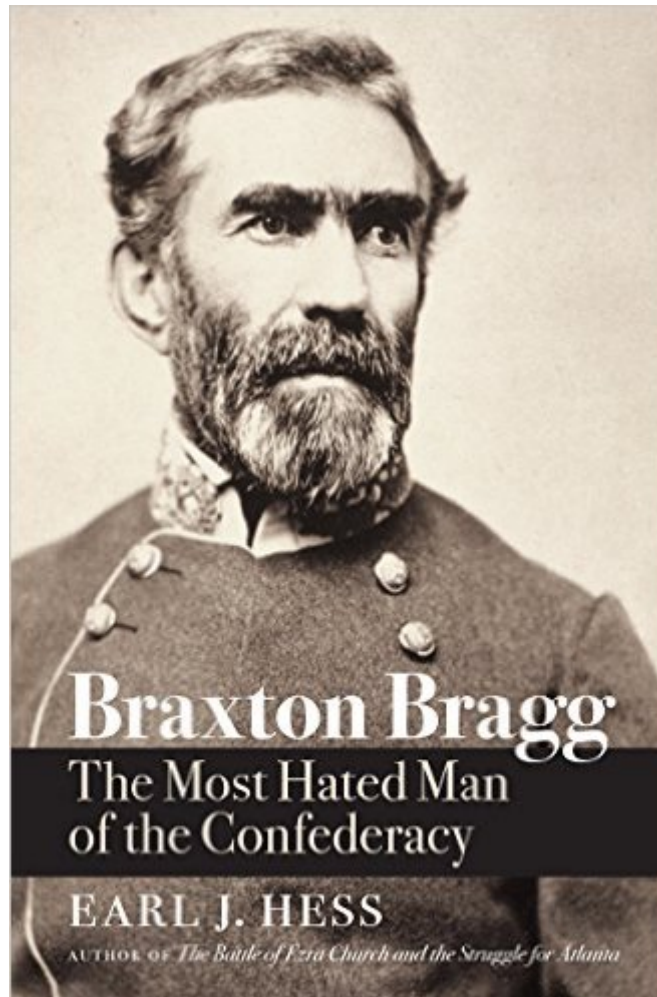


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Braxton Bragg: The Most Hated Man Of The Confederacy (Civil War America)



Synopsis

As a leading Confederate general, Braxton Bragg (1817–1876) earned a reputation for incompetence, for wantonly shooting his own soldiers, and for losing battles. This public image established him not only as a scapegoat for the South's military failures but also as the chief whipping boy of the Confederacy. The strongly negative opinions of Bragg's contemporaries have continued to color assessments of the general's military career and character by generations of historians. Rather than take these assessments at face value, Earl J. Hess's biography offers a much more balanced account of Bragg, the man and the officer. While Hess analyzes Bragg's many campaigns and battles, he also emphasizes how his contemporaries viewed his successes and failures and how these reactions affected Bragg both personally and professionally. The testimony and opinions of other members of the Confederate army—including Bragg's superiors, his fellow generals, and his subordinates—reveal how the general became a symbol for the larger military failures that undid the Confederacy. By connecting the general's personal life to his military career, Hess positions Bragg as a figure saddled with unwarranted infamy and humanizes him as a flawed yet misunderstood figure in Civil War history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Braxton Bragg has always been a controversial figure,” opines author Earl J. Hess in the opening words of his magnificent new study. “His contemporaries began the process of making

him into a hero, a fool, a bloodthirsty disciplinarian, and an old-fashioned scapegoat, all wrapped up in one package. Historians have tended to do similar things, followed by a legion of Civil War enthusiasts who seem to delight in making Bragg the Confederacy's chief whipping boy. • That single pithy paragraph frames the entirety of the Bragg myth, which Hess puts to the test in *Braxton Bragg: The Most Hated Man of the Confederacy*. The prominent Confederate general is best known for leading the primary Confederate Western field army to a string of (primarily) strategic defeats until he resigned following the disaster atop Missionary Ridge in November 1863. Thereafter, Bragg assisted Jefferson Davis in Richmond and saw final service in North Carolina. He lived out the few years he had left in an impoverished state, unwilling to write his own memoirs while hoping history would offer a fair critique of his record. *Braxton Bragg* unfolds in chronological fashion, with just enough prewar material to understand the man who began the Civil War, and just enough postwar coverage to better appreciate the man who dropped dead on a street in Galveston, Texas, in 1876. Coverage of his campaigns and battles is sufficient to understand the playing field upon which Hess excels: piecing together the evidence to flesh out the real Braxton Bragg. Hess's study is more of a critical evaluation of both the man and his controversial service, and the literature addressing both, than pure biography. It reads much like a long scholarly article, and one whose pages I happily turned with deep satisfaction.

In the past 20+ years I have read everything I could get my hands on regarding the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Over that time there has been only one other book (Albert Castel's *Decision in the West, The Atlanta Campaign of 1864*) that I have looked forward to as much as this biography of Braxton Bragg. The author, Earl Hess, does not disappoint with this critical, but fair study not only of Bragg, but of prior historian's interpretations of the man. I found it to be a fascinating book. For students of the historiography of the Army of Tennessee this is a must read. The subtitle says it all about Bragg, "The Most Hated Man of the Confederacy" and I too was once a hater. I remember going to one of Jerry Russell's Congress of Civil War Roundtable Tours in the 90s in which Dr. Grady McWhiney was a speaker. Dr. McWhiney had written what he called "Braxton Bragg & Confederate Defeat, Volume I", but he never wrote Volume II. The joke was that Bragg was too depressing a figure and McWhiney couldn't bear to waste anymore time on him. Everyone agreed that Bragg was a loser and President Jeff Davis as well for totally standing by him. In the process of writing a regimental history of an Army of Tennessee unit I read more and more in both primary and secondary sources and slowly my opinion began to change. As to Jeff Davis' support of Bragg I began to ask myself who could Davis have found who was better than Bragg? At first I thought there

were many better generals, but the closer I looked at them from Davis' perspective they were almost all lacking (although I would have liked to have given Patrick Cleburne a chance).

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