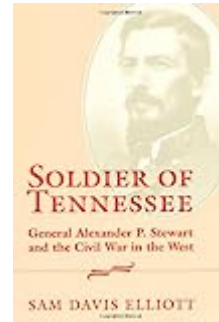


Sam Davis Elliot. *Soldier of Tennessee: General Alexander P. Stewart and the Civil War in the West.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999. xviii + 339 pp. \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8071-2970-8.



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The West's Unknown Civil War Soldier

The Confederate Army of Tennessee fought in the battles of Belmont and in skirmishes along the Mississippi River at Island #10 and New Madrid. Later the army clashed with Federals at Shiloh, Perryville, Murfreesboro, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Missionary Ridge, Resaca, and at the battles around Atlanta. It soldiered on through John Bell Hood's Tennessee Campaign and then the final surrender in North Carolina.

This book provides an excellent narrative of those battles through the life of one of its most important but understudied leaders. Joining the Army of the Tennessee as a major at the war's start, Alexander P. Stewart fought in every major battle, even commanding the army's last engagement as lieutenant general at Bentonville, North Carolina. Stewart rose quickly in the ranks, impressing both fellow officers and common soldiers with his military skills, devotion to duty, and quiet confidence. Until this fine study, by Sam Davis Elliot, an attorney practicing in Nashville, historians have largely overlooked Stewart's important military career, the primary focus of this book. Elliot's narrative also explores his subject's other pursuits. The result is to shed important light on

southern "plain folk" life, religion, and education (the latter being Stewart's primary pre- and post-war pursuit). Only thirty-seven at war's end, Stewart resumed civilian life as a businessman, educator, and battlefield conservator.

Stewart's pre-war career belied his Civil War successes. Born into a humble, Scotch-Irish family in Rogersville, Tennessee, Stewart's family held a life-long ambivalence to the institution of slavery. In 1831, the Stewart family migrated to Franklin County, Tennessee, near the Alabama border not long after Alexander's tenth birthday. Though the region eventually became one of Tennessee's leading cotton-producing areas, the Stewart family—pious Methodists—disapproved of slavery. One of fourteen children, Alexander Stewart applied and was accepted to West Point Military Academy in 1838. Graduating ninth in his class in 1842, Stewart was commissioned a second lieutenant, serving for approximately a year at posts in Georgia, before returning to the Academy as professor of mathematics. Married in 1844, Stewart pursued a career in academia, holding professorships at Cumberland College in Lebanon, Tennessee, and the University

of Nashville. By the time Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, Stewart had returned to Cumberland. He probably supported his state's decision not to secede from the Union. But once Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the seven seceded states after the South's firing on Fort Sumter, Stewart willingly joined his fellow Tennesseans in their determination to protect their "constitutional rights."

Stewart's skills were put to use in the first few months after Fort Sumter in organizing the state's Mississippi River defenses. Participating in combat at Island #10 and Columbus, Kentucky, across the river from Belmont, Missouri, Stewart was later involved in the defense and evacuation of New Madrid. Stewart was appointed brigadier general about the time of the Army of Tennessee's withdrawal to Corinth, Mississippi. The Confederates chose this important railroad junction because of its close proximity to Pittsburg Landing on the Tennessee River, where the Federals were assembling their force in preparation for an invasion of Mississippi. Stewart led his men ably in the Battle of Shiloh in early April 1862, only to retreat with the rest of his army south back through Corinth, and then finally to Tupelo several months later.

Stewart next saw action in Kentucky at the Battle of Perryville as part of Leonidas Polk's wing in Braxton Bragg's army. Stewart's brigade performed ably during the battle but retreated with the Army of Mississippi back into Tennessee as the Kentucky campaign came to a close in October 1862. After its withdrawal from Kentucky, Bragg's army stationed itself in Murfreesboro on the rail line between Nashville and Chattanooga. On December 31, 1862 Stewart's brigade was the first to engage the Federals. Elliot counts Murfreesboro as "Stewart's best performance to date" (p. 74). By June 1863, "Old Straight," as Stewart's men began calling him, was promoted to major general. For the remainder of the year, Stewart fought in the failed Tullahoma Campaign in central Tennessee. By mid-summer, his forces joined the demoralized Confederates in the state's southeastern corner in the vicinity of Chattanooga. Performing ably at the "barren victory" at Chickamauga, Stewart found himself in the middle of the backbiting campaign among Braxton Bragg's generals for the North Carolinian's ouster. While Stewart did not sign the petition to President Jefferson Davis calling for Bragg's removal, Elliot speculated that Stewart favored the move. Even so, Stewart's relationship with his superior remained cordial until Bragg's departure after the disaster at Missionary Ridge in December 1863. In that conflict, Stewart's four brigades lost nearly one third of their men. Promoted to lieutenant general as the

Federals were closing in on Atlanta in July 1864, Stewart inherited command of Leonidas Polk's Army of Mississippi, numbering approximately 14,000 men and consisting of nine brigades organized into three divisions.

In the subsequent three chapters, Elliot successfully chronicles Stewart's service through the rest of the war, focusing primarily on Stewart's role in Joseph Johnston's failed defense of Atlanta and Hood's disastrous Tennessee Campaign. In January 1865, Stewart's troops left Tennessee in the hands of the enemy for the third time. By then, few doubted that the cause was lost. Even so, duty required that Stewart's corps leave the Volunteer State to join Joe Johnston's army in North Carolina. Flush from his devastating "March to the Sea" and the invasion of South Carolina, Gen. William Tecumseh's army was unstoppable, and it was only a matter of time before Johnston's decimated force was forced to surrender. After the Battle of Bentonville, in which Stewart played a major role, defeat was a certainty. The end came on April 17 when Johnston surrendered to Sherman at the Bennett House near Durham station.

After the surrender, Stewart returned home to war-torn Tennessee and joined other Confederate veterans attempting to rebuild their lives. Stewart worked as a surveyor, cotton broker, insurance company executive, and, in 1874, he became chancellor of the University of Mississippi. While in Oxford, Stewart kept in contact with former Confederate leaders, including Jefferson Davis. In 1886, the same year he left the university, Stewart contributed his own history of the Army of Tennessee published as *The Military Annals of Tennessee: Confederate*. After traveling in the West, to explore and visit family, Stewart embarked on his last mission. In 1890, he became resident commissioner of the Chickamauga-Chattanooga National Military Park. Until the park's dedication in the summer of 1895, Stewart oversaw the acquisition and development of the park. Retiring from his post in 1898, Stewart remained active in Confederate Veterans' affairs until his death in 1908.

Twelve fine maps grace eleven of the fifteen chapters that cover Stewart's Civil War years. Illustrations of most of Stewart's closest fellow officers are also included. Elliot's narrative is smooth, and his subject remains the focal point of the Army of Tennessee's movements. There is, however, little attempt in this book to push forward any grand eloquent thesis. Elliot's primary purpose is to shed light on an understudied Confederate leader whose life's mission was to defend his state, serve his God on the battlefield, the classroom, and the home, while doing

his duty as best he understood it. While Stewart left few papers, Elliot adeptly recreates his life by careful analysis of secondary sources and by combing manuscript collections in nearly every major archival repository in the South. This fine book joins the work of Richard M. McMurry, Thomas Connelly, Peter Cozzens, Larry J. Daniel, James Lee McDonough, and Nathaniel Hughes as among the best military histories of the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Elliot's excellent biography of Stewart contributes substantially to our understanding of the war in the West.

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