle of Gettysburg and beyond. Taken from Hood's own biography, *"Advance & Retreat,"* and from the book by Richard M. MacMurry, *"John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence"*

"After this urgent protest against entering into battle at Gettysburg according to instructions - which protest is the first and only one I ever made during my entire military career - I ordered my line to advance and make the assault." – Gen. John Bell Hood from **"Advance & Retreat"**

"I knew that if the feat was accomplished it must be at a most fearful sacrifice of as brave and gallant soldiers as ever engaged in battle." – General John Bell Hood

"I can assure you, that the gallant hearts that throb beneath its sacred folds, will only be content, when this glorious banner is planted first and foremost in the coming struggle for our independence." – Gen. John Bell Hood

General John Bell Hood – A Biography



A gallant hero. A tall, blonde hair, blue-eyed southern gentleman whose life took a tragic turn after the battles at Gettysburg and Franklin. General Hood is an ancestral cousin of Minnie Mae Hood, the paternal grandmother of Elvis Presley, and 5th cousin of Elvis.

The Hood Family began, like the Pressley family, in North Carolina. The Hoods and Pressleys had intermarried since before the ancestors of General Hood removed to Kentucky. *The American Civil War Biographies: John Bell Hood (1831-79)*

“No one ever questioned the bravery of Confederate General John Bell Hood, but his command of the Army of Tennessee was a disaster for the Confederacy.

Hood was born in Owingsville, Kentucky during 1831. He grew up in Kentucky's

bluegrass region of central Kentucky near Mt. Sterling. His paternal grandfather was Lucas Hood who served in the Indian Wars under famed General "Mad" Anthony Wayne. His grandfather fought at Fallen Timbers. His maternal grandfather James French, served in the Revolutionary War. His father wanted him to be a doctor. Instead Hood through the assistance of an uncle, Congressman Richard French, secured an appointment to West Point. There his academic career was average, but he awarded a large number of demerits--some by Superintendent Col. Robert E. Lee. Despite the demerits, Hood graduated 44th out of 52 in the class of 1853. Hood served in South Carolina and then with the cavalry in Texas. When the Southern states seceded, Hood was awarded a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army of Northern Virginia. He rapidly rose in rank. He was severely wounded at Gettysburg, but upon recovering joined the Army of Tennessee. Hood had proven a daring and effective commander under the command of Lee, but when given command of the Army of Tennessee he proved a disaster. After the War he fathered a large family.

Family

John Bell Hood's paternal grandfather was Lucas Hood who served in the Indian Wars under famed General "Mad" Anthony Wayne. His grandfather fought at Fallen Timbers. His maternal grandfather James French, served in the Revolutionary War. Their stories seem to have made a great impression on their grandson.

Parents

John is often associated with Texas because he served in the U.S. Army there and commanded Texas volunteers in important Civil War battles. He was, however, born in Owingsville, Kentucky during 1831. He grew up in Kentucky's bluegrass region of central Kentucky near Mt. Sterling. His father was a medical doctor, John W. Hood. His mother was Theodosia French Hood.

West Point (1849-53)

His father wanted him to be a doctor. Instead Hood through the assistance of an uncle, Congressman Richard French, secured an appointment to West Point. There his academic career was average, but he awarded a large number of demerits--some by Superintendent Col. Robert E. Lee. Hood received a total of 196 demerits. If he would have received 4 more demerits he would have been expelled. Lee seems to have been extremely irritated with a pre-Christmas celebration at a local tavern. Despite the demerits, Hood managed graduate. He was 44th out of 52 cadets in the class of 1853. Hood would face several of his classmate in Civil War battles. Two of the most important were John M. Schofield (US, Army of the Ohio) and George Thomas (US, Army of the Cumberland).

Army Career (1853-61)

Hood served in South Carolina and then with the cavalry in Texas. After graduating from West Point, Hood was commissioned a brevet second lieutenant in the United States Army. He was assigned to at Fort Scott in California (February 1854). His first action, however, came in Texas. Hood was quickly promoted to second lieutenant of cavalry and assigned to the new 2nd Cavalry

Regiment at Fort Mason, Texas. At the time Texas was the frontier and the Army has the task of protecting settlers from raiding comanches in western Texas. The 2nd Calvary was a storied unit. It was commanded by Col. Albert Sydney Johnston and Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee, two of the finest commanders in the U.S. Army and future Confederate Army. Hood later became known as one of the most wounded of all Civil War commanders. Hood received his first wound in a fire fight at Devil's River (July 20, 1857). A Comanche warrior hit Hood's left hand with an arrow. Native American arrows should not be thought of as ineffectual weapons. Until the development of revolvers and repeating rifles, there were some advantages to the bow and arrow, especially in rapidity of fire. Hood's aggressive actions with the 2nd Calvary were noted. He was ordered to West Point to serve as Chief Instructor of Cavalry (September 1860). Hood requested that the appointment be rescinded. I am not sure if he did not want to teach or did not want to go north at a time of rising sectional tensions.

Civil War (1861-65)

When the Southern states seceded, Hood decided to join the Confederacy even though Kentucky did not secede. Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter (April 13, 1861). Hood 3 days later resigned from the United States Army. He was awarded a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army of Northern Virginia. He rapidly rose in rank. He helped organize the Confederate cavalry involved in resisting McClellan's Peninsula Campaign and then was active during Lee's Seven Day's Campaign (1862). He played an important role at Second Bull Run (1862). Hood led a division at Sharpsburg (Antietam) and his action in the morning fighting probably saved the Army of Northern Virginia. By the end of

1862 Hood was promoted to Major General. While the Army of Northern Virginia survived Antietam, Lee's defeat ended any real chance of a quick Confederate victory. Hood was also active at Fredericksburg (1863). The Army of the Potomac turned Lee back a second time at Gettysburg, again with enormous losses. Hood serving as a division commander under Longstreet was severely wounded, losing the use of his left arm. Hood upon recovering commanded a corps at Chickamauga and was wounded in the leg which had to be amputated. Hood recuperated in Richmond. There he became close to President Jefferson Davis. Davis discussed his plans to reinforce General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee and to launch an offensive targeting General William T. Sherman's forces at Chattanooga, Tennessee. Hood was offered the command of a corps. Davis foresaw an aggressive campaign. Hood was, however, not nearly as effective as he had been as a division commander. It is not clear if his wounds had changed him or if it was the added authority. At any rate he got along poorly with the other corps commanders, particularly General Hardee. When the Army of Tennessee fell back to Atlanta, Hood replaced Joe Johnston as commander. Up to this point Johnston had fought a skillful defensive campaign against Sherman's superior forces. Hood changed tactics. He launched a series of unsuccessful, but costly attacks. Finally he had to evacuate Atlanta. Hood tried to attack Sherman's supply lines to force him out of Georgia. Instead of course Sherman marched to the sea. Hood moved his much reduced army into central Tennessee, feigning an attack on the Ohio Valley. Here he fought an engagement at Franklin in which his remaining units were decimated in virtual suicidal frontal assaults. He then attempted to besiege Nashville. He attacked and what was left of the Army of Tennessee was annihilated (mid-December 1864). Finally he moved the exhausted remnants of the Army into northern Mississippi. He resigned his command (January 1865). The Army of Tennessee had been a major Confederate army, but

after a few months under Hood, it essentially no longer existed. Davis just before Richmond fell ordered Hood to raise an army in Texas. Hood had second thoughts, especially after Davis was arrested and the last important Confederate command under Gen. Kirby Smith surrendered in Texas. Hood surrendered to Federal officials in Natchez, Mississippi (May 31, 1865).

Assessment

Hood had proven a daring and effective commander under the command of Lee, but when given command of the Army of Tennessee he proved a disaster. The hard fighting Hood proved a brilliant brigade and division commander. As a corps commander he proved ineffectual. When finally promoted to head an army, he was an abject failure and essentially destroyed his army. The losses endured by his army were appalling. Lee had also subjected his army to heavy losses, even in his victories. But Lee had achieved victories. Hood's enormous losses of men came with no compensating achievement--only virtual annihilation. Hood's command was criticized after the War by several Confederate commanders, especially his former commander--Joe Johnston. Steven Vincent Benet wrote a noted poem about Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. It included a vivid passage on Hood: *"Yellow-haired Hood with his wounds and his empty sleeve; Leading his Texans, a Viking shape of a man; With the thrust and lack of craft of a berserk sword; All lion, none of the fox. When he supersedes Joe Johnston, he is lost, and his army with him; But he could lead forlorn hopes with the ghost of Ney. His bigboned Texans follow him into the mist. Who follows them?"*

After the War

Hood after the war moved to New Orleans. He turned to business. He opened a cotton brokerage and insurance agency. His agency was the Life Association of America, an interesting name for a country he attempted to destroy. Both of his businesses prospered and he succeeded in amassing a small fortune. To his credit, Hood supported numerous philanthropic efforts, especially fund raising for orphans, widows and wounded soldiers. Tragically this would include his family. New Orleans suffered a yellow fever epidemic (1878-79). Hood was doubly affected. The epidemic closed down the New Orleans Cotton Exchange. The claims from victims ruined virtually every insurance company in the city. Hood, himself, succumbed to the epidemic (1879).

Family

Hood after the War fathered a large family, although our information is very limited. He married Anna Marie Hennen, a New Orleans native (April 30, 1868). I have no information on her background at this time. The marriage was apparently successful and with business success, the Hood family prospered. Over 11 years of marriage, they had eleven children which included three sets of twins. Hood died of yellow fever (August 30, 1879). His wife and eldest child died as a result of the epidemic as well. The epidemic ruined Hood financially. Afterward, the ten surviving children were left destitute. They were adopted by seven different families in Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and New York.

Sources

Hood, John Bell. *Advance and Retreat* . Hood's book was written to defend his much criticized conduct as commander of the Army of Tennessee. Union and Confederate officers charge that Johnston's assessments and figures contain many errors.

MacMurry, Richard M.- "John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence"