

Confederate Mission Command at Chickamauga: A Case Study of Braxton Bragg and A.P. Stewart

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ABSTRACT

In the American Civil War, the Battle of Chickamauga of 18–20 September 1863, holds important lessons on mission command, particularly the actions of Confederate General Braxton Bragg and one of his division commanders, A.P. Stewart. Their degree of application of the principles of mission command greatly influenced the course of the battle. Bragg's incompetency in utilizing favorable terrain, discord in relationships with subordinate commanders, and vague or shifting mission orders caused the Confederacy to squander opportunities to destroy the Union army in early September and at other points that could have proved decisive during the battle. In contrast, Stewart's tactical competency and mutual trust among his subordinates enabled his division to seize key terrain and penetrate Union defenses that adjacent units could have exploited for an earlier and more decisive victory.

Keywords: Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Alexander P. Stewart, Braxton Bragg, American Civil War, Mission Command, Confederate States Army, Leadership

Mando de la misión confederado en Chickamauga: un estudio de caso de Braxton Bragg y A.P. Stewart

RESUMEN

En la Guerra Civil Estadounidense, la Batalla de Chickamauga del 18 al 20 de septiembre de 1863 contiene lecciones importantes so-

bre el mando de la misión, en particular las acciones del general confederado Braxton Bragg y uno de sus comandantes de división, A.P. Stewart. Su grado de aplicación de los principios del mando de la misión influyó mucho en el curso de la batalla. La incompetencia de Bragg para utilizar un terreno favorable, la discordia en las relaciones con los comandantes subordinados y las órdenes de misión vagas o cambiantes hicieron que la Confederación desperdiciara oportunidades de destruir el ejército de la Unión a principios de septiembre y en otros puntos que podrían haber resultado decisivos durante la batalla. En contraste, la competencia táctica de Stewart y la confianza mutua entre sus subordinados permitieron que su división tomara terreno clave y penetrara las defensas de la Unión que las unidades adyacentes podrían haber explotado para una victoria más temprana y decisiva.

Palabras clave: Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Alexander P. Stewart, Braxton Bragg, Guerra civil estadounidense, Mando de la misión, Ejército de los Estados Confederados, Liderazgo

联盟军在奇卡莫加战役中的任务式指挥：关于布拉克斯顿·布雷格和亚历山大·P·斯图尔特的案例研究

摘要

美国内战期间，1863年9月18-20日发生的奇卡莫加战役对任务式指挥具有重要意义，尤其是联盟军上将布拉克斯顿·布雷格及其下属师长之一的亚历山大·P·斯图尔特所采取的行动。他们对任务式指挥原则的应用程度极大影响了战役进程。布雷格在利用有利地形一事上的能力不足、与下属司令官关系的不和谐、以及模糊或变化的任务指令，导致联盟国浪费了9月早期以及其他时刻击败合众国军队的机会，而这些时刻本有可能在战役中发挥决定性的作用。相反，斯图尔特的策略能力和与下属之间的相互信任使其军队抓住关键地形并击破合众国军队的防御，而其邻近部队本有可能利用有利地形争取更早、更具决定性的胜利。

关键词：奇卡莫加战役，查塔努加，亚历山大·P·斯图尔特，布拉克斯顿·布雷格，美国内战，任务式指挥，联盟军，领导力

The Influence of Mission Command

Unlike the statues and monuments at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, or Antietam that commemorate generals, those at Chickamauga honor lower-echelon leaders who provided direction when the top commanders of each side failed to exercise effective mission command during the battle fought between 18 and 20 September 1863.¹ One notable case of Confederate officers at the battle involved General Braxton Bragg, overall Confederate commander in the battle over the Army of Tennessee, and one of Bragg's division commanders, Major General Alexander Peter (A.P.) Stewart. In 1894, W. J. McMurray, a member of the 20th Tennessee Infantry Regiment—one of the five regiments in Stewart's division—called for “a monument to Stewart's memory” at the site where Stewart's “Little Giant Division” broke the Federal center.² Later, at the Tennessee monument dedication on Horseshoe Ridge in 1895, James D. Porter, former Governor of Tennessee and Confederate veteran of this battle, declared that the Battle of Chickamauga would not have been a barren victory if Stewart had commanded the army rather than Bragg.³ While this remark can be “dismissed as complimentary hyperbole,”⁴ the statement stems from important contrasts between these two Confederate leaders and their different mission command capacities.

This article investigates the leadership styles and abilities of these two leaders at Chickamauga through the

lens of contemporary Army doctrine on mission command, or “the Army's approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation.”⁵ It seeks to answer the question, how did A.P. Stewart's leadership differ from Braxton Bragg's at Chickamauga? Primary source material including diary accounts from soldiers, official reports on the battle by leaders, and circumstantial evidence from how the battle progressed offer details on how these two fared in the principles of mission command: competence, mutual trust, shared understanding, commander's intent, mission orders, disciplined initiative, and risk acceptance (see Table 1). Ultimately, Bragg's weak mission command in terms of incompetence in utilizing terrain, poor mission orders, and lack of mutual trust hindered Confederate forces and contributed to missed opportunities to defeat the Union army; whereas Stewart's tactical competence, disciplined initiative, risk acceptance, and strong mutual trust enabled Confederate forces to secure key terrain and created opportunities to defeat the Union army.

After driving General Braxton Bragg's forces out of middle Tennessee in the summer of 1863, General William S. Rosecrans led his 60,000-strong Army of the Cumberland southward toward Georgia. His objective was to seize Chattanooga—a vital Confederate railroad hub that connected four major railroads and offered a route through the Appalachian Mountains deeper into Georgia. President Abraham Lin-

Principle	Definition/Description
Competence	Commanders, subordinates, and teams possessing tactical and technical abilities to perform their necessary tasks and functions.
Mutual trust	Shared confidence between commanders, subordinates, and partners that they can be relied on and are competent in performing their assigned tasks.
Shared understanding	A mutual comprehension of an operational environment, an operation's purpose, problems, and approaches to solving problems.
Commander's intent	A clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.
Mission orders	The process of issuing directives to subordinates conveying desired results without specifying how to achieve those results.
Disciplined initiative	The duty individual subordinates have to exercise [enterprise or leadership] within the constraints of the commander's intent to achieve the desired end state.
Risk acceptance	Application of judgment to make choices with the potential for loss in return for certain benefits that would be unattainable otherwise.

Figure 1. Principles of Mission Command. Source: Generated by the author based on definitions and explanations in Department of the Army, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces, ADP 6-0 (Washington, DC: Department, of the Army, 2019), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN18314-ADP_6-0-000-WEB-3.pdf, 1-6 to 1-14.

coln considered this site to be strategic key terrain and just as vital as Richmond. Although Bragg had been outmaneuvered in Tennessee, his Army of Tennessee received reinforcements and totaled around 65,000 by the time Rosecrans approached Chattanooga. Bragg fortified Chattanooga and prepared for a Union attack from the north—not a maneuver to his west.

Within Bragg's army, A.P. Stewart led a division that consisted of the following components: Foulé's Co. Mississippi Cavalry (escort); Johnson's Brigade (detached) with attached artillery (York's Georgia Battery); Bate's Brigade with attached artillery (Eufaula Alabama Battery); Brown's Brigade with attached artillery (Dawson's Georgia Battery); and Clayton's Brigade with attached artillery (1st Arkansas Battery).⁶

Precursory Events (15 August–17 September 1863)

Actions taken by Bragg and Stewart in late August and early September 1863 reveal important distinctions regarding their levels of competence, or the trait of “commanders, subordinates, and teams possessing tactical and technical abilities to perform their necessary tasks and functions.”⁷ Bragg carried with him a bleak string of defeats throughout the war and the Union's recent Tullahoma campaign in Tennessee. Bragg's Army of the Tennessee also suffered from a lack of cohesion and mutual trust, largely due to the lack of confidence for Bragg shared by his subordinate commanders and lowest-ranking troops alike.⁸ Bragg's decisions in early and mid-September 1863 compounded this rancor in the ranks and distain of him for his perceived incompetence. Meanwhile, Stewart's preparations, tactical compe-

tence, and mutual trust formed a cohesive unit that would obey his command even in the direst circumstances.

Bragg's Incompetence regarding the Terrain and Employment of Forces

Bragg's inability to visualize the battlefield and utilize his resources effectively led him to lose several advantages the terrain afforded to his defense and enabled Rosecrans to pass through Look-out Valley to the west of Bragg's forces at Chattanooga undetected (see Figure 2).⁹ Anticipating a Union attack from the north, he positioned reconnaissance

forces north and along the Tennessee River, but neglected the heavily-wooded, rolling terrain westward. He also failed to capitalize on the Tennessee River as a natural obstacle to approaching Union forces, where he could have planned for indirect fires to disrupt Union forces as they approached and tried to cross the river.

Instead, Rosecrans marched through this terrain uncontested. His forces then crossed the Tennessee River southwest of Chattanooga and conducted a turning movement to threaten Confederate lines of commu-

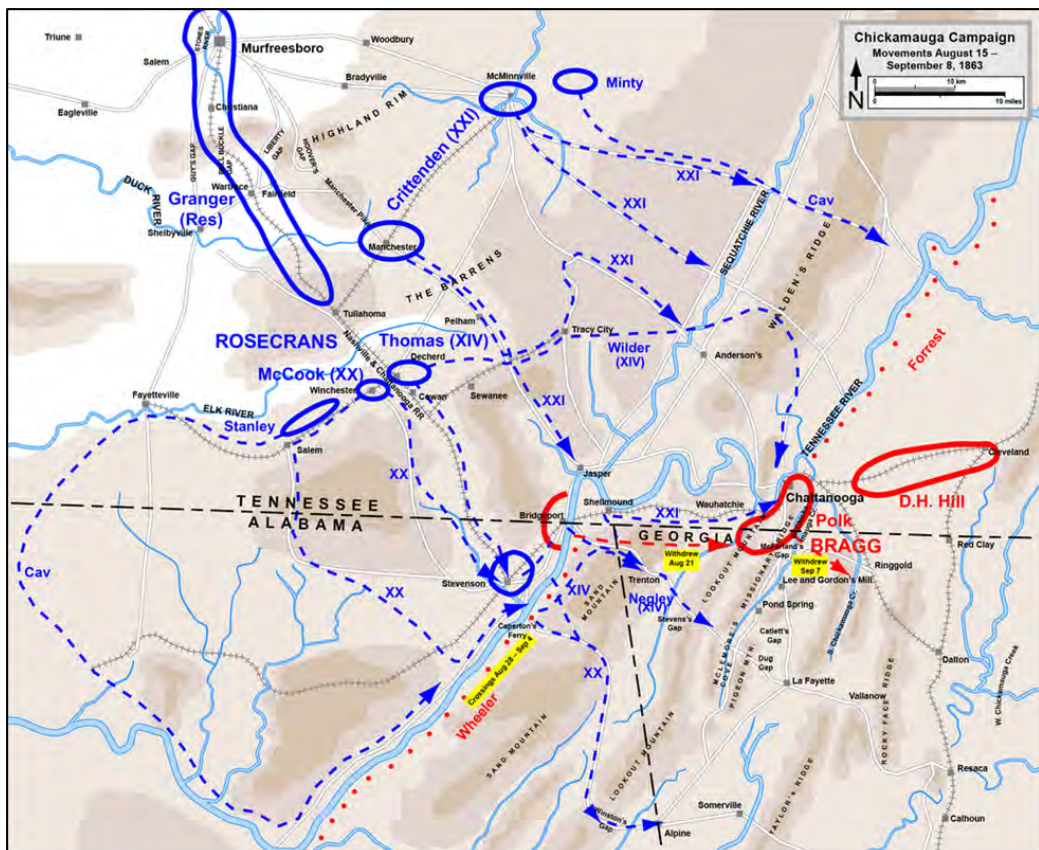


Figure 2. Initial Movements in the Chickamauga Campaign, 15 August - 8 September 1863. Source: Hal Jespersen, "Map of Chickamauga Campaign of the American Civil War," 2 November 2008, <http://www.posix.com/CWmaps/>.

nication, so as to draw Bragg's Army of Tennessee out of its defenses in Chattanooga. When the surprised Bragg was alerted to these Union forces to his south on 8 September, he did as Rosecrans intended and abandoned Chattanooga, despite opposition from D.H. Hill, one of his corps commanders.¹⁰ He moved his army south to interdict Rosecrans and prevent the disruption of his lines of communication. Despite Bragg's reconnaissance failures and cession of Chattanooga (which the Union occupied on 9 September), the dispersed Union forces crossing the river presented Bragg with an opportunity to defeat them while they were vulnerable.

Squandered Opportunities due to a Lack of Mutual Trust under Bragg

The Union army split into three distinct columns of corps-sized elements as it advanced, utilizing the three routes suitable for movement. Bragg, aware of this dispersion across 65 km, planned to attack the separated corps one by one while they were vulnerable and too far from one other for mutual support.¹¹ At 9:00 p.m. on September 10, Bragg uncharacteristically convened a council of war with his division and brigade commanders to outline plans to attack Rosecrans's separated columns. The official record on this council remains unclear, but three possibilities exist regarding the meeting's outcome: (1) Stewart was unaware of Bragg's positive orders; (2) Bragg's subordinate commanders were aware of his orders and most understood them to not be discretionary, but Major General Thomas C.

Hindman (senior Confederate officer of troops closest to Union forces under Negley) believed he had discretion on when to attack; or (3) that the generals felt they had discretion but that Bragg's orders were no longer worth obeying.¹²

Over the following days, the Confederates failed to attack these vulnerable Union corps in what is traditionally attributed to insubordination of Bragg's division commanders, a manifestation of the lack of mutual trust between Bragg and his subordinate commanders. Stewart's division participated in the potentially decisive isolation and defeat of one of Rosecrans's corps at Dug Gap, but Bragg failed in this attempt mainly due to his poor command relationship with subordinate commanders.¹³

Several of these subordinates later criticized Bragg for this failure. D.H. Hill blamed Bragg and his methods of command for failures to exploit Union weaknesses prior to the Battle of Chickamauga.¹⁴ A.P. Stewart wrote the following in 1886 while reflecting on these missed opportunities in early September 1863: "Bragg was in a position to crush the enemy's center and interpose his army between the wings, which could not have escaped . . . Whatever apologies may have been offered for this failure, the real cause of it was the lack of confidence on the part of the superior officers of the Army of Tennessee in its commander. If Robert E. Lee or either of the Johnstons had been in command, the blow would have been struck, and in all human probability Rosecrans's army would have been destroyed."¹⁵ Although Stewart rarely criticized Bragg or others openly, his writings clearly re-

veal his contempt for Bragg and blame his weak mission command abilities for these missed opportunities.

***Competence and Mutual Trust
Yield a Ready Force under Stewart's
Direction***

In contrast to the doubt held and disdain harbored by division commanders for Bragg, Stewart's peers and subordinates recognized Stewart's competence and leadership abilities. Philip Stephenson explained that Stewart was "never regarded by the men as having the qualities of greatness," but he rose steadily through the ranks due to merit—"he never seemed to make a mistake!"¹⁶ Despite his station as the newest division commander at Chickamauga, he had the trust and confidence of superiors, peers and subordinates. B.L. Ridley, who had served as one of Stewart's staff officers, paid Stewart tribute when he said in 1895, "When other commanders found that Stewart was supporting them, on right or left," he said, "all was well; and when he struck the enemy, there were frequently heartrending scenes of carnage and of blood."¹⁷ Ridley also commented that those who served under Stewart's command know that "he would not willingly sacrifice them, [and] whenever he said to do so, they would leap into the very jaws of death."¹⁸ In the weeks prior to the Battle of Chickamauga, Stewart had taken measures to reestablish discipline in his unit through drill and issuance of orders on establishing and policing camps.¹⁹ While at Chattanooga, it seems Stewart shared Bragg's belief that

the Union army would cross the Tennessee River just north of Chattanooga, and so Stewart distributed his Brigades at crossing points in anticipation, nested with Bragg's defensive plans.²⁰

**Opening Engagements
(18 September 1863)**

In alignment with his envisioned envelopment of the Union army, Bragg ordered his army to extend north to where he thought the Union's left flank would be—at Lee and Gordon's Mill—and then to cut across West Chickamauga Creek to isolate the federals and prevent their retreat to Chattanooga. Bragg specified four crossing points for his elements: (1) Reed's Bridge for Johnson's division, (2) Alexander's Bridge for Walker's Reserve Corps, (3) Thedford's Ford for Buckner's corps (which included A.P. Stewart's division), and (4) Dalton's Ford for Polk's corps (see Figure 3).²¹ Confederate units executed the orders and began to make contact with Union forces the morning of 18 September at unexpected points on the battlefield.

***Persistent Efforts to Fulfill
Bragg's Intent***

The array of Confederate forces and locations of initial engagements on the 18th demonstrate that Bragg successfully conveyed his intent for his army to interdict Union movement northward to Chattanooga. Army doctrine describes commander's intent as "a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired mili-

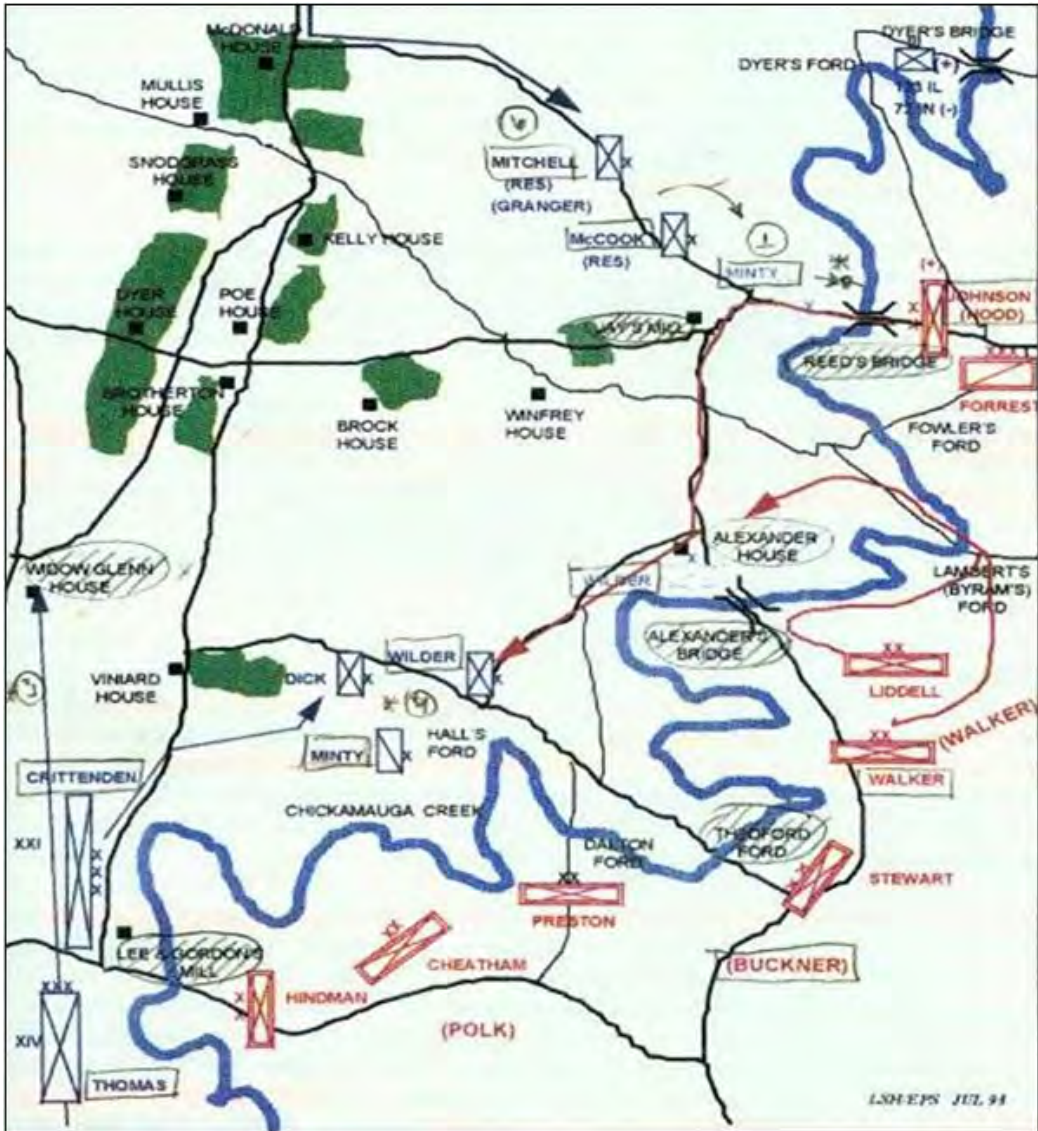


Figure 3. Movement to Contact, 18-19 September 1863. Source: “Estudio de Campo: La Batalla de Chickamauga (Case Study: The Battle of Chickamauga),” presentation at Command and General Staff Officers’ Course (CGSOC), Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), Fort Benning, GA, 14 September 2021, Slide 10.

tary end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander’s desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.”²² As Bragg’s

forces made initial contact around 7:00 a.m. near Reed’s Bridge (see Figure 3)—further north than he expected Union forces to be—his right wing extended in an attempt to turn the Union and cut off its retreat toward Chattanooga.²³ Additional engagements to the north should

have led Bragg to realize his assessment of the Union disposition was wrong and that he should reconsider the intent of turning the Union army, as this proved to be unfeasible. Instead, the Confederate right wing was reinforced by forces from the left wing and continued to extend northward. This led to the battle unfolding at a location and in a manner neither side had anticipated.

Stewart's Competence at Thedford's Ford

Stewart displayed tactical and technical competence at Thedford's Ford as he directed his division in a successful obstacle crossing while under fire. After receiving the order from his corps commander, Major General Simon B. Buckner, to occupy the key terrain dominating the ford but to avoid engagement with the enemy unless necessary,²⁴ Stewart arrayed his forces for the task. He tasked his engineer attachment to reconnoiter the site, led with his most experienced brigade, and maintained a reserve.²⁵

Stewart also emplaced an artillery battery on the high ground to provide overwatch, which, along with the 4th Georgia Battalion of sharpshooters of Bate's brigade, later engaged Union skirmishers across the creek in what the artillerymen later claimed to be the opening shots of the Battle of Chickamauga.²⁶ The efficiency with which Stewart's division executed this task attests to Stewart's competence and the shared understanding of his subordinate commanders and staff, especially the discipline displayed by inexperienced

soldiers under direct and indirect fire that ranged much of the area.²⁷ In fact, while Brigadier General John Pegram, commanding cavalry, and Stewart were discussing plans nearby, "a cannonball struck about five paces from them before careening onward and nearly killing a member of [Brigade Commander J.C.] Brown's staff."²⁸

First Day of Battle (19 September 1863)

On the morning of the 19th, Union forces sought to secure a line of retreat northward while the Confederate line extended further northward in an attempt to locate the Union's left flank and turn the Union army. From the point of initial skirmishes, Rosecrans and Bragg slowly committed more forces until the Union formed a defensive line along Lafayette Road to repel Confederate attacks. Smoke from gunfire and cannon fire pervaded this line as the battle carried on into the afternoon. Bragg's poor mission command contributed to confusion among Confederate leaders and a lack of forward progress. Stewart, on the other hand, displayed mission command abilities that nearly split the Union defense into two separate forces and offered an opportunity for Bragg's army to defeat Rosecrans.

Bragg's Mission Orders

Bragg's mission orders on the 19th were limited due to his distance from the battlefield and vagueness stemming from reorganization of his forces and ad hoc

decisions. First, Bragg established his command post in vicinity of Thedford's Ford, near the intersections of the main roads (see Figure 4). This considerable distance from his main forces, however, limited his ability to monitor progress of the battle and provide direction. In contrast, Rosecrans established his command post within a few hundred yards of the Union defensive line along Lafayette Road and was able to inspect his defensive line and convey orders throughout the 19th (although illness led him to delegate some of those authorities and limit his personal involvement in mission orders, which negatively impacted Union mission command; see Figure 4).²⁹ With such factors in the battlefield as heavily-wooded terrain, greater proximity to his subordinate commanders and units would have facilitated Bragg's mission orders and reevaluation of the operational picture throughout the battle.

Second, Bragg's ad hoc decisions and guidance, sometimes bypassing subordinate commanders in filtering down to divisions, led to confusion regarding mission orders. As Army doctrine states, a mission order is "a communication—verbal, written, or signaled—that conveys instructions from superiors to subordinates" and allows "maximum freedom of action in accomplishing missions."³⁰ Doctrine holds that the level of detail in mission orders will vary depending on the situation, but "they are neither so detailed that they stifle initiative nor so general that they provide insufficient direction."³¹ As skirmishes erupted on the morning of the 19th, Bragg showed "little regard for the

proper chain of command" as he issued orders and slowly committed forces to support those in contact, rather than amassing forces.³²

During this sequence of events as Union forces sought to identify a vulnerable southern flank to attack, Bragg provided insufficient direction when he removed Stewart's division from Buckner's Corps to support Major General Benjamin Franklin Cheatham (see Figure 4). Bragg's orders were so vague that Stewart "rode back to seek clarification, whereupon he discovered how limited Bragg's understanding of the battle really was" as Bragg told Stewart to advance and "be governed by circumstances."³³ These challenges linked to mission orders emanating from Bragg contributed to confusion down the Confederate line that weakened unity of effort among divisions and hindered tempo.

Stewart's Disciplined Initiative and Risk Acceptance

The Confederates' sole success on the 19th was the result of Stewart's individual efforts in the absence of guidance after he became "frustrated with the indecision and lack of communication in the high command" and attacked.³⁴ Here, Stewart displayed superior disciplined initiative, or "the duty individual subordinates have to exercise [enterprise or leadership] within the constraints of the commander's intent to achieve the desired end state."³⁵ Throughout the battle, Stewart and his brigade commanders had "not deviate[d] from the published doctrine of the time,"³⁶ but this changed as Stewart formed his at-

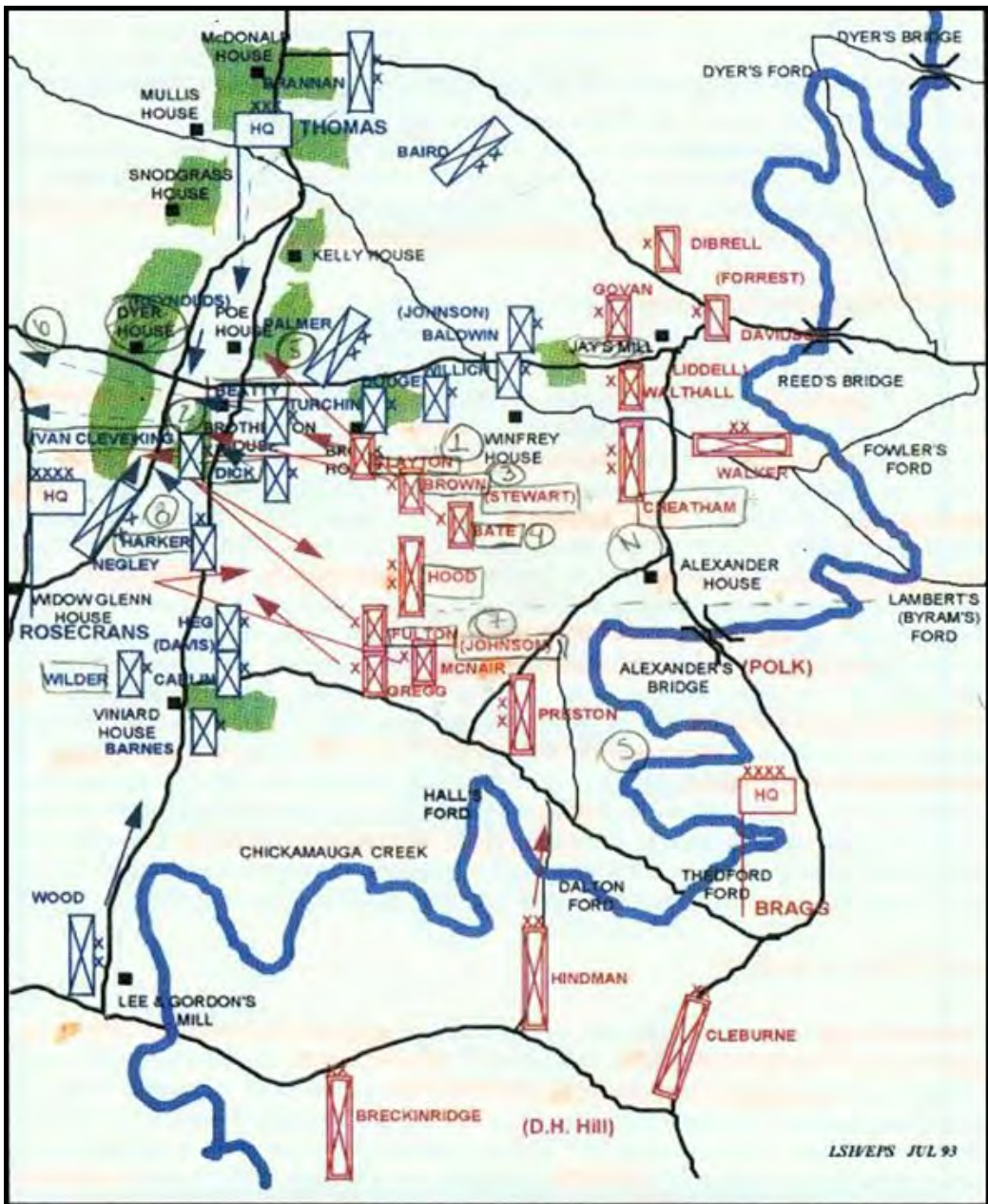


Figure 4. Stewart's Attack, 1400-1630 hours, 19 September 1863. Source: "Estudio de Campo: La Batalla de Chickamauga (Case Study: The Battle of Chickamauga)," Slide 13.

tack formation on the 19th. Rather than the common attack practice of committing successive lines of forces "until they all mingled together into the enemy," Stewart "only committed one brigade at

a time," and when that brigade reached its culminating point, he replaced it with a different brigade.³⁷ Stewart's attack broke the Union's first line and disrupted its second line,³⁸ which created

a breach of the Union line in his sector, but adjacent units failed to exploit this gap (Figure 4).

Stewart accepted risk in this attack, as it carried possibilities of limited support from adjacent units. Furthermore, he decided to lead with his most inexperienced brigade (Clayton's brigade) followed by his most experienced one (Brown's brigade), which carried the possibility of heavy casualties, but proved favorable in terms of audacity and tempo. Brown's brigade was able to psychologically endure witnessing the carnage Clayton's brigade suffered before it and see the wounded pass through its ranks to the rear, whereas a less experienced unit in its position might have broken under such pressure.³⁹ Stewart understood the likely perils of attacking a prepared enemy with these inexperienced troops, but he recognized the potential payoff for this attack in the midst of a standstill on the battlefield.

Stewart's display of mission command principles set conditions for a critical juncture in the battle whereby the Confederacy could have penetrated the center of the Union line, but it proved indecisive due to inaction on the part of other leaders to capitalize on this opportunity. With nightfall, Stewart ordered his men to lie on their arms through the night with the enemy around 300 yards from Clayton's line. Since Stewart's interaction with Bragg earlier that day, Stewart "had not seen a superior officer all day."⁴⁰ In addition to missed opportunities in Stewart's sector following his penetration of Union de-

fenses, this led Stewart to send messengers to the rear to report on the events of that day and seek guidance, which was to hold his position.⁴¹

Second Day of Battle (20 September 1863)

After 18,000 men had fallen on the 19th between Union and Confederate forces, Rosecrans held a council of war among his subordinate commanders, whereas Bragg called no council of war.⁴² Bragg maintained his intent from previous days—to drive the Union army south and away from Chattanooga. The subsequent activity that day at Chickamauga involved Union blunders that permitted Confederate troops to penetrate their line near Rosecrans, which led Rosecrans and one-third of his army to flee from the battlefield.⁴³ Eventually, Confederate troops confronted the remaining Union forces under Major General George Henry Thomas at Snodgrass Hill. The arrival of the Union army's Reserve Corps enabled most of the remaining Union forces to retreat northward, which ended the Battle of Chickamauga—a costly Confederate victory.

Initial Shared Understanding Under Bragg, Followed by More Ad Hoc Commands

Despite the challenges of the previous day and confusion resulting from Bragg's bypassing corps commanders in ad hoc orders given to division commanders, Bragg achieved shared understanding regarding his scheme

of maneuver and initial plans for the 20th. A particularly challenging mission command principle is creating shared understanding of an operational environment, or “an operation’s purpose, problems, and approaches to solving problems,”⁴⁴ but Bragg’s utilization of his corps commanders and simplicity in his attack plan fostered shared understanding. During the evening of the 19th, Bragg had divided his army into two wings: Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk commanding the right wing, and Lieutenant General James Longstreet leading the left wing.⁴⁵

This benefitted Stewart in terms of mission orders, as Longstreet met with him the morning of the 20th and assured Stewart that he would receive guidance directly from Longstreet throughout the day.⁴⁶ This would resolve communication issues associated with lack of guidance or correspondence with his higher headquarters the previous day. Bragg directed the attack to begin on the extreme right just after daylight and would “continue down the line by division in succession,” so Stewart, like the other division commanders, understood he was to attack when the adjacent unit to his right moved.⁴⁷

Bragg, however, later adjusted these plans and utilized his staff to convey new orders down the line later that morning. Enemy artillery before 10:00 a.m. disrupted some Confederate preparations down the line, including Stewart’s division. Bragg and his staff were then observed “dashing along behind Stewart’s line”⁴⁸ as they disseminated new orders, contradicting the

earlier order of successive attacks down the line. One of Bragg’s staff officers delivered Bragg’s order to Stewart to “advance at once and attack the enemy” and for “every captain to attack”—an order also passed to all other divisions.⁴⁹

Stewart’s Disciplined Initiative and Risk Acceptance at Poe Field

On the 20th, Stewart reverted to traditional doctrine with one brigade forward and two back in his attack at Poe Field, fulfilling Bragg’s order for an immediate attack along the entire front.⁵⁰ The circumstances posed significant danger for Stewart’s division, as it would attack an entrenched, prepared defender. Furthermore, his division’s flank laid exposed to a bend in the Union line, the attack was an ad hoc response to Bragg’s order, the attack overlapped the army’s right wing, and units accompanying Stewart were disillusioned with the attack.⁵¹ Despite these challenges, Stewart led his men forward.

As Stewart’s division advanced, intervisibility lines from a small hill masked its units as their troops climbed the hill toward the Union line, but they came under devastating fire from a Union battery after cresting the hill (see Figure 5).⁵² He succeeded in penetrating the Union’s first line of breastworks, but this tactical achievement had little effect on the overall battle in his sector.⁵³ Heavy smoke from the fighting greatly reduced visibility and caused confusion, but Stewart’s subordinate commanders understood his intent to push forward and managed to control their formations. Throughout the afternoon, Stewart and

Aftermath

Under Bragg, the Confederacy secured a victory at Chickamauga, but lost twenty percent of its force in the battle. Its failure to destroy Rosecrans's army, however, permitted Union forces to retreat northward. General Ulysses S. Grant later relieved Rosecrans, and the Union's subsequent attack in November defeated the Army of Tennessee and secured control of the areas around Chattanooga. This enabled Union forces to penetrate the south and destroy factories and disrupt Confederate lines of communication through Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's March to the Sea.

Thus, Bragg's weak mission command contributed to the Confederacy's failure to destroy Rosecrans's army and permitted the Union to eventually achieve its strategic objective at Chattanooga. After Bragg's defeat by General Ulysses S. Grant in the Battle of Chattanooga in November 1863, he was replaced by Joseph E. Johnston in December 1863. Bragg then became Jefferson Davis's military advisor and commanded the coastal defenses of Wilmington, North Carolina. Bragg's subordinate commanders and historians have blamed his weak mission command for the lackluster results at Chickamauga.

In contrast, Stewart's mission command propelled him to higher offices and led many historians to evaluate him as the best division commander at Chickamauga.⁵⁶ His performance led him to steadily take on greater responsibilities and rank. Stewart spent the

majority of the war in command of a brigade or a division, but he was "thrust into corps command during the chaos of the Atlanta Campaign."⁵⁷ Some aspects of Stewart's mission command abilities at this elevated echelon are inconclusive. For instance, the record is mixed regarding Stewart's culpability for Hood's defeat at Spring Hill. Hood insisted his subordinate generals, including Stewart, failed to follow orders, but others argue such orders were never issued. Veteran D.W. Sanders went further to state that Stewart "was an able and accomplished general" and that had Hood actually ordered Stewart to attack, the result would have been "one of the most brilliant and bloody episodes of the late war."⁵⁸ Most evidence of Stewart's mission command after Chickamauga, however, suggests brilliance, such as accounts of his exemplary performance at New Hope Church in May 1864.

Conclusion

At the Battle of Chickamauga, Bragg displayed weak mission command through his incompetence regarding the use of favorable terrain, his vague and ad hoc mission orders, and lack of mutual trust with his subordinate commanders, all of which hindered his army's ability to defeat the Union army; Stewart, on the other hand, displayed strong mission command abilities, most notably in his tactical competence, disciplined initiative, risk acceptance, and the mutual trust among his unit members, all of which enabled his division to secure key ter-

rain and create opportunities to defeat the Union army. Instances of application or demonstrations of the principles of mission command—competence, mutual trust, shared understanding, commander’s intent, mission orders, disciplined initiative, and risk acceptance—reveal significant contrasts between the mission command of Bragg and Stewart in the battle. Had the Army of Tennessee been under the command of a different leader, perhaps the Con-

federacy would have destroyed the Union army under Rosecrans in early September 1863 or at a place other than Chickamauga. Even during the battle, another operational leader might have capitalized on opportunities presented by the gaps in Union lines created by Stewart’s division, but Bragg’s poor mission command consistently squandered such opportunities and eventually ceded the strategic key terrain of Chattanooga to the Union.

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Notes

- 1 Robert Daniel Stinson, “Braxton Bragg on Leadership: A Historical Case Study on Leader-Member Exchange in the Army of Tennessee,” dissertation written for the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Chattanooga, TN, May 2013, 4.
- 2 W. J. McMurray, “The Gap of Death at Chickamauga,” *Confederate Veteran* 2 (November 1894), 330, as cited by Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2004), Kindle Edition, location 3850. In the same reference, Elliott also wrote that “Stewart’s feelings toward a monument to his memory at a time he was still living (in 1894) are unknown.”
- 3 On this, see Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee*, location 1399; “Tennessee C.S.A. Infantry,” *The Historical Marker Database*, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=62628>.
- 4 Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee*, location 1406.
- 5 Department of the Army, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, ADP 6-0 (Washington, D.C.: Department, of the Army, 2019), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN18314-ADP_6-0-000-WEB-3.pdf, Glossary-3.
- 6 U.S. Army Command and Staff College, “The American Civil War: Alexander P. Stewart and the Tactical Employment of His Division at the Battle of Chickamauga” (Damasus, MD: Inc. Penny Hill Press, 2015), 59-60.
- 7 Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, para. 1-27.
- 8 Private A. M. Glazener of the 18th Alabama penned in a letter to a friend dated 17 August: “This army is in a bad condition. The men all think we are whipt all out of heart they don’t put much confidence in this general, Bragg.” On this, see A. M. Glazener to T. M. Shuford, August 17, 1863 (typed copy), A. M. Glazener Letters, CCNMP; see Glazener to wife, August 20, 26, 1863, Glazener Letters; Jno. A. Kirby to “Pa,” August 26, 1863, Confederate States Archives, Officers and Soldiers’ Miscellaneous Letters, DU, as cited by Elliott, locations 1166 and 3827.
- 9 It is likely that forces in vicinity of the modern Point Park, TN, just on the southwest side of Chattanooga, would have been able to observe indications of a large Union force advancing through Lookout Valley, based on the author’s visit to the site on 16 September 2021. This terrain feature affords observation over vast swaths of the Tennessee River and valley westward.
- 10 On this, see Hill, “Chickamauga,” *B&L* 3:641-42, as noted in Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee*, location 3833 (footnote 13).
- 11 Ogden, presentation, 16 September 2021.
- 12 Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee*, location 1209.
- 13 U.S. Army Command and Staff College, “The American Civil War,” 32-33.

- 14 On this, see Hill, "Chickamauga," *B&L* 3:641-42, as noted in Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee*, location 3833 (footnote 13).
- 15 Lindsley, ed., *Military Annals*, 81, as cited in Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee*, location 1196.
- 16 Stephenson, *Civil War Memoir*, 212, as cited in Robert Lamar Glaze, "Experiencing Defeat, Remembering Victory: The Army of Tennessee in War and Memory, 1861-1930," doctoral dissertation written for the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, August 2016, https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5258&context=utk_gradiss, 81.
- 17 *Confederate Veteran* 3 (1895): 260-61, as cited in Glaze, "Experiencing Defeat, Remembering Victory," 81.
- 18 *Confederate Veteran* 3 (1895): 260-61, as cited in Glaze, "Experiencing Defeat, Remembering Victory," 81.
- 19 Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee*, location 1151.
- 20 *Ibid.*, location 1171.
- 21 Ogden, presentation, 16 September 2021.
- 22 Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, para. 1-45.
- 23 Ogden, presentation, 16 September 2021.
- 24 *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. in 128 parts (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, vol. XXX, Pt. 2, 357, 361, 382, 384, and 394; Bromfield L. Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee* (Mexico. Missouri: Missouri Printing & Publishing Co., 1906; reprint, Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1978), 208-209 (references are to reprint edition); as cited in Luke J. Barnett III, "Alexander P. Stewart and the Tactical Employment of his Division at the Battle of Chickamauga," master's thesis presented at Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1989, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADB136021.pdf>, 85.
- 25 Barnett, "Alexander P. Stewart," 88.
- 26 William T. Alderson, ed., "The Civil War Diary of Captain James Litton Cooper, September 30, 1861 to January, 1865," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 15 (1956): 157; Ridley, *Battles & Sketches*, 209; *The War of the Rebellion*, Series 1, vol. XXX, Pt. 2, 361, 384, 394, and 401; as cited in Barnett, "Alexander P. Stewart," 86 and 88.
- 27 Barnett, "Alexander P. Stewart," 89.
- 28 Elliott, *Soldier of Tennessee*, location 1255.
- 29 James Ogden III, presentation for Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) students, Chickamauga, GA, 17 September 2021.

- 30 Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, para. 1-52 and 1-54.
- 31 *Ibid.*, para. 1-56.
- 32 David A. Powell, “The Battle of Chickamauga,” developed for Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, 2010, <https://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/the-battle-of-chickamauga.html>.
- 33 United States War Department, *The War Of The Rebellion*, Series I, Volume 30, part 2, 361, as cited in Powell, “The Battle of Chickamauga.”
- 34 Thomas L. Connelly, *Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 201-203, as cited and summarized in Glaze, “Experiencing Defeat, Remembering Victory,” 25.
- 35 Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, para. 1-59.
- 36 Barnett, “Alexander P. Stewart,” 147.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 146-147.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 149-150.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 149.
- 40 U.S. Army Command and Staff College, “The American Civil War,” 106.
- 41 *The War of the Rebellion*, Series 1, vol. XXX, Pt. 2, 363, 371, 405, 376, 382, 384, 393-94, and 397, as cited in U.S. Army Command and Staff College, “The American Civil War,” 106.
- 42 American Battlefield Trust, “Chickamauga: Animated Battle Map,” YouTube, 28 June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlJUuNny9mc&t=538s>, 10:50.
- 43 American Battlefield Trust, “Chickamauga: Animated Battle Map,” 16:17.
- 44 Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, para. 1-36.
- 45 U.S. Army Command and Staff College, “The American Civil War,” 117.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 117-118.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 120-122.
- 50 Barnett, “Alexander P. Stewart,” 148.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 147-148.
- 52 U.S. Army Command and Staff College, “The American Civil War,” 123.

- 53 Barnett, "Alexander P. Stewart," 147 and 150.
- 54 U.S. Army Command and Staff College, "The American Civil War," 133.
- 55 Ibid., 134.
- 56 Ibid., 49.
- 57 Glaze, "Experiencing Defeat, Remembering Victory," 80.
- 58 *Southern Bivouac* 3 (1884): 365, as cited in Glaze, "Experiencing Defeat, Remembering Victory," 80.