Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat Volume II (Braxton Bragg Confederate Defeat)

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Dr. Judith Lee Hallock Ph.D. : Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat Volume II (Braxton Bragg Confederate Defeat) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat Volume II (Braxton Bragg Confederate Defeat):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Much needed book on a misunderstood generalBy Steven J. SmallwoodThis is a much needed book on the most villified and most misunderstood general in the confederate army. I, like most people just took for granted the common bad opinion of Braxton Bragg. This book along with volume one by McWhinney present a very fair eveluation of what I consider the Confederacy's most maligned leader. Bragg made many positive contributions to the cause and was always dedicated to the Confederate government and cause. If some of his subordinate officers had shared this dedication, the perception of Bragg would be much more positive. Bragg's opponents within the Confederacy seemed to be much more vocal than his supporters so you hear much more negatives than positves. I highly recommend this book and urge everyone to take a fresh look at Braxton Bragg and his contributions to the Confederate cause.4 of 7 people found the following review helpful. The Second Volume of a Virulently Hostile Biography.....By OdysseusIn 1991, Judith Hallock (PhD, State University of New York at Stony Brook) -- following in the footsteps of her academic mentor and collaborative partner, Grady McWhiney (1928-2006) -- wrote this second volume of a decidedly unflattering and derogatory two-part biography of General Braxton Bragg (McWhiney published the first volume, Braxton Bragg: Volume I: Field Command, back in 1969). Together,

Hallock and McWhiney have done a great disservice to this truly unsung and under-appreciated Confederate general.Hallock's tome traces Bragg's career from the Tullahoma Campaign through Bragg's postwar years.I must admit, I had a great deal of difficulty reading this volume: Not only did it fail to present any new information or perspective on Bragg (or the war), but it read as nothing more than a hostile, op-ed column from a small-town newspaper -- rather than as a serious piece of historical scholarship.What could be called the "McWhiney-Hallock Thesis" goes something like this: Braxton Bragg, while a patriotic and conscientious officer who was skilled at training, organizing, and discipline, was an unimaginative tactician and a lover of petty office politics who failed to marshal the confidence of either his men or his junior commanders. Debilitated by a series of personal illnesses and health issues, Bragg because psychologically unfit for command. Consequently, Bragg expended one of the Confederacy's most important field forces, the Army of Tennessee, into what amounted to a series of either wasteful, unproductive offensives (i.e. Kentucky, 1862, Stones River, 1862-63, and Chickamauga, 1863) or blundered altogether in a sea of indecision and confusion (Tullahoma, and later Chattanooga, both in 1863). McWhiney nor Hallock have few kind words for the General. Combined, this two-volume biography makes a relentlessly scathing and unflattering portrait of a man, both authors contend, whose talents would have been better spent in another post, such as inspector-general.The McWhiney-Hallock Thesis is rife with serious faults, is historically inaccurate, and, in the end, is patently incorrect.Contrary to Hallock's intention, the evidence of Bragg's capability and talent is clearly demonstrated -- in Volume I. Consider the following: Bragg was a remarkably conscientious and detail-orientated officer. He graduated near the top of his class at West Point, and served with great distinction in the Mexican-American War at the Battles of Monterrey and Buena Vista. A thorough professional, Bragg loathed waste and inefficiency, becoming an outspoken critic of the Army's bureaucratic ineptitude. Furthermore, not only was Bragg well-liked by Zachary Taylor, but he was a pre-war colleague and close personal friend of none other than.....William T. Sherman! Bragg was the consummate military professional, who was also successful in civilian life: After the war with Mexico, Bragg owned and operated a very successful sugar plantation. In his private life, he had a very loving, tender marriage with a loyal and fiercely-devoted wife.Are these the traits of a flawed leader?Bragg's performance at Pensacola, Shiloh, the Kentucky Campaign, and Stones River are addressed in Volume I. Let me state, for the record, that Bragg proved to be a devoted, conscientious, and pro-active field commander, whose ability to lead the Confederate Army of Tennessee was consistently hampered by a litany of debilitating obstacles: Incompetent (and even mutinous) corps commanders, a hostile press, a chronic shortage of supplies, a dearth of skilled staff officers, untrained volunteers, high desertion rates, anti-Davis politicians seeking a scapegoat for southern reverses, and a lack of serious direction from Richmond. In the meantime, Bragg faced a well-equipped, well-supplied Federal force which heavily outnumbered his own - all in difficult terrain. In fact, given these enormous handicaps, the ability of the Army of Tennessee to accomplish what it did is testament to Bragg's skill as a field commander.Hallock begins her narrative with the Tullahoma Campaign. True to her academic advisor and mentor, Mr. McWhiney, the author immediately launches into her crucifixion of Bragg, labeling the affair as one of "confusion and indecision" (p. 8). Bragg is raked over the coals for lacking "tact and diplomacy," being at time "disorientated," "befuddled," and "beleaguered" (p. 13). She speaks of Bragg's "confused mental state" (p. 14), a man in a "feeble state of health" (p. 21) who suffered from "indecision," "panic" (p.20), and "hysteria" (p. 23). The reader is constantly reminded of Bragg's health problems (Issues which could have been clinical depression or even PTSD). The reader is repeatedly subjected to an endless barrage of negative adjectives describing Bragg's personality and/or generalship. For example, Hallock utilizes or makes reference to "disorientation," "delusion," and "deluded" - all on a single page! (p. 29). Hallock's small tome is riddled with such pejoratives.At Chickamauga, the actions of Hindman and Polk were clearly insubordinate, and in any other army in a different war, would have been met with arrest, imprisonment - or worse (Bragg himself put it best, referring to Polk as "being luxurious in his habits, rises late, moves slowly, and always conceives his own plans the best" (p. 78). Making matters more difficult for Bragg was Longstreet, a narcissistic man who, desiring his own command, stooped to dishonesty and outright prevarication (a phenomenon not only revealed in Longstreet's official account of Chickamauga, but in the latter's postwar memoirs).After Chickamauga, the squabbling among the high command of the Army of Tennessee reached a nadir. The bitterness and rancor felt among the top commanders festered due in no small part to the unwillingness of Davis to decisively intervene. In the end, Forrest, Hill, and Polk were re-assigned.Chattanooga proved to be Bragg's epic last chapter as Commander of the Army of Tennessee. It was Bragg's intention to blockade and cut-off the Federal army inside the important railhead, but immediately things went awry: Confederate cavalry proved not only ineffective (particularly Wheeler), but subjected their fellow southerners to pillaging and looting; Bragg's army once again found itself woefully short of supplies, and reinforcements were simply not to be had. Moreover, Davis' plan to send Longstreet's Corps into Eastern Tennessee severely weakened Bragg's army. The subsequent defeat of Bragg's Army at Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge - followed by the eventual Confederate retreat to Dalton, Georgia - sealed Bragg's reputation. The reasons why Bragg's Army collapsed have been a matter of intense historical speculation. Critics have cited the poor use of artillery or Bragg's holding too much faith in the effectiveness of geography to protect the Confederate center. In the end, all of the above factors compounded Confederate weaknesses.Though actual combat losses were relatively small, the image of a Confederate

Army fleeing in chaos and disarray from the battlefield proved too much: In December, 1863, Bragg tendered his resignation, being replaced by Joseph E. Johnston.For the next three months, Bragg was in a state of professional limbo - a general without a command. Interestingly, Bragg's departure did NOT solve the major problems facing the Army of Tennessee. For example, inter-personal politics among subordinate Confederate commanders went unabated, Richmond continued to concentrate men and material on Lee's command in Virginia, and Wheeler proved the ever-disappointing head of cavalry.In February, 1864, Davis appointed Bragg his military advisor. However, the duties of the new position were anomalous: The position had been vacant since Lee's departure from the post in 1862. While Bragg viewed the job as a "Chief of Staff," his authority overlapped (and thus conflicted) with that of the Confederate Secretary of War, James Seddon. Nonetheless, Bragg's talent at organization and efficiency once again manifested itself -- overseeing inspections of armies, supervising the supply system, and conducting investigations into corruption within the quartermaster department, the conscription bureau, and the prisoner-of-war system. For example, to alleviate crowding at Andersonville, Bragg ordered the construction of new prisons at Millen, Georgia and in Alabama. Bragg remained in Richmond eight months. Under the most difficult circumstances, Bragg did a splendid job as (unofficial) chief-of-staff (It should be said that Bragg's admirable efforts in Richmond are worthy of a separate, scholarly study).Yet, Bragg's relationship with the Army of Tennessee continued. Bragg's rapport with Johnston deteriorated as the latter repeatedly pleaded for more troops, equipment, and horses, while Bragg prodded Johnston to take the offensive. Frustrated over Johnston's tactics, Johnston was eventually replaced - by John Bell Hood. Bragg only half-heartedly endorsed Hood, the latter having actively lobbied via a letter-writing campaign -- behind Johnston's back -- to obtain command of the army. But Hood quickly disappointed his superiors, evacuating Atlanta in September. In the East, Bragg's job was made difficult by Lee, who remained distant and difficult to communicate with. Meanwhile, the relationship between Bragg and Davis remained strong, built upon a sense of mutual loyalty and respect.In October, 1864, Federal forces were threatening Wilmington - the last, major port open for Confederate blockade runners. Davis considered the situation so critical he ordered Bragg to Wilmington to take charge of the situation. Thus, Bragg's career as field commander resumed - as does Hallock's unavailing invective ("This assignment provided Bragg another opportunity to prove himself a poor field commander, and once again he blamed others for his failure")(p. 220). When Bragg took command at Wilmington, he found nothing more than untrained and undisciplined reserves, scattered and inadequate defenses, and a gross shortage of experienced officers. Confederate naval personnel were so undisciplined that Bragg considered sending them away. Adding to Bragg's difficulties was the lack of clear command delineation of Confederate authority in the region of Virginia-North Carolina, compelling Bragg to awkwardly appeal to both Generals Robert E. Lee and Theophilus Holmes on strategic matters.Meanwhile, Sherman's army, fresh from its triumph at Atlanta, was marching virtually unopposed through the Georgia countryside -- faced only by a token number of local militia and Wheeler's depleted cavalry corps. In November, 1864, Bragg was ordered to Augusta to mobilize local defenses against what Confederate officials mistakenly thought to be a threat by Sherman's army. Bragg did his best, taking with him half of his Wilmington garrison. Adding to Bragg's responsibilities, Davis gave Bragg command of all coastal forces, a position Bragg believed utterly futile. The Confederacy had less than five months to live, and manpower shortages were crippling. Indeed, the South had entered what the Germans call Gotterdammerung - the last, dramatic, death struggle.With the defenses of Wilmington weakened, Ulysses S. Grant ordered an attack against the key port city. Bragg immediately returned to Wilmington. Once again, Hallock finds little to compliment Bragg for, accusing the general of indulging once again "in his favorite pastimes - griping and carping" (p. 232). After the fall of Fort Fisher, Bragg's report was "a masterpiece of distortions and innuendos" (p.237), claiming that "Bragg's greatest dilemma was how to divert blame from himself" (p. 238). Such criticisms are patently unwarranted. What the author is trying to accomplish with such invective is difficult to ascertain...As the war came to a rapid end, so did Bragg's military career: In January, 1865, Lee was named General-in-Chief of Confederate Armies. Bragg immediately lost his post as de facto chief of staff, and was relegated to commanding troops in North Carolina. In February, Johnston was returned as Commander of the Army of Tennessee. Bragg eventually joined Davis on the latter's flight from Richmond, but to his credit finally convinced the Confederate President that the war was lost. In May, Bragg was captured by members of the 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry near Concord, Georgia. The war was over.Bragg's postwar career is heartrending. Bragg became a wandering soul, finding it difficult to adjust to civilian life: Having lost his Louisiana plantation to the Freedman's Bureau, he relied on the charity of his brother, residing on the latter's estate in Alabama. Living in a dilapidated former overseer's cabin, Bragg supervised the work of thirty former slaves. Having lost most of their personal possessions and heavily in debt, Bragg and his wife Elise drifted: First to Louisiana, where Bragg was temporarily hired by a railroad company, then in 1867, the former general became the superintendent of the waterworks of New Orleans - only to lose that position under the Reconstruction government. Two years later, Jefferson Davis offered Bragg a position as a district agent in the Carolina Life Insurance Company, but Bragg left after only four months -- feeling unsuited for the work and discouraged by low pay. Bragg then contemplated accepting a position in the Egyptian Army, but his lack of French discouraged him. In 1871, the City of Mobile employed Bragg to oversee river, harbor, and bay improvements, but the former general soon had a falling-out with civilian investors. Bragg continued to seek other employment. In 1874,

Bragg moved to Texas, where he was appointed Chief Engineer of the Gulf, Colorado, Santa Fe Railroad. By all accounts, Bragg did an admirable job, but experienced a falling-out with the firm over payment of salary. Soon thereafter, Bragg became Superintendent of Railroads for the State of Texas, a post he held until his death just a few months later.Yet, Bragg's contribution to the Confederate cause continued: In 1868, Bragg was one of the founding members of the Southern Historical Society Papers, which proved instrumental in gathering primary records of the Confederacy. Bragg remained the archetype of the "unreconstructed rebel," devoted to the Confederate cause and unforgiving to his former enemies.In September, 1876, while walking down a public street in Galveston, Bragg suffered a stroke and died almost immediately. Bragg was 59 years old. He was later interred in Mobile.The author concludes her volume with a grand re-telling of the same, vitriolic, ad hominem arguments that infuses the McWhiney-Hallock Thesis: That Bragg was a major contributor to Confederate defeat because he "lacked imagination" (p. 268), "failed to learn from his mistakes" (p. 269), was unable to "establish and maintain group solidarity within the army" (p. 269), and as a field commander, "proved himself particularly inept" (p. 272). According to Hallock, Bragg's soldiers "did not feel warmth for or from him" (p. 269), then infuses her criticisms with all sorts of dubious pop psychology, claiming that "Bragg's harshness may have been prompted by fears of his own inadequacy," and that his "unreasonable efforts" to discipline and organize his soldiers "may have provided him some measure of comfort as a way of making up for his inadequacies on the battlefield" (p. 269). Hallock smothers the reader with additional culls from her imagination, a poor soul who not only lacked friends, but suffered from what may have been a litany of psychosomatic illnesses. In the end, contends the author, "Bragg's personality was perhaps his greatest shortcoming" (p. 270).I find Hallock's post mortem criticisms of Bragg - like those her dissertation mentor, Grady McWhiney - to be peevish, petulant, and churlish. General Bragg's reputation has been besmirched and maligned, a slander that has reached epic proportion in the realm of Civil War historiography. Instead of being disgusted, frustrated, or angry with Bragg, I found myself possessing a deep and sincere respect for one of the Confederacy's truly unsung heroes.....Lastly, one more criticism of Bragg ought to be addressed: Historians like McWhiney and Hallock have been quick to condemn the general for fighting - and then falling back (i.e. The Kentucky Campaign, Stones River, and Tullahoma). Yet, any serious student of military history knows that pulling one's forces back does NOT equal defeat. Recall the famous withdrawals of the First Marine Division at the Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War, The Red Army in 1941-42, the North Vietnamese Army (1946-1973), and even the Continental Army during the American War of Independence - to name but a few. Forfeiting territory does not necessarily define strategic defeat. In fact, the Kentucky-Stones River-Tullahoma-Chickamauga Campaigns can be rightly interpreted, holistically, as part of a much, much larger attempt to protect Chattanooga and Northern Georgia. In these battles, Bragg not only inflicted a combined total of over 40,000 casualties upon the Federal Army (10,000 more than the South lost at Vicksburg), but delayed the capture of Chattanooga-Atlanta by at least a full year. In this light, Bragg's success as a field commander and strategist come more into focus. In short, Bragg bought the Confederacy the one commodity it lacked: Time.In the end, Hallock makes a remarkable confession: "Bragg achieved greater successes with the Army of Tennessee," she admits, "than did any other Western general" (p. 268).Amen to that.

Book by Hallock Ph.D., Dr. Judith Lee