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Nathan Bedford Forrest: An Analysis of Untutored Military Genius

By Jac Weller

Confederate subordinate generals who served in the Western armies are not so well known as those commanded by General Lee in Virginia. The name Forrest brings to the minds of many only a gigantic man with blood red sabre and blazing eyes, mounted on a tremendous horse and leading one of his furious cavalry charges. He deserves to be so remembered. Perhaps not since Richard of the Lion Heart has an army commander possessed such physical strength and personal combat efficiency. Richard did his fighting encased in what amounted to the 12th Century equivalent of a light tank. Unprotected by armor, Forrest slew in hand-to-hand encounters during the four-years of war at least thirty opponents.[1] In the waning days of the Confederacy, as a Lieutenant General, he fought six Union troopers and came away under his own power.

But Forrest was far more than an individual champion. He was a superb military leader and battlefield commander. There were 22 Confederate lieutenant generals and full generals, nineteen of whom were graduates of West Point.[2] Of those who were not, Richard Taylor, son of General and President Zachary Taylor, was a man of education and military background. Wade Hampton, the South Carolina seigneur, was bred to power and command and was a direct descendant of General Wade Hampton of Revolutionary fame. The last, Bedford Forrest, had only a few months schooling in his life. His father and grandfather probably had even less. His rise in a time and place where birth and education were usually necessary for political and military advancement was indeed remarkable. Much that he did is unusual; the man himself is unique.

Professional military men, particularly Europeans, have studied the campaigns of this wilderness-trained natural soldier. Forrest's use of calvary was in part responsible for its continued existence in Europe in 1914, particularly in Russia. British Field Marshall

[1] Robert Selph Henry, *First with the Most Forrest* (Indianapolis and New York, 1944), 17.

[2] Marcus J. Wright, *General Officers of the Confederate Army* (New York, 1911), 9-18. General Wright does not include John B. Gordon of Georgia among the lieutenant generals. Ellsworth Eliot, Jr., *West Point in the Confederacy* (New York, 1941), *passim*. *Register of Graduates United States Military Academy*, 1955 edition, *passim*; hereinafter cited as *West Point Register*.

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Viscount Wolseley wrote and thought much about Forrest.[3] Sir Douglas Haig probably knew more of his battles, strategy, and tactics than any World War I American general.[4] Captain Liddell Hart, the eminent British military analyst of our own time, based in part his theory of deep strategic penetration on a study of Forrest.[5] Guderian who called himself Hart's "disciple" used these deep penetrations very well indeed in World War II. Wavel, who had even closer access to Hart's studies, was in many respects following Forrest's methods when he smashed the Italian North African forces and took 130,000 prisoners, 400 tanks, and 1,200 guns with a British force of only 31,000 men, 275 tanks, and 120 guns.[6]

Forrest's achievement in rank and the study of him abroad, while significant, are not the only basis for the accolade "military genius." His record speaks for itself. Forrest was successful and practical; he was a good soldier. Further, he achieved truly amazing things when other commanders in the Western theatre were handicapped to helplessness by unsolved logistical and replacement problems. Forrest was almost always victorious, whether he was in overall command or only a sector commander. General Joseph E. Johnston, who had the very best chance to know the generals of both Virginia and the West, pronounced "General Forrest the greatest soldier the Civil War produced."[7] The quotations which mean most, however, were made by Forrest's opponents. Grant said of him, "neither army could present a more effective officer."[8] Rosecrans at the time of Chickamauga, feared him most of the opposing Confederate generals, although others of higher rank were present at the time.[9] Stanton, Lincoln's secretary of war, believed somewhat illogically that as late as May 29, 1863, Forrest might raise the siege of Vicksburg.[10]

Sherman's references to Forrest in his official wartime communications are particularly pertinent, since he was in most direct contact. He wrote Stanton June 14, 1864, "Forrest has only his own cavalry

[3] Henry, *Forrest*, 462, also *passim*; Wolseley in *United Service Magazine*, IV, 4; also *ibid.*, V, 118.

[4] Henry, *Forrest*, 462 *ff.*

[5] A letter from B. H. Liddell Hart to the author dated January 6, 1955, and a short unpublished manuscript by Captain Hart in the author's possession entitled, *Note on the Effect of My Studies of Sherman's and Forrest's Operations in the Western Theatre of the American Civil War.*

[6] J. F. C. Fuller, "Arms and the War," in Ordnance, XXXVIII (1953), 219.

[7] Dabney H. Maury, *Recollections of a Virginian* (New York, 1894), 150.

[8] U. S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York, 1894), II, 108.

[9] *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (69 vols. and index; Washington, 1881-1901), Ser. 1, Vol. XXX, pt. 3, p. 691; hereinafter cited as *OR* with all references to Series 1 unless otherwise noted.

[10] Stanton to Rosecrans, May 27, 1863.

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—and the militia under Gholson. I cannot understand how he could defeat Sturgis (at Brice's Crossroads) with 8,000 men."[11] The next day he wrote, "I will order . . . follow Forrest to the death, if it cost 10,000 lives and breaks the treasury,"[12] and "We must destroy him. . . . If we do not . . . the whole effect of our past conquests will be lost." On June 24, 1864, he wrote Lincoln that he had promised Brigadier General Mower a Major General's commission if he killed Forrest.[13]

However, the statement of some unknown veteran of Forrest's command, which was taken up and repeated by others, is perhaps even more appropriate. "The Almighty God as well as Jefferson Davis signed Bedford Forrest's Commission."[14] It expressed about as well as words ever can the man and the soldier.

No American and very few from any land have ever risen to equal military rank so quickly with so little academic training, military study, and actual experience. Forrest had almost no schooling. He had done, prior to 1861, no military study at all. He had negligible actual military experience.[15] As already indicated, Forrest's two fellow non-West Point Confederate Lieutenant Generals were both educated men from prominent military families with some actual military experience. Cromwell and Clive were non-professionals, but men of much greater education and first-hand familiarity with military matters. One searches in vain for other comparable English-speaking military figures. Even our Revolutionary commanders had a good deal more military education, or campaign experience, or both.

FORREST THE CIVILIAN

Even though a military neophyte, when he enlisted a few days before he was forty, Forrest took with him into the Confederate service a great deal that was important later. His achievements before he enlisted were considerable. His business experience and civilian "know-how" were turned to quick account by his powerful and practical mind.

He was born in Bedford County, in Middle Tennessee, in 1821. His hardy family lived in a tiny log cabin. The elder Forrest was a

[11] *OR*, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 474.
[12] *OR*, III, pt. 2, p. 121.
[13] *Ibid.*, 123.
[14] *Ibid.*, 142.
[15] He intended to volunteer for service in the Texas army at the age of 20 and went there in 1841 with some others from his section, but found the war temporarily over and no soldiers required.

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blacksmith and a small farmer. They were frontier Anglo-Saxon stock, not closely related to the slaveholding aristocracy. Bedford's grandfather, who was perhaps a soldier of the Revolution, was born in Virginia but lived most of his long life in North Carolina. The Forrest family—Bedford was the oldest of nine children—moved from Tennessee to North Mississippi as soon as the Indian lands there were opened for settlement. This country was virgin wilderness. Schools were few and poorly attended. When Forrest was sixteen his father died, leaving him the head of the family. By thrift and efficiently directed hard work he made the family comparatively affluent in a surprisingly short time.

Bedford, even before his majority, went into partnership with an uncle and started trading in horses. As a young man, he was interested in any and all money-making operations. He bought and sold both slaves and real estate as his capital increased.[16] He prospered; his field of operations increased. In his middle 20's, he moved to Memphis. Times were good then along the Mississippi, but Forrest did even better than others. Both his capital and his profits increased.

He quit the slave trade before 1860 and spent the major part of his own time supervising cotton raising on his several plantations, while running several other enterprises through subordinates or with partners. In 1860, he made 1,000 bales which, with the natural increase in his own slaves, probably meant a net income to him of about $75,000 in the money of the times.[17] He was worth at this time about $1,500,000.[18] But figures alone do not give a full picture. On the basis of relative purchasing power after taxes, probably very few citizens during 1958 topped Bedford Forrest in 1860.[19]

Although Forrest enlisted as a private soldier on June 14, 1861, in what later became the Seventh Tennessee Cavalry, along with his own son and his youngest brother whom he had raised as a son, this was perhaps something of a gesture. Forrest was well know along the Mississippi. Wealth and economic position, even if newly acquired, meant a lot in the Old South. He was a natural leader as well, and had been an alderman of Memphis. He had a reputation for fearless and furious action. He had once taken a prisoner from a mob of 3,000 men single-handed. He intervened after a noose

[16] Wyeth, *Forrest*, 20, and elsewhere.

[17] *Ibid.*, 22; normal increases in slaves on plantations of this type generally were worth a bit more than the money crop each year.

[18] Henry, *Forrest*, 439.

[19] A ratio of purchasing power for 1861/1956 of 1/25 is probably substantially correct. Forrest would have had the equivalent of $1,875,000 after taxes.

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was about the man's throat, and completely over-awed and dispersed the entire gathering with two Colt Navy revolvers and a Bowie knife.[20] A man like this couldn't be wasted in the ranks. A few days after he enlisted, he was authorized by the governor of Tennessee to raise a battalion of mounted rangers. This appointment carried with it an assurance of a lieutenant colonel's commission.

FORREST'S MILITARY RECORD

Forrest started his recruiting activities in late June, 1861. He had to find not only men, but arms, horses, and all equipment. His battalion of eight companies, totaling about 650 men from four different Southern states, was mustered into the Confederate service during the first week in October.[21] His men formally elected him their commander, and he was promptly commissioned a lieutenant colonel. The battalion was soon on active duty in Western Kentucky, and Forrest was soon recognized as a successful outpost commander with a reputation for furious fighting. In a cavalry engagement at Sacramento, Kentucky, December 28, 1861, he achieved an outstanding small victory.[22]

Forrest's battalion was ordered to Fort Donelson and arrived on February 11, 1862. As senior cavalry officer there, Forrest commanded the entire Confederate cavalry, about 1,400 troopers. He fought them well, both in meeting and developing the initial Union advance overland from Fort Henry and in the remarkably successful Confederate attack on the enveloping Union lines on February 15, 1862. His command took two batteries and collected about 4,000 stand of small arms. When Confederate Generals Floyd, Buckner, and Pillow[23] decided to surrender, Forrest disagreed violently. He took his entire command out of the doomed position, carrying anyone else who would follow along with him.

Forrest and his troopers arrived at Nashville on February 18, 1862, and found it in utter chaos. An armed mob was looting Confederate warehouses and in control of almost the entire town. Forrest knocked out the mob leader with a pistol butt and turned a fire hose on the rest. In hours, he had the situation in hand with practically no bloodshed. Supplies for the Confederate armies began moving South

[20] Lytle, *Forrest*, 27, and elsewhere.

[21] Two more companies joined November 21, 1861 bringing the total to 790 men; Wyeth, *Forrest*, 28.

[22] Particularly notable as Forrest used in it much of the battlefield tactics which led to later fame. See his own report, *OR*, VII, 65.

[23] There is considerable evidence that Pillow did not want to surrender; Wyeth, *Forrest, passim.*

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by every possible means of transportation. Forrest and his rear guard left only after the Union forces were actually entering the other side of Nashville.

Forrest's battalion was enlarged and made a regiment, and he became a colonel on March 16, 1862. At the end of the first day's fighting at Shiloh, April 6, 1862, Forrest was holding the extreme right flank of the Confederate line next to the Tennessee River. He and his scouts penetrated the Union position by walking between the bluffs and the bank of the stream. He reported to the Confederate commanders both the demoralized condition of the Union army that had fought through the day and the arrival of the first of thousands of Union reinforcements under Buell. He advised an immediate attack. "The unlettered colonel was told to return to his command."[24] After the second day's fighting which the Confederates lost, Forrest commanded the rear guard covering the retreat. Forrest's force stopped and then routed a portion of the Union pursuing force under Sherman, the latter returning to his starting point. However, Forrest was almost captured and was seriously wounded as he charged too far into the Union force.

In the reorganization after Shiloh, Forrest lost his Old Regiment and was sent on June 11, 1862, to form a brigade around Chattanooga and in Middle Tennessee. He took with him only his staff and a twenty man "Escort Company" under his brother William Forrest. His new brigade was made up of disorganized, ill-armed, and under-strength small units; however, he led it almost immediately into enemy occupied country. He took Murfreesboro on July 13, 1862, capturing two Federal generals and their entire force of about 1,300 including cavalry, infantry, and a full battery of artillery. Forrest's force consisted of cavalry only and was as yet only half armed. This has been considered one of his outstanding accomplishments. It was the first major cavalry raid of the war.

During his stay in Middle Tennessee, he was pursued by several Union forces, all stronger than his. He eluded or fought partial actions with these, while taking and destroying small fortified posts, bridges, sections of railroads, depots, and the like. When Forrest finally left this area, which was supposed to be completely in Union hands, he had a fully armed, trained, organized, and confident cavalry brigade. One Union commander said he was wearing out his force by fruitless chasing of Forrest who had his command

[24] Wyeth, *Forrest,* 77-78 quoting a Southern Historical Society Paper by General James A. Chalmers, Forrest's immediate superior at Shiloh and later one of his most valued lieutenants.

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mounted on race horses.[25] Forrest received a well-deserved brigadier general's commission on July 21, 1862.

Forrest's next assignment was to protect the left flank of Bragg's army then invading Kentucky. His brigade, although scarcely two months old, performed brilliantly. It did more than just protect; it held up the whole Union army as the latter strove to get back to the Ohio. Buell had been caught napping, and was saved only by Bragg's complete inability as a fighting commander. Perryville came too late and was very poorly managed from the Confederate point of view.

Again on September 30, 1862, Forrest was ordered to turn over his command to another and, with a somewhat larger nucleus, raise another brigade in and about Murfreesboro for use in West Tennessee. Soon he gathered a respectable force with good officers and morale, but few arms and little equipment. He crossed the Tennessee December 15, 1862, with 2,100 men, 600 of whom were unarmed and 400 in one regiment—practically the entire regiment—armed with flintlock muskets only.[26] For two weeks Forrest was fighting every day. He avoided superior concentrations by mobility, guile, or bluff. He captured men, arms, supplies, and equipment. He fought several respectable small battles. Most important of all, he so obliterated Grant's main line of communications, the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, that the latter's second attempt to capture Vicksburg was immediately called off. Grant would not again depend upon railroad transportation, but use the river instead.[27]

Forrest was defeated at Parker's Cross Roads due to a miscarriage of his orders, but extricated his command handily and recrossed the Tennessee stronger in men, organization, and confidence, as well as immeasurably better armed and equipped. Forrest and his new brigade now served for four months in Middle Tennessee under Wheeler and Van Dorn. The former was defeated in an attack on Union-held Fort Donelson; the latter defeated the Union advanced forces at Thompson's Station and sent Forrest against Brentwood. More than 1,800 of the 2,000 Union prisoners taken by Van Dorn surrendered directly to Forrest's troops.[28] Forrest was now occasionally in command of a division; and after Van Dorn's murder, Forrest took his place as chief cavalry commander in the area.

[25] *OR*, XVI, pt. 2, p. 234; XVI, pt. 1, pp. 815-16 and *passim*.
[26] *OR*, XVII, pt. 1, p. 598.
[27] Grant, *Memoirs*, I, 432.
[28] The reports of this disparity in favor of Forrest's command almost led to a quarrel between Forrest and Van Dorn, Wyeth, *Forrest*, 176, and elsewhere.

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On April 23, 1863, Forrest was ordered to Decatur, Alabama, to combat what developed into one of the most dramatic Union cavalry raids of the War under Colonel Streight. In five days of almost continuous fighting, Forrest finally defeated and captured the whole expedition of about 1,500 men with less than half as many of his own. His reputation, already established in the Western Army, suddenly spread throughout the whole Confederacy.

Forrest was in command of the extreme Confederate right at Chickamauga, including all cavalry on that flank and some infantry.[29] He and his dismounted troopers did extremely well in three long days of fighting,[30] and pursued the beaten Federals almost into Chattanooga. He was terribly abusive in his criticism of Bragg for many things,[31] and for a variety of reasons was again removed from his command and sent to North Mississippi. By December of 1863 he was back in West Tennessee, where he gathered his largest force of recruits and brought them out safe against a numerous, well-armed enemy. He bluffed an attack on the Federal base at Memphis and passed within nine miles of it, while the enemy was expecting him to come out miles to the east.

Forrest's greatest opportunities and his greatest achievements came in 1864. In February, he defeated a Union column of cavalry, infantry, and artillery under General Sooy Smith, which was en route from Memphis to unite with Sherman. The whole Federal command was then to proceed to Mobile,[32] but Forrest in three days fighting sent Smith back to his starting point while Sherman retreated to Vicksburg.

Forrest operated in West Tennessee and Kentucky for a considerable period in March, April, and May of 1864, and during this time, he took Fort Pillow as well as doing other extensive damage. In June of 1864, he beat a Union army under General Sturgis in a pitched battle at Brice's Crossroads. This was one of the most complete Union defeats of the war and was won by Forrest against a numerical superiority of about two to one. He beat the Union command as it came up at the double over a narrow sandy road on a very hot day. His men fought mainly on foot, but mounted and pursued for 50 miles.[33]

In July of 1864, another Union force from Memphis was stopped

[29] Forrest's report of Chickamauga fighting quoted at length in Wyeth, *Forrest*, 264-66.
[30] Stanley F. Horn, *The Army of Tennessee* (Indianapolis and New York, 1941), 263.
[31] *Ibid.*, 290-91.
[32] Wyeth, *Forrest*, 291, quoting a letter from Grant to Thomas.
[33] *OR*, XXXIX, pt. 1, p. 119.

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and forced to retreat after three days fighting.[34] Still another Federal advance was thrown back when Forrest slipped past it and attacked Memphis. Meanwhile, however, Sherman was slowly pressing Johnston back towards Atlanta. As early as May, responsible people were calling on President Davis to send Forrest with a really heavy column against Sherman's communications.[35] But the order came too late, and Forrest's force was too small.[36] Nevertheless, on September 18, 1864, Forrest crossed the Tennessee and wrecked railroads, captured fortifications, destroyed transports, captured gunboats, and generally confounded Union concentrations.

Forrest commanded the Confederate cavalry in Hood's auspicious invasion of Tennessee. His troopers gave Hood one of the most glorious opportunities of the war at Columbia, Tennessee;[37] but the opportunity was lost.[38] Forrest had little to do with the Pyrrhic Victory of Franklin and was not even present at the total defeat at Nashville.[39] But he saved the defeated remnant of the Confederate army in the retreat that followed by one of the most masterly exhibitions of military efficiency ever given by anyone at any time.

Forrest was made lieutenant general in March, 1865.[40] The final campaign opened with him in command of his theatre, but the time for Confederate victories was past.

MILITARY ANALYSIS

In analyzing the qualities which led to Forrest's remarkable record, we will consider his contribution and methods in each of several divisions of military activity. We learn about these mainly from his actions. Unlike many great professional commanders, he left no memoirs, lists of military maxims, notes of historical study, or even records of profound conversations, although many of his pithy remarks survive.[41] He seemed unaware of his remarkable efficiency,

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[34] These engagements near Harrisburg were fought with Stephen D. Lee in command of the Confederate army, although that army was composed principally of Forrest's men. Lee was Forrest's superior.

[35] Particularly General Howell Cobb and Governor Joseph E. Brown of Georgia, and General Joseph E. Johnston, in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York, 1884-88), IV, 276. Hereinafter cited as *Battles and Leaders.*

[36] Forrest did break Sherman's communications temporarily; he wasn't strong enough to keep them severed. Besides, Sherman with corn already ripe in Georgia was now independent of the railroads behind him.

[37] *Battles and Leaders,* IV, 432.

[38] *Ibid.* This miscarriage of orders is not yet completely explained.

[39] Forrest was demonstrating before Murfreesboro and gathering supplies in that area.

[40] Wright, *Officers of Confederate Army,* 18.

[41] One of these from several sources is, "War means fighting, and fighting means killing." Only a realist could have coined this.

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or the fact that his actions themselves showed as rigid an adherence to principles as any soldier has ever demonstrated. His plans were fully developed in his wonderfully powerful mind and rigidly followed. These were based upon the best of military maxims, even though Forrest himself probably did not realize it. Not since Genghis Khan, whom he somewhat resembled in action, has an almost illiterate[42] commander shown such a practical grasp of all that the text books try to teach.

Forrest fought to win, not to demonstrate proficiency in military theory. He dominated and ran everything; his single will determined almost everything about his forces.[43] He was completely in control of his team at all times. He was supremely practical. There is a continuity and natural grace about Forrest's activities which made things which were impossible for others seem easy when he did them. This characteristic, however, makes precise analysis difficult. The whole is not so easily broken down into its component parts as with lesser and more formally schooled commanders. His strategy imperceptibly became his tactics. His organization was all embracing, so that his remarkable logistics, inspections, intelligence gathering, and internal personnel management were intermingled. Forrest had a remarkable ability to delegate successfully, yet he kept ultimate control of everything personally. His weapons teamwork pervaded almost all his military activities. The high morale of every Forrest command cannot be simply traced; it was the result of the combined Forrest personality as well as discipline, attention to men's wants, and success.

Forrest was not a simple character. He had a combination of qualities seldom found in one man. He had a knack of doing the right thing at the right time. Each decision, whether civilian or military, seems in retrospect perfectly normal and not particularly brilliant. Yet when taken together the sum of separate decisions is genius. Common sense alone can accomplish a great deal in business and in battle, and Forrest "fought by ear" as he called it. He claimed no great mental brilliance; yet he planned and administered with a deceptive simplicity. Only a close scrutiny of him and of his

[42] The application of the adjective "illiterate" to Forrest is not strictly true. He could read, although there is some basis for believing his staff read for him at times. His official reports were written by others, perhaps principally Major Charles W. Anderson, but at his direction and correction. His messages written personally are singularly ungrammatical and ill-spelt. Taylor found him, "slow and homely of speech"; Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction* (New York, 1955), 242.

[43] Wyeth, *Forrest*, 35, quoting from unpublished manuscript of the Rev. David C. Kelley.

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methods will show that within his own orderly brain there was I.B.M. filecard precision.

FORREST'S STRATEGY

Strategy has been defined as "The Art and Science of developing and integrating the . . . capabilities of a nation towards . . . victory."[44] Forrest had little to do with Confederate policy making. It is well to note, however, that he disagreed with three of the basic strategic errors of the Confederacy: Cotton was not used initially to buy supplies for the Confederate Armed Forces; the Negro population of the South was never efficiently employed; and no real provision was made for a long war.

Forrest wanted to exchange cotton in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri for sorely needed arms, supplies, and equipment.[45] Cotton was literally as valuable as gold, but not until late in the war did the General Government at Richmond take full advantage of this in international trade and never at all for local purchases.[46] Forrest employed Negroes wherever possible and received loyal service from them. His popularity with the colored people of the South was puzzling to the Union officers,[47] and he showed that he could have handled them well if they had been used on a larger scale in the Confederate armies. Finally, Forrest prepared personally for a long war; his military preparations, where possible, were made on the same basis.

Strategy in a more limited sense can be said to be the art and science of gaining local objectives not including actual combat. The art and science of combat is tactics. The dividing line between strategy and tactics is sometimes thin, and for purposes of this particular study we will consider strategy to be everything that does not pertain to actual fighting.

1. The Concept of Mounted Infantry

Forrest's foremost strategic contribution was the employment of cavalry for movement, with the serious fighting done on foot. This mounted infantry concept accounted for much of the early study of Forrest by European professionals. Viscount Wolseley wrote, "Forrest was the first general who in modern days taught us what Turenne and Montecuculli knew so well, namely the use of the true dragoon,

[44] U. S. Army Department, *Dictionary of U. S. Army Terms* (SR 320-5-1), (Washington, 1953).

[45] *OR*, XXII, pt. 1, p. 608.

[46] For a complete and learned discussion of this see Frank L. Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States* (Chicago, 1959).

[47] Henry, *Forrest*, 441.

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the rifleman on horseback, who from being mounted has all the mobility of the horse soldiered."[48] Mounted infantry were nothing new in war, but Forrest's employment of it certainly was. Further, he evolved the entire system from beginning to end. He probably never heard of Turenne, much less his obscure opponent, Count Montecuculli. However, he realized, in part from his civilian experience, that firearms used by men on horseback do little more than make noise, save at the very closest ranges. Forrest's men were armed for fighting on foot like good infantry. They did not expect to fight seriously on horseback.

His commands, although called cavalry and mounted for mobility, could fight as infantry and do it well. At Chickamauga, General Harvey Hill, fresh from Virginia where he said he had never seen a dead cavalryman, asked someone on the Confederate right who the Confederate infantry were who were fighting tenaciously on that flank. "Them ain't infantry, General," was the answer. "Them's Bedford Forrest's cavalry!" Harvey Hill was suitably impressed.[49] This instance of doing serious fighting on foot is but one of a series extending from Sacramento in December of 1861 through Selma in April of 1865.

2. Deep Penetration

Almost as important as Forrest's strategic employment of mounted infantry was his own particular type of cavalry raid—in reality not a raid at all. Recent study of Forrest's strategy has been particularly concerned with these deep penetrations. Guderian and Wavel in World War II were doing essentially what Forrest had done. Flexible forces of real fighting potential are sent far into enemy territory to occupy the area and defeat opposing commands which attack them. The idea is not "hit and run," but to possess the section and deny it to the enemy. Forrest had an intuitive and almost unique ability to handle his commands with enemy forces all around him. His strategic balance was superb.[50]

There were five principal deep penetrations by Forrest. Three were made into the same general area, West Tennessee and Kentucky. The other two were into Middle Tennessee, but from different directions. Twice in 1862, Forrest went into enemy occupied territory with a

[48] *United Service Magazine*, V, 4.

[49] There are several versions of this; probably the conversation was more grammatical as quoted in Wyeth, *Forrest*, 252. D. H. Hill certainly praises Forrest and his men as quoted in *ibid.*, 255.

[50] An instance of this ability and the confidence of his men in Forrest is given in Henry, *Forrest*, 137, quoting Wolseley.

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force half armed and less than half organized. During the course of his occupancy of these two territories, and with more numerous Union commands around him, he trained both officers and men. He armed his force from captures. His quick, secret moves left the enemy essentially masters only of the ground upon which they stood. He isolated Union posts and sometimes captured them. He was operating without support far behind the "lines," but controlled the country. His forces gave way before heavy Union infantry thrusts, which he was not powerful enough to oppose directly, but closed in behind them. He did not hesitate to divide his forces upon different coordinated missions, but was always able to reconcentrate quickly for decisive action.[51]

When Stuart or Morgan raided, they and not the enemy were masters only of the ground upon which they stood. They had trouble getting their troopers off their horses to "destroy" a railroad. Sometimes the enemy would have the line back in operation the next day. Forrest damaged the Mobile and Ohio Railroad in West Tennessee and Kentucky in December of 1862 so badly that the enemy was never able to get it running again. Forrest took his time and kept Union forces from interrupting his wrecking operations. He tore up mile after mile of track and crossties, piled the former on the latter and set the whole afire. Heat from the burning crossties twisted the rails so that they were useless for railroad purposes thereafter. Every culvert and every bridge was thoroughly destroyed.

Stuart's raids were gallant affairs, usually ending after three or four days with his men and horses exhausted and needing the protection of General Lee's main army for a period of rest and recuperation.[52] Morgan, who was all offense,[53] was surprised on several occasions and ignominiously captured on his most daring raid. Forrest could keep the field, without outside help, far behind enemy lines, and keep it for weeks on end with apparent ease.

3. *"First with the Most"*

In reply to questions as to how he achieved his successes, Forrest

[51] On December 19, 1862, Forrest moved on strongly held Jackson, Tennessee, with but a small force faking an attack while he sent three strong detachments under Dibrell, Russell, and Cox on specific offensive missions which were all successfully accomplished; these rejoined the next day. Wyeth, *Forrest*, 115-16; Henry, *Forrest*, 111.

[52] Stuart's two great "rides around the enemy," before the Seven Days and before Gettysburg, have been questioned as to their military efficiency.

[53] "He had little of that peculiar skill with which Forrest . . . contested . . . an enemy's advance and converted . . . every mistake that he made into a disaster." Basil W. Duke, *History of Morgan's Cavalry* (Cincinnati, 1867), 27. Praise indeed for Forrest from Morgan's second in command.

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said essentially on several occasions, "I get there first with the most men."[54] This was the basic principle of Forrest's strategy. The practical realist planned to win by speed and power, not by heroics. Speed is always implied in his term "first," and power in his term "most." Few words contain so much pith and meaning in a military sense as these.

In Forrest's defense of Mississippi and Alabama from Union attacks based on Memphis and the Mississippi River line of communications in 1864, he was greatly inferior to the forces opposed to him, yet he managed to strike quickly with a locally superior force to defeat the more ponderous and slower moving Union attacks. When all seemed hopeless, he raided Memphis and brought the Union expeditionary force back post haste to defend its own base.

4. Ruses de Guerre

Forrest's fertile imagination supplied him with abundant stratagems which he used throughout the war as circumstances required. Perhaps the most successful of these was his ability to bluff enemy forces into surrendering with but token resistance, or without firing a shot.

When he took the entire Union force at Murfreesboro in the summer of 1862, his plan called for the isolation of the enemy into three separate bodies. He then forced the surrender of each in turn more by show than fighting.

Later in the war, after Forrest's name had become a psychological force in itself,[55] he imposed even more upon the enemy. The Union garrisons of block houses and the like would see Confederate soldiers moving about resolutely and then receive a message under a flag of truce. They must either surrender or take the consequences of their rash and useless resistance.[56] Capitulation often came quickly. Forrest seldom had anywhere near as many men as he claimed.[57] Cannons vaguely seen in the woods were sometimes made of logs and wagon wheels. The final negotiations which preceded Streight's sur-

[54] This is also quoted, "Fustest with the mostest men," many sources. Henry says, "First with the most men" and ridicules the idea of "Fustest" and "Mostest." However, the author has heard both the colloquialisms frequently.

[55] A force of Union cavalry once surrendered to a small party of Confederate infantry near Florence in North Alabama who charged yelling "Forrest! Forrest," Henry, *Forrest,* 273, quoting diary of J. Pugh Cannon, April 12, 1864 entry, p. 196.

[56] Called the Murfreesboro attachment, Wyeth, *Forrest, passim.* ". . . or I will have every man put to the sword." *OR,* XVI, pt. 1, p. 805.

[57] He actually took one Union commander, Colonel Wallace Campbell, of Athens, Alabama, to inspect his encircling forces. The Colonel saw most of them two or three times as they dismounted to impersonate infantry, remounted and rode elsewhere to be inspected as cavalry, etc.; Henry, *Forrest,* 354, and elsewhere.

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render were particularly interesting in this regard. Forrest claimed to have five times as many men as he had, but didn't mention artillery. However, he had given orders to have his two guns moved with their limbers and teams round and round a hill where Streight could count them over and over. He believed Forrest had twelve pieces of artillery.

Forrest on either offense or defense was likely to either "bluff and bragg," or lay an ambush. He took kettle drums with him to be used to give the idea that his force contained a strong proportion of infantry.[58] His escort could deploy and sound like a brigade of cavalry at night.[59] He could hide with his whole command when necessary, either from a superior force or from gunboats. On several occasions, Forrest personally passed himself off as a Union officer commanding a "Union" force consisting of whatever Confederate troops he had at the time.

TACTICS

Forrest's fighting was deeply influenced by his strong belief in the offense. He was not by nature, training, or inclination fond of the defensive. Any holding that he did was merely preliminary to attack. Even in overall defensive situations, such as covering Hood's army after the Nashville disaster, Forrest's actual fighting was done as much as possible by counter-charges, and counter-attacks following ambushes, rather than by straight holding actions. In covering the Confederate army after Shiloh, he charged Sherman's forces after enticing them into an awkward position. In Mississippi in 1864 he was forced to an overall defensive. Yet as we have seen, he used a final offensive maneuver to defeat each enemy thrust. In modern times, Forrest's comments on the Maginot line and strategic defensives in Korea would have been blistering.

Forrest hated above all things, however, the kind of pig-headed frontal attacks that professional generals sometimes order when they can think of nothing else. In the Donelson expedition under Wheeler early in 1863, he did not want to attack a fortress with unsupported dismounted cavalry, and protested violently against the attack before it was made. He led two charges against infantry behind breastworks with massed siege and field artillery and had two horses killed under him; but he refused to serve further under Wheeler, a West Point graduate of the class of 1859.[60] His scathing

[58] Particularly West Tennessee in December of 1862; Wyeth, *Forrest*, 109.
[59] Particularly in a frozen cornfield as in December of 1863 at Estenaula; *ibid.*, 284.
[60] *West Point Register*, 150. He stood 19th in a class of 22. However, Wheeler, in

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remarks to Hood before the latter broke his army upon the Union defenses at Franklin are taken up in detail later.

In spite of Forrest's love of the offense, he was not, like some purely offensive commanders, lost in defensive situations. Like Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah, Forrest in retreat would fight for a wheelbarrow. He could keep complete control of his entire force in the tightest possible situations such as that at Parker's Crossroads in December, 1862.

Ever important in Forrest's tactics was his desire to obtain the initiative. He called this "getting a bulge." Once he had this, he kept it. He was unacquainted with all that had been written even then about battlefield ascendancy. He was as capable, however, as any commander who ever lived at keeping his enemy off balance.

Forrest's attacks are remarkable for two features. There is a continuity in regard to these from Sacramento to Selma, in every single action, big and small. First, he tried to pick unexpected points. Second he never made a single attack if it was humanly possible to have some part of his command hit the enemy at another point. The multiple nature and the unexpected angles of Forrest's attacks upset the enemy; concentration was difficult. A single Confederate regiment attacked the right rear of the Union force at Brice's Crossroads. Forrest's main attacks there enormously benefitted from this.

Where possible, Forrest attacked from the flank. He realized the value of "hitting 'em on the end!" as he called it. The successful parts of his Chickamauga fighting against the main Union force and against Granger's reinforcing column were in large part from the flank. On a smaller scale, he smashed every one of Streight's stands and counter-attacks by a movement on one or both of the Union flanks. In clearing a way for Hood's army on November 23, 1864, the Federal forces were thrown back, utterly demoralized, by attacks on both flanks and their rear.

1. Weapons and Weapon Tactics

Of particular importance to Forrest's tactics were his rather unusual ideas in connection with arms and the teamwork of employing them in battle. Nowhere in his military operations was his previous personal life more important to him. He was a product of the wilderness and the frontier. He was born to a life of firearms and edged weapons. Before he came of age he fought four men in the public

spite of his youth, was a good and brave soldier who offered to allow Forrest to take over command of all cavalry in the summer of 1864; Wyeth, *Forrest*, 434, quoting a letter from Wheeler.

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square at Hernando, Mississippi. Three fell by his pistol and a borrowed knife. The fourth saved himself by flight. He was an acknowledged expert with revolver and rifle long before the war. At Donelson, in his first serious combat, a Union sharpshooter was annoying his regiment from the top of a tall tree at long range. Forrest took a Maynard rifle from one of his men and in one shot brought the enemy soldier headlong to the ground. At Murfreesboro he killed with a revolver a Union soldier who lay in wait for him as the soldier rose and fired.

Forrest's opinion of sidearms was far from orthodox, although by the end of the war, even the Union cavalry came around to something of the same idea. When he was raising his first battalion in Tennessee and Kentucky in the summer of 1861, he bought with his own funds equipment and arms including a number of Colt Navy revolvers. He had no respect at all for sabers. They were not only foreign to the frontier fighting that he knew well, but were also likely to be used in the frenzy of combat in a way that, in the hands of men of ordinary strength, would not inflict serious wounds. Forrest carried a saber ground to a razor edge, but he didn't believe in them for his men. His own personal strength was such that on one occasion he practically severed a Union officer's head from his shoulders with a single blow. Even a pocket knife,[61] or a stray ax were fatal weapons in his hands,[62] but for his soldiers he preferred revolvers.

As regards shoulder weapons, Forrest's ideas changed somewhat during the war. Because of difficulty of obtaining rifles or carbines, his first battalion was armed in large part with sawed-off double-barreled shotguns. These were extremely effective in his charge of Sherman's pursuing column following the retreat after Shiloh. The regiment paused at 25 yard range, emptied their shotguns, and then went on in with revolvers. So employed, buckshot can be extremely effective;[63] however, as the war wore on, Forrest liked to begin to fight dismounted and at longer range. Nothing is so typical of Forrest

[61] Forrest killed Lieutenant Gould of the Artillery (after the latter shot the general in the body at close range) by holding the lieutenant's hand and pistol powerless with one of his while he opened his pocket knife with his teeth and ripped open his assailant's abdomen. See Henry, *Forrest*, 162-63, for good description of the combat and its causes.

[62] In self-defense after the end of the war he seized an axe and split the skull of a drunken armed Negro who was intent on murdering both his own wife and Forrest who had come to her assistance. He was acquitted by a Negro magistrate; Henry, *Forrest*, 441-42, and elsewhere.

[63] Union Lieutenant Colonel J. G. Parkhurst reported that Forrest's men had "double-barreled shotguns and Colt's Navy revolvers" at Murfreesboro; *OR*, XVI, pt. 1, p. 804.

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as the use of rifles, particularly long-range rifles. They saved the lives of his men by keeping the enemy cavalry too far away to be dangerous with their shorter ranged, but quicker firing, carbines.

At first, he had a preference for the Sharps and Maynards breech-loading weapons.[64] Later on, however, because of the scarcity of these and also because of their poor obturation, Forrest tried to arm every single trooper with a short Enfield rifle.[65] The long infantry Enfield rifle had a barrel too clumsy to carry on horseback; the British carbine was too short to be effective dismounted. However, between these two extremes, there were several models of the British Enfield that were almost perfect for Forrest's purposes. Even today, the musketoon Enfield will shoot remarkably well on man sized targets up to a full 400 yards.[66]

Every trooper, where possible, had a rifle with which he was capable of full infantry performance dismounted. The most skillful had the most accurate weapons and were designated as sharpshooters. Forrest used these men at Sacramento and in every protracted engagement throughout the war. Perhaps the most dramatic employment of them was in the capture of Fort Pillow on the Mississippi during his last deep penetration into this area in 1864. His sharpshooters picked off at long range most of the Union officers and others who showed themselves and thereby gained a complete fire ascendency over the garrison.[67] The walls, built to withstand artillery, were too thick to be used for smallarms fire without exposing the firers to the Confederate sharpshooters safely protected behind trees and stumps. The latter, once they had silenced the garrison, advanced stealthily until they were within 150 yards of the Fort. They took new positions and then concentrated a covering fire of such volume and accuracy on any Union soldier showing himself that the main Confederate force was able to walk forward, cross the ditch, and mount the earthwork to just beneath the parapet without firing a shot, or suffering many casualties.

At a word of command, the Confederates rose and fired into the Union soldiers huddled together inside the fort with telling effect. Fort Pillow was captured and at comparatively small cost. The garrison, mostly Negro Union soldiers plentifully supplied with

[64] *OR*, VII, 65.

[65] In Forrest's proposal to President Davis and Confederate Adjutant-General Cooper, August 9, 1863, to reoccupy West Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mississippi he stipulated that he wished men "with long-range guns (Enfield)"; *OR*, XXIII, pt. 3, p. 955.

[66] Jac Weller, "Shooting the Weapons of the Confederate Infantry," in *American Rifleman* (April, May and June [Three Part Article], 1954), *passim*.

[67] *OR*, XXXII, pt. 2, p. 559.

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whiskey, sustained heavy casualties in the fort and then retreated down the bluff to the edge of the river where there was a supply of extra ammunition. A Union gunboat was to support their further fighting with canister. However, if the gunboat stayed at effective canister range, it was within effective range of the Confederate Sharpshooters now concentrated and instructed by Forrest to "shoot everything blue from wind to water." The gunboat steamed away leaving a tragic situation ashore. Some Negroes tried to surrender while others around them continued to fight. Heavy casualties were sustained.

An indication of the real usefulness of the different Confederate cavalry commanders is given by the arms they preferred for their troopers. J. E. B. Stuart in Virginia, a true master of reconnaissance and mounted fighting in the classic cavalry style, preferred the saber. Not many men on either side were killed by sabers. John Morgan, the raider non-pareil, wanted each of his soldiers to have four, six, or even more revolvers for use on horseback. Even discounting the supply and maintenance problem in connection with Morgan's idea, which was certainly impractical for any large number of men in the Confederacy, revolver fire on horseback gives a maximum effective range of about 15 yards which was insufficient for serious field operations. Forrest's men were not merely cavalry; they were soldiers and did anything and everything that soldiers of any kind could do. Forrest realized that for serious fighting a man on foot armed with a Minie rifle was immeasurably superior to any horseman, however armed.

A rare compliment was paid Forrest and his men by Union General William Sooy Smith who complained that Forrest's muzzle-loading Enfield and Austrian rifles put the Union troopers armed with the very best breechloading and repeating carbines at a disadvantage.[68] An interesting development of this same thinking was the issue of the Colt revolving rifle—discarded early in the war for use by the infantry—to Northern cavalry operating against Forrest.[69] An even more astonishing counter-armament was the issuance to a large section of Union cavalry in the fall of 1864 of the long muzzle-loading Springfield 1861 infantry rifle.[70] These weapons could not be loaded efficiently on horseback, yet Colonel Capron's men endeavored to use them mounted.

[68] *OR*, XXXII, pt. 1, p. 257.

[69] *OR*, XVII, pt. 1, p. 181.

[70] Wyeth, *Forrest*, 539, quoting Union Major Henry C. Connelly in a letter dated August 8, 1887, to *Century Magazine*, ". . . about as serviceable to cavalry as a good club."

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Another Union compliment to Forrest was the make-up of Streight's command, infantry mounted on mules—infantry to fight like Forrest's men did dismounted; the mules to give untrained horsemen the speed and range of the Confederates. It was not a happy choice for the men were badly galled; the mules couldn't match Forrest's superb horses.

Forrest's weapons tactics rather than his weapons themselves were responsible for his success. Successful commanders throughout military history have had their specific weapons copied when their combat efficiency was due to the way they employed them.

2. *Forrest's Artillery*

Artillery was employed by Forrest to his great advantage from the beginning to the end of the war.[71] He took it everywhere and spared no pains in selecting and training men and horses for it. He himself was a competent gunner. He practically committed to memory in one week the Confederate Field Artillery Manual.[72] Although his pronunciation of words like ricochet was a bit unusual (he said "rickety shay"), he insisted that everything that would tend to preserve his batteries and increase the individual efficiency of his guns be done exactly. His artillery was particularly important to his invasion success. Cavalry raiders usually could not attack the timber and earth fortifications which the Union covering forces employed so extensively in the West. So long as these held out, it was impossible to do a great deal of damage to the railroad bridges and depots which they defended. Forrest took along his artillery, knocked apart the fortifications or forced the garrisons to surrender, and then destroyed everything with ease and thoroughness.

In the early days, Forrest had only brass smoothbore pieces. His first Chief of Artillery, Captain Freeman, liked best the 12-pounder field howitzer whose most effective ammunition was canister. Freeman employed these weapons at short range, generally with two cans of musket balls in front of a single charge of powder.[73] At Thompson's Station, Freeman's battery suddenly opened on the Union flank at very close range, creating a panic among the dismounted Union

[71] Forrest had a single piece of artillery under his command during the early days in Western Kentucky. This 4-pounder was used satisfactorily against a Union gunboat. A section (2 pieces) of the battery captured at Murfreesboro in 1862 was permanently assigned to Forrest's First Brigade. He had his own artillery throughout the rest of the war.

[72] Wyeth, *Forrest*, 138.

[73] *Ibid.*, 184. It should be borne in mind, however, that Confederate canister was generally cast iron pellets rather than relatively scarce lead.

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cavalry and artillery. These smoothbore howitzers were first class for such work.

Forrest captured in West Tennessee in December, 1862, two 3-inch Rodman rifles. He began to have a preference for the rifled field guns thereafter. Captain John Morton, who commanded his artillery after Freeman's death, handled these with unusual ability and precision. They were more accurate at the longer ranges and had greater penetrating power for fighting gunboats. This preference for rifled guns, which was unusual in either army for serious fighting in the later years of the war, was due in part to Forrest's love of long range sharpshooting and in part to the gunboats with which he had to contend on the three great rivers in his theater of operations. However, Morton's gunners seem to have been the most efficient of all Confederate artillerymen with explosive shell from rifled guns, largely because they were using captured ammunition most of the time. Wartime accounts of Confederate shell performance, as well as the large number of unexploded projectiles recovered from the battlefields today, indicate the unreliability of Confederate fuses.[74] Morton's guns on occasion seemed to explode every shell in close proximity to the target;[75] and Morton seems to have been able to fire canister more effectively from his Rodmans than was usual.[76] Perhaps when using canister his pieces were so close to the enemy that the charges did not have a chance to separate unevenly as was common from rifled barrels.

Other artillery pieces are mentioned as being in Forrest's commands. The mountain howitzers were used for a while but were never popular because of their poor range and low power. They were discarded as soon as they could be replaced either with standard field howitzers, or with field guns. Two 20-pounder Parrotts were taken on the Johnsonville expedition and unfortunately lost aboard the *Venus* when recaptured by the Federal forces in Forrest's only naval fighting. Some James rifles were captured in Middle Tennessee in the fall of 1864 and were used effectively in the Johnsonville bombardment. In this action, Forrest used his artillery from

[74] Jac Weller, "Civil War Field Artillery," in *Military Collector and Historian* (June, September, and December [Three Part Article], 1953), *passim*. Also Jennings C. Wise, *The Long Arm of Lee* (Lynchburg, Va., 1915), 538 says only one shell in fifteen worked in an action on May 4, 1863. About half those recovered from battlefields were "duds."

[75] *OR*, XXXIX, pt. 1, p. 92.

[76] John W. Morton, *The Artillery of Nathan Bedford Forrest's Cavalry* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1909), 64 and *passim*.

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one bank of the Tennessee to destroy well guarded Union communications on the other.[77]

3. The Weapons Team

Forrest's greatest weapons contribution was not in the use of any one arm, though he managed to have his men do well with each, but in the employment of his weapons as a team. In every action, he thought of all his arms and employed them in a coordinated plan. The sharpshooter with his precise but slow loading rifle, or the ever potent artillery, usually came first. Forrest had a feel for weapons. Local conditions determined how he would employ his artillery and sharpshooters for maximum initial advantage. When battle was joined, his dismounted troopers fought with full infantry power. There were finally the shotguns and revolvers for close range work. Forrest was a team man; his weapons team was the very best.

SUPPLY

Forrest was a first rate battlefield commander. He was also what was far rarer in the Confederacy—a master of military supply and field transport, or logistics as that science is called today.[78] As the war was fought, supply became the basic problem of the Confederacy. Before the final defeat, Confederate armies were forced into inefficiency by starvation and exposure. One of the tragedies of the Confederacy is the fact that this took place in some parts of the South while there was plenty of food, clothing, and tentage in other parts.

Forrest's innate logistical ability is astonishing. His methods of attacking the problem were characteristic of him. At first, when he was still receiving issues from the Confederate Government, he was good at getting what he ordered, while other battalion commanders were having to wait for weeks.[79] Later, when almost every other commander in the Confederate army, including even General Lee, was protesting against the failure of commissary and quartermaster supplies to arrive, Forrest took matters into his own hands. He did not stop trying to get things through the usual channels, when that was possible, but he somehow procured what was needed. If supplies were available through civilian sources in either Confederate or

[77] At this time, the main route for supplies was up the Tennessee to Johnsonville, by rail to Nashville, and then over alternate routes to Chattanooga and south to Atlanta.

[78] Logistics is a G-4 function in today's U. S. Army organization, and includes transportation as well as procurement. There is a supply officer, but his functions are in connection with accounting.

[79] Wyeth, *Forrest*, quoting Kelley who succeeded ". . . except when I came in contact with the requisitions of N. B. Forrest."

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Occupied territory, they were purchased. There was also a good deal that only the Union army could supply. Forrest took full advantage of this last source throughout the war.[80]

Forrest found out early that the running of a military command was not greatly different from the running of several plantations. Slave labor required about the same form of quartermaster and commissary work as for troops in the field. He soon began to make up a group of men capable of finding what was required for his commands, both through regular and irregular channels. These officers were, in part, Forrest's business associates from civilian life. He took them virtually intact from command to command throughout the war years. His commissary was in charge of Major Gilbert V. Rambaut, a former Memphis hotel manager. His quartermaster, Major C. S. Severson, had long experience in merchandising in the Memphis area. Major Charles W. Anderson, who had merchandising experience and was a former railroad executive, was sometimes his inspector general. Others were only slightly less important. The entire staff did what was required at the time; they were not specialized as are some staff officers today. Forrest was a keen judge of men and had a capacity for employing his personnel where their talents would be most useful in taking care of his command.

Early in the war, Forrest's battalion had a compact well-provisioned wagon train driven by his own slaves. In large measure, the wagons and teams as well as the supplies that they carried were furnished by Forrest himself. His teamsters were promised their freedom at the end of the war and served him faithfully long after they could easily have deserted to the enemy. Forty-four of the original 45 remained loyal into the last year of the war, but the loss of mules and wagons was far greater.

Forrest's first recourse in supplying weapons to his men was to purchase them with his own funds. As already pointed out, he procured Colt Navy revolvers in this manner in the summer of 1861 in Kentucky. He bought new shotguns and had them cut down according to his own ideas for their use by his soldiers. Volunteers were urged to bring their own arms. Forrest's staff made sure that they got their full share of the weapons provided by the Confederacy. But that source alone could not have provided half the necessary weapons. He fully armed the first brigade he raised in the summer

[80] Wolseley in *United Service Magazine*, V, 118 says ". . . every gun, rifle, wagon and ambulance and all the clothing, equipment, ammunition and other supplies . . . taken from the Northern armies" with most of it so stamped.

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of 1862 with weapons captured from Union forces in and around Murfreesboro. He armed his second brigade in West Tennessee in a similar manner in December of that year. In the Spring of 1863 he clashed violently with his commander, General Van Dorn, over his right to keep the best of the arms which his forces captured.

Forrest appreciated more than most military men the power of money in getting supplies and equipment through civilian sources. He spent his own without hesitancy. In West Tennessee in December of 1863, he spent within a few days $20,000 of his private funds—a large sum at the time—for subsisting and equipping his men.[81] As already pointed out, he advocated bringing into West Tennessee and Kentucky cotton with which he could have purchased not only subsistence supplies, but ammunition and smallarms.[82] A realist always, and close to his people, in the last winter of the war he wanted to exchange salt for foodstuffs with the civilian population of Mississippi and Alabama, now almost as poor as the army.[83] Confederate paper money did them no good.

In Bedford Forrest's deep penetrations, he gathered up everything —not only arms, clothing, and foodstuffs, but lead and leather as well. Towards the end, when the Confederacy lacked even horseshoes, he brought out the iron rims from farm wagon wheels in order to beat them into the needed shoes for his mounts.

Captures from the enemy sometimes presented serious problems. Almost everything was needed in the Confederacy, but where a good deal was seized from the enemy there usually was not sufficient time or transportation equipment to permit carrying off everything. Arms and ammunition were of first importance; they were of relatively small bulk. Decisions had to be made concerning other property. In many cases, a good deal had to be destroyed. In such instances, individual soldiers were allowed to exchange clothing, saddles, blankets, and the like for pieces of better quality or condition. However, a strict supervision had to be maintained that they did not load themselves down with extra things. Mobility was essential; and mobility was impossible if each trooper's horse was carrying an extra hundred pounds of quartermaster and commissary supplies.

The exchanges of equipment, mounts, arms, and the like were responsible for the relatively first rate condition of Forrest's commands. Saddles issued by the Confederacy were of such poor qual-

[81] *OR*, LVI, 789.
[82] Wright, *Officers of Confederate Army*, 18.
[83] *OR*, XXXIX, pt. 1, p. 815.

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ity as to be positively harmful to the horses' backs, but they hurt Forrest's commands less than others, since his men retained very few of them for any considerable period of time.

Forrest had a peculiarly civilian approach to all property that he captured. At Murfreesboro in July of 1862, he started his practice of inventorying everything.[84] He had a peculiar knack for the right kind of paper work. He had lived in poverty in his youth, and he took the same care of the things he captured for the Confederacy as he did his own. Only by the most painstaking attention to detail could property be kept efficiently, either on a slave-run plantation or in an army.

Next to weapons, horses were the most important single requirement for Forrest's rather unusual techniques of making war. Confederate cavalrymen sometimes furnished their own mounts.[85] There was no shortage of fine horses suitable for cavalry mounts in the Western South early in the war, nor of men willing and able to bring such a horse with them into the service. As time went on, however, cavalry horses were used up at alarming rates. A soldier who provided his own mount and had it killed on active duty had a right to expect an equivalent horse from the Confederate Government. Sometimes a man would return to his home to procure another animal. More often, particularly in Forrest's command, one would be supplied from those captured or procured in other ways.[86] Toward the end of the war, this became increasingly difficult since suitable horses no longer were available.

Forrest somehow kept his command reasonably well mounted. Nothing was more time consuming for him than his continual inspections of horses and his personal instruction of riders in their care, yet this policy paid rich dividends. Horses which stayed alive and in good condition did not need to be replaced. Forrest was particularly careful of his horses during long periods of active duty, and his ability to get a little more from his command in a crisis than the opposing generals could get from theirs was due as much to the painstaking care of his animals as to the men themselves. Before setting out after Streight, Forrest personally chose the horses and men which were to accompany him. In spite of the remounts

[84] Morton, *Forrest's Artillery*, 111.

[85] There was no uniformity in this throughout the entire Confederacy. Initially, Forrest advertised that "a valuation of the property in horses and arms will be made, and the amount credited to the volunteers." Memphis *Daily Appeal* as quoted in Wyeth, *Forrest*, 24.

[86] Forrest was accused of horse stealing by his opponents; Sherman to Grant, April 28, 1864, as quoted in Henry, *Forrest*, 273.

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the Union force obtained, the Southerners and their animals won. But Forrest's horses, while cared for, were not pampered. He believed in using them and not just having them around to look at. Twenty-nine were killed under him during the four years of war.[87]

TRANSPORTATION

Getting from place to place in Forrest's theatre of operations presented unusual problems. Forrest's whole thesis of fighting was based on movement, and the horse furnished the major part of soldier transport.

Forrest fought over a territory lacking in public means of transportation. Southern railroads were generally of little importance. Within a few months after the start of the war the Mississippi and Northern Alabama roads had been torn up. They ran only sporadically thereafter, although Forrest did use five freight trains in September, 1864, to transport part of his command toward Middle Tennessee.

Public highways in this area were not good; and they rapidly became much worse. What bridges there were before the war were soon destroyed by one or the other of the contending armies, yet Forrest's command had a remarkable ability to ford streams. In the early stages of the Chickamauga Campaign, he offered to carry three infantry divisions across the Tennessee on the backs of his horses. The fording of a river as wide as the Tennessee—more than a mile at one place where Forrest crossed it—seems inconceivable for a large command, yet he did it more than once at low water. With the rains even the small streams became impassable, but Forrest developed an unusual device for getting his entire command, including artillery, across relatively narrow streams. He swam the horses with their riders hanging to them and then pulled the guns across by means of a rope attached to a double team on the other side.[88] The gun itself would be completely under water, but was not permanently harmed. The ammunition was held above water by mounted men, or taken across in small boats.

Twice on the Memphis raid in 1864, when General A. J. Smith's second invasion of Mississippi was defeated by Forrest's action in attacking Smith's base, the Confederates built bridges over large streams by using wild grapevines, and trees felled properly in midstream.[89] These bridges depended in part on floats in the middle and usually would last only a day or so. But they could be built in a

[87] A careful treatment of this is given in Wyeth, *Forrest*, 605-606.
[88] Many sources; good illustration in Wyeth, *Forrest*, 216.
[89] Morton, *Forrest's Artillery*, 218.

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matter of three hours, including rail and board flooring, and allowed passage of men, animals, and even field guns.

One of the truly remarkable feats accomplished by Forrest was to cross wide rivers, too full for fording, in the face of patrolling gunboats. Although a seemingly risky procedure, Forrest never ran into trouble. When he planned crossing the Tennessee at Clifton in December of 1862, he sent ahead a boat-building party; and after he was across he sank the two flat boats in order to use them on his return.[90] He had chosen for his crossing a place where an island provided shelter for his boats. He had lookouts up and down the river to spot and signal the approach of gunboats, and when one came the flat boats pulled behind the island. If he was undiscovered he was content to let the gunboats go their way. But his artillery was so posted as to be able to keep the gunboats at a distance, if it became necessary to make the crossing by force.

Forrest was a master of improvisation throughout his career. An unusual railroad transportation expedient, probably invented by him, was the replacement of some of the railroad engines in North Mississippi, at least to an extent capable of transporting supplies, by teams of mules. He once saved a gun during a temporary retreat at Chickamauga by cutting the harness from dead animals and putting it quickly over the saddles of the horses of four of his Escort Company. When weeks of continued rain had rendered the roads completely impassable to horse-drawn artillery of the ordinary sort, Forrest dragged his guns on the Johnsonville expedition by impressing large teams of oxen along the road.

Forrest's greatest transportation achievement was his rear guard action which saved Hood's defeated army after the Battle of Nashville. More than 13,000 Confederate soldiers including seven generals and about 60 guns had been lost,[91] yet when Forrest arrived across country from Murfreesboro, he brought order out of chaos. Nominally in charge of the rearguard only, he fought almost continuously and still directed all transportation activities. His command, which now included infantry, was, according to General Thomas, "undaunted and firm, and did its work bravely to the last," while the rest of the army was "a disheartened and disorganized rabble."[92] Under extreme weather conditions Forrest managed to get every gun and wagon across the Tennessee. Rather than struggle against the hub-deep mud and ice for miles with regular teams, For-

[90] Wyeth, *Forrest*, 108.
[91] Thomas said "13,189 men . . . and 72 pieces." *OR*, XLV, pt. 1, p. 46.
[92] *Ibid.*, 42.

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rest left half the guns and wagons, double-teamed the others, and used yokes of oxen to help out. After getting the first lot across the river, he held up the Union pursuit, under Wilson, long enough to bring back his animals and make another trip. During this retreat, he not only got out every gun and wagon that remained, but also a large number of beef cattle and hogs that he had gathered at Murfreesboro. Anyone doubting Forrest's ability to handle large operations need only read again the saga of this retreat. He was advising Hood, not only on the rearguard action and the trains, but also on every other detail of army operation.[93] His was a truly remarkable performance.[94]

ORGANIZATION

Formal organizations with enormous staffs are military phenomena of the 20th Century. Forrest certainly never had anything like them, nor was his organization rigid and set. Things were changing too rapidly. As a Lieutenant General, when he commanded the Confederate forces in Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana as well as part of Alabama and, for what it was worth, Tennessee and Kentucky, he had but a small staff by modern standards. Yet one of the foremost reasons for his success was his unusual but effective organizational techniques. He had a knack of instituting an even flow of authority within his own commands. The structure was so simple all could understand it; thus there were fewer chances for mistakes. Each unit commander was completely responsible for his entire unit. Staff functions as we think of them today with their implied divided authority and multiple responsibility were unknown. Somehow, Forrest seems to have bound together into a team his unit commanders, their officers, and their enlisted men. He seems to have done this quickly and without apparent effort. From beginning to end, Forrest had relatively less trouble with his units than did other officers of a similar grade. This is particularly unusual when one considers his social position in relation to some men he commanded.[95]

In the Fall of 1861, Forrest persuaded several independent company commanders to join his battalion. One of these, the often quoted D. C. Kelley, a Methodist Minister who took leave of his congregation to fight a war, was elected major. These men joined Forrest of their

[93] Wyeth, *Forrest*, again quoting Kelley, p. 571.
[94] Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 421 *ff*, describes this vividly.
[95] Forrest, as a former slave dealer and gambler from the "cracker" section of the Southern people, aroused considerable resentment, Henry, *Forrest*, 237.

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own free will and accord. They were dissimilar in almost everything save that none of them had any real knowledge of soldiering. Neither did their commander, but he knew how to run things. In a little over three months, this unit not only fought well at Donelson,[96] but held its organization through a night of chaos, forded a freezing stream, and got free to become the only Confederate unit that escaped a dismal and humiliating surrender.[97] Forrest had somehow galvanized individuals into his kind of team. It did precisely as he ordered, but it had more than just discipline. It had a unit pride and confidence in its commander and in itself. This was the nucleus of the force which Forrest used to stop cold the Union pursuit after Shiloh. This regiment and its organization, conceived and brought into being in less than eight months by a man who knew literally nothing of the theory of command and military subordination, was truly remarkable.

As he shifted to larger and larger commands, he took with him the same simple and direct organization. His subordinate commanders were never completely of his choice, but they were usually won over to the Forrest way of doing things. So were the men they commanded.[98] It helped, of course, that Forrest took with him from command to command his staff and other special forces, but he had to build afresh time after time. His regimental commanders were not always first quality. In most instances, Confederate officers through the grade of colonel were elected by their men—not the best way to get efficient leadership. Because of his frequent transfers, Forrest did not always select his chief subordinates, yet he managed to retain an organization that ran smoothly in camp and on the march. In battle, his commands reacted with precision and speed to his wishes. There was an astonishingly small time lag between an order and its execution, considering the communications of the day.

Forrest's organization was, of course, designed to subordinate everything to his own indomitable will.[99] Perhaps no other man would have set up such a completely centralized system; the strain of running it would kill most men. Yet with Forrest in charge it was superb. He encouraged individual initiative only in relatively small

[96] General Gideon J. Pillow's report particularly; *OR*, VII, 282.

[97] General John B. Floyd's report, *ibid.*, 270-75. Perhaps the saddest account of all of a tragic want of confidence in Confederate soldiers.

[98] Forrest was not always popular; he was "feared and despised" by some in the fall of 1862, who later appreciated and loved him. Henry, *Forrest*, 171, quoting John Berrien Lindsley, *The Military Annals of Tennessee, Confederate* (Nashville, 1886), 784, 787.

[99] Wyeth, *Forrest*, 35 and *passim*, usually quoting Kelley.

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matters. He never gave a discretionary order when it was avoidable. Theorists will say that this is wrong, yet it worked for him.

INTELLIGENCE

Perhaps no part of Forrest's organization was quite so characteristic of him as his use of scouts. Timely information was of tremendous importance. Forrest intuitively appreciated this from the very beginning. Like Washington, he was his own intelligence officer.[100] In his own unique way he organized extremely well for the collection of information. Trained regular soldiers are notoriously poor at mingling with civilians to gain information. Even volunteer soldiers in uniform are somewhat at a disadvantage. Forrest's scouts, who were more or less continuously commanded throughout his various organizations by his brother, Captain Bill Forrest, were never even on the Confederate payroll.[101] In times of stress they came together and fought bravely mounted or on foot; but they usually operated semi-independently. They were not spies; they were always armed and they operated under direct control against the enemy. However, there was an informality about the Southern uniform which allowed them to appear to be civilians when it was desirable.

When Forrest began his deep penetrations he already had accurate, up-to-date information on conditions within the areas to be invaded, gathered by these scouts. He sent them into Middle Tennessee before he entered the territory in the summer of 1862. At least some of Forrest's scouts were almost continuously in West Tennessee. In the spring of 1863, he probably knew far more of enemy dispositions in and about Nashville and Franklin than his superiors. Because of his excellent scouting system he was particularly good at guessing his enemy's probable moves before he made them.

Intuitively, Forrest seems to have grasped what G-2 officers have systematically determined in recent times. Combat intelligence comes mainly from reconnaissance and proper and immediate interrogation of prisoners.[102] Forrest could move surely and quickly for his scouts kept him continuously informed of the situation about him.

[100] Today, the G-2 officer of a United States division is responsible for the collection, evaluation, and pertinent dissemination of division intelligence. He has a small personal staff as well as special forces for reconnaissance, capture of prisoners, interrogation, and the like.

[101] Wyeth, *Forrest,* 131; these men were also known in West Tennessee as the "Forty Thieves."

[102] The author wishes to acknowledge his debt to his friend and Princeton classmate, Colonel Roger Willock, USMCR, M. A. Harvard 1956, for long conversations linking Civil War and modern military techniques. Colonel Willock was recently G-2 officer of the 3rd Marine Division, FMF, during the Korean Emergency.

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His men felt safe and slept soundly even in close proximity to superior Union forces for they had confidence in their commander's ability to avoid all disastrous contact.[103] At Chickamauga, even though his command was almost fully engaged, he still had his scouts out as a screen to intercept, develop, and immediately report the presence, direction, and strength of a Union column under General Granger advancing from Chattanooga.[104]

THE ESCORT

Forrest's Escort Company was an organization somewhat similar to his scouts. It was made up of soldiers individually selected for their fighting ability; but they could do other things too. Forrest needed a small force that he could personally lead into combat at a critical time, or that he could send on the most difficult type of flanking missions. He formed this elite corps of fighters like himself and used it for unique purposes. There were few American military precedents for anything of this type. The company grew in size from about a dozen in the battalion days to as many as two hundred late in the war.[105] They were first rate at fighting, or at maneuvers. They could bluff. They could even on occasion do an extremely convincing job of deserting to the enemy with complete information as to Forrest's plans—all, of course, in accordance with Forrest's instructions[106]—and then redesert with useful information about the Union forces.

PLANNING

Organizational planning came naturally to Forrest, but it was his own type of planning. His powerful mind dispensed with lists and charts, yet his staff testifies to his tremendous power of concentration for hours at a time.[107] He seems to have planned everything, in his

[103] Forrest's longest stay behind Union lines was in West Tennessee and Kentucky between March 16, 1864, and about May 3, 1864.

[104] D. H. Hill says, "that ever-watchful officer, General Forrest, reported . . . a heavy Yankee column. . . . His active scouts . . . brought in prisoners, who gave the information . . . ."; *OR*, XXX, pt. 2, p. 144.

[105] These men seem to have received first official recognition in June, 1862, when 20 were chosen by Forrest from his first regiment and taken under the immediate command of Captain Bill Forrest to Chattanooga to raise the first brigade; Wyeth, *Forrest*, 84. The escort proper was 60 men on August 9, 1863; *OR*, XXIII, pt. 2, p. 955. On November 23, 1864, it was 80, *OR*, XLV, pt. 1, p. 752; however, in the last year of the war, Forrest assigned extra companies and even small battalions to duty with his Escort.

[106] Two of many deserters during war came into Union lines September 7 and 12, 1862, greatly confusing a future president of the United States, James A. Garfield, then Rosecrans' Chief of Staff; *OR*, XXX, pt. 3, pp. 462, 563.

[107] During these periods, even his staff found it dangerous to approach him.

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mind, down to the smallest detail.[108] So much in his campaigns that appears to be good luck can be traced to his power of anticipation and to the steps he took beforehand. He could and did extemporize brilliantly, but much that seemed good luck was the result of hard thinking weeks before. After crossing the Tennessee at Clifton, in the first deep penetration of West Tennessee, his force was virtually without percussion caps. A civilian brought in tens of thousands purchased in Memphis under instruction from Forrest and paid for by his personal funds. A year later, in this same section and in Kentucky, the Confederate forces found a civilian population awaiting their arrival with supplies gathered and volunteers eager. Forrest had sent Colonel Tyree Bell, an able officer well known politically in this section, to prepare the way.

The real death blow to Streight's unfortunate raid—these raids by both sides succeeded far more often than not during the war—was struck by Forrest the night before Streight's surrender. Both forces were near collapse from four days of fighting and marching. If Streight could reach Rome, Georgia, and cross the rivers there, he could probably circle back to Union support. Forrest sent off a messenger to Rome, picked a scant squadron to "devil Streight all night," and gave his own men and horses long hours of strength giving repose. The next morning, he covered the distance in four hours which Streight had taken eleven to get over in darkness and in fighting with Forrest's skeleton pursuit. Streight's men were literally so sleepy and physically exhausted they couldn't fight. Streight's reconnaissance force, moreover, had discovered the bridges over the rivers at Rome strongly held in accordance with Forrest's instructions.[109] Surrender was the only alternative.

One wonders at the ability of any human mind to assimilate the details and evolve the plans that Forrest's did, particularly when he was actively commanding. Yet Napoleon, so different in all else, seems to have done about the same thing. Each used their staffs as implementing, rather than planning and evolving, organizations. Today, hundreds of men would be involved in command and staff work for a force such as Forrest's. Specialists of all types would labor innumerable man-hours. Yet the Chinese Communist forces defeated our Eighth Army in November, 1950, in Korea because the

[108] Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, 243.

[109] Wyeth and Henry do not precisely agree here. Forrest sent off a courier, Wyeth, *Forrest*, 215; but the actual defense of the bridge was instituted before the arrival of it in response to information from rural mail carrier John H. Wisdom, Henry, *Forrest*, 153 *ff*.

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vast conglomeration built to take the place of a single intellect failed to realize what was happening right under their noses, and was not able to coordinate for offensive or defensive action at above company strength.[110] Forrest's organization functioned without jeeps, radios, telephones, or even typewriters; it depended essentially on one man. But he knew what was happening, not only within his own command, but in the enemy's also. He, and not the enemy, controlled the neutral areas both day and night. He could handle an army completely down to the last man, in attacks, in retreat, and for weeks at a time deep in "enemy" territory.

Too much has been written of the lack of drill in Forrest's organizations—especially early in the war when he knew little of the proper orders for close maneuvers and did not realize their value. But he was a natural fighter, and when he became convinced of the value of drill he characteristically did more of it than other commanders. In Middle Tennessee in the spring of 1863 he had dress parade twice a week.[111]

DISCIPLINE

Forrest's ability to attract volunteers did not mean that he was lax. He realized always the importance of discipline. He was tough himself and most critical of commanders who were not.[112] Even in the course of fairly routine matters, and entirely apart from his battle madness, he personally thrashed dozens of his troopers for infractions of rules, disobedience to orders, and even bringing him false information. Let us look at several typical incidents. An enormous recruit, a country boy who was away from home for the first time, was ordered to help rescue a wagon and team from a swollen winter stream.[113]

"Ah ain't agoin' to do hit'" the Tennessean cried. Forrest clambered out of the icy water, picked the fellow up, and threw him bodily into the freezing stream. The boy became a pretty good soldier after that.

During the pursuit of Streight, one of Forrest's troopers returned from having had a horse's shoe replaced with a story given him by a local Union sympathizer. A Yankee column of cavalry of great size was but a few hundred yards away on a parallel road.[114]

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[110] S. L. A. Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet* (New York, 1953), in its entirety. This book is a superb description of what actually happened. When information and communications break down leadership and direction are impossible.

[111] *OR*, XXIII, pt. 2, p. 638.

[112] *OR*, XXXIX, pt. 3, p. 815.

[113] Henry, *Forrest*, 209.

[114] Wyeth, *Forrest*, 206.

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"Did you see them?" queried Forrest.

"No, General, but a farmer came riding hell for leather with . . . ."

Forrest was off his horse, lifted the unfortunate trooper from his saddle, seized him by the neck and beat his head against a nearby tree. "You ever bring me a lie like that again and, by God, I'll kill you!"

These were just disciplinary chastizements, two of many. There was also the battle madness. This was something else entirely. It is unbelievable the way he behaved, but there were hundreds of witnesses. He thought little of any human life, and least of all of his own. Even his close friends were not safe; they dared not even remonstrate with him.[115] At Brentwood, in the spring of 1863, he discharged someone's buckshot-loaded double-barreled shotgun into a Confederate squad momentarily fleeing.[116] He killed for cowardice the color bearer of an infantry regiment serving under him at Murfreesboro in December of 1864.[117]

Fear has a place in all disciplinary programs, and in Forrest's commands it was in part at least a personal fear of the commander. Major Kelley has left us hints as to how Forrest was able to bring this about. He was popular in a certain sense only. Officers and men admired and respected him. He was without pretense; anyone could see at a glance he was able. He brought his officers together and fostered a team spirit which spread quickly to the entire battalion. But even his closest friends feared him.

Forrest because of his strength, athletic accomplishments, and weapon ability was a personal hero. Dozens of stories about these circulated freely. Nothing is so good for a unit as to have a commander the men can brag about, particularly when they can brag about his physical prowess. Forrest was an undisputed champion physically during the war years. He remained so in the hearts of his soldiers as long as they lived—the one and only champion of their youth. They remembered many different things of him when they talked about him in later years,[118] but the universal features of all word pictures were the enormous, powerful shoulders and the furious bronze-colored face when he was fighting mad.

But muscle and personal combat efficiency alone would have been useless. Both officers and men realized that Forrest had an extremely

[115] Major Anderson as quoted by Wyeth, *Forrest*, 249.

[116] Lytle, *Forrest*, 164.

[117] W. A. Calloway and another eye witness quoted by Wyeth, *Forrest*, 552.

[118] We are indebted to Wyeth and Horn for so many of these word pictures that, if not completely exact, show the way Forrest's men thought of him.

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acute and powerful brain. His civilian life experience was useful; he knew how to do things and was used to doing them well. His commands throughout the war found their wants cared for relatively well; their collective ego was satisfied by their military record. Forrest's fiery rages were well known, but the men quickly realized that the rages did not impair his judgment and resourcefulness. In spite of his ferocity and audacity, Forrest was a cool, level-headed battle commander.

There was another side to Forrest which may well have aided the team spirit he built. He swore and he killed, but there is no record of filth ever having passed his lips. He was as strong morally as physically. He neither drank nor used tobacco in any form.[119] Even during the war years, his men loved him in a way second only to the Confederate deifying of General Lee. His men realized also his own great love for them. Bedford Forrest had an approach to the Civil War far different from that of the planter aristocracy. His South was one great clan. Forrest took an interest like that of a chief of a clan in the material well-being of each soldier. Men from all walks of life were drawn into the family teams which his commands soon became. From each, when it was necessary, he required total effort, but to each he gave a fair share of the best there was. He was hard, yet he cried like a baby when they buried Captain Freeman, his first Chief of Artillery.[120] Throughout the War Forrest's commands showed a higher percentage of personnel present and ready for duty than other comparable units.[121]

Forrest on occasion demanded the last ounce of energy from man and beast, as in the pursuit of Streight's raiders. But he trusted his men. He built up within them the feeling that they could not let him or themselves down. Forrest fearlessly gave furloughs to whole regiments, even in the last winter of the war[122] and deep within enemy lines,[123] confident that every single man would return. He was disappointed in few instances, although other commands, even in General Lee's Army, finally disintegrated through desertion.

[119] Major Anderson as quoted by Wyeth, *Forrest*, 240; Henry, *Forrest*, 15.

[120] Van Dorn's April 9, 1863, attack upon Franklin, in which Forrest commanded a division, seems never to have been meant seriously. There was no real fighting, although Forrest's artillery was surprised on the march and its commander captured and shot for failure to run faster in the quick retreat of the Union cavalry; Wyeth, *Forrest*, 184.

[121] Henry, *Forrest*, 15.

[122] Forrest furloughed his whole command, save the Texans who couldn't get home January 5, 1865. The Seventh Tennessee returned on time to a man; Wyeth, *Forrest*, 578-88.

[123] Forrest gave furloughs to a portion of Buford's division, Kentucky troopers, in Western Kentucky on April 3, 1864; all returned, Wyeth, *Forrest*, 331.

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This mutual confidence was based on obligations both ways. In covering the retreat of the Southern Army after Shiloh, Forrest was wounded by a Minie bullet which lodged near his spine. He went back to Memphis with a four weeks' leave, but the health and spirit of his regiment suffered so much at Corinth, because of poor living conditions, that he returned in less than half the time to take charge and bring order out of chaos. A few days later, the bullet was started from its position in a skirmish and had to be cut out without anesthetic. This time he continued in command.

A knowledge of past success and pride of accomplishment is always a powerful aid in building morale. With Forrest's commands, this went even further. They were famous men in an army which was particularly hard on the ego of others. The Confederate infantrymen, partly through jealousy, jeered at cavalry because of their supposedly easier life and relative freedom from bloody combat. Even fairly early in the war, however, the Confederate armies of the West had these jibes in plenty for all cavalry commands save Forrest's. For his men there was praise even to their faces, a rare thing indeed in the South.[124]

Nothing was more important to the spirit of Forrest's troops, or to their confidence in him, than the very real concern he showed for their lives. In spite of his love for the offensive—"Getting a bulge on the enemy and keeping the scare on them," as he called it, —Forrest was not a reckless commander. His men knew it. His famous "Hit 'em on the end" remark—attack from the flank and rear—was part of Forrest's general economy of the lives of his men.[125]

Forrest even used to good advantage the atrocity stories arising out of his capture of Fort Pillow. He did not defend himself against the unfair charges; and a Union Congressional Committee gathered volumes of testimony of the most obviously unreliable sort tending to show that when the Fort Pillow garrison refused to surrender on demand Forrest had taken the place and put some of them to death horribly.[126] This publicity could hardly have been better. Forrest's

[124] Henry, *Forrest*, 16.

[125] He insubordinately and brutally criticized Hood before Franklin. Stanley F. Horn, in a conversation with the author, related an interview he had some years previously with an eye witness to the stormy meeting between Forrest and Hood. "If you attack the way you are headed you will get all your men killed," Forrest said, and then cursed Hood to his face. Forrest's remarks to Wheeler after the unsuccessful action at Donelson were equally emphatic.

[126] Henry, *Forrest*, 248; also Forrest's report *OR*, LIII, 618. Forrest never circulated any refutation of the "atrocities" which he was supposed to have committed. However,

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demands for surrender in the future received careful consideration. Union forces composed of predominantly Negro troops just wouldn't stand against him. Forrest conserved the lives of his men. He gained their confidence.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Forrest needed every bit of the trust and confidence of his men in the terrible retreat from Nashville in December of 1864. For days his troopers fought superbly armed, equipped, fed, and supplied Union cavalry under one of the greatest of the Union cavalry leaders, General James H. Wilson of Delaware; and yet Forrest took every gun and wagon safe across the Tennessee. He even captured in one of his counterattacks a Yankee gun, which he also brought off—the only trophy of Hood's ill-fated Tennessee campaign.[127] Finally, he managed to get his own entire command across the Tennessee with an astonishingly small loss.

But time was running out. Before the last of Forrest's command was south of the Tennessee, 1865 had dawned. The Confederacy was slowly sinking from attrition, as well as from blows of the Union armies. Even in the early spring, Forrest's command continued in reasonably good shape, and once more regiments bravely prepared for a campaign. Somehow, Forrest had managed to feed, clothe, and arm his men; and even the horses had come through the winter in fairly good shape.

But Forrest and his men lost a battle at Selma to the superbly subsisted and equipped troopers in blue under Wilson. The Yankees now had repeating rifles firing inside primed metallic cartridges. There had been a time when Federal cavalrymen couldn't ride, but that was no longer the case. They dismounted as quickly as Forrest's men did, if there was a real fight. They also had their sharpshooters, and had their artillery up front where it would do the most good. Forrest and his army escaped from Selma with their fighting ability only slightly impaired, but they were disheartened by wild rumors of tragedy in Virginia—General Lee's surrender at Appomatox.

Like the great Virginian, Forrest also surrendered with his men, although he could easily have gone with a part of his command into the vast Trans-Mississippi. He felt, as did General Lee, that his duty was with the Southern people, not with a few desperate individuals continuing a now hopeless war. Nathan Bedford Forrest commanded the last organized Confederate force east of the Mississippi. He

in spite of conditions in this area, *OR*, XXXII, pt. 2, pp. 102 and 592, not even the Federal commanders believed Forrest guilty.

[127] *Battles and Leaders*, IV, 471.

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was one of the last leaders of the Old South. He was also the first leader of the New South, the head of the Ku Klux Klan when it was the last resort of the decent elements of a defeated people.[128]

FORREST'S SHORTCOMINGS

Few men have no faults. Fewer still make no mistakes. Forrest was certainly in neither of these groups. His military faults were numerous. Some were derived from his lack of experience and education; and these were almost completely corrected in a relatively short time. But others seem almost a part of his personality.

First, Forrest was not a good subordinate. Stated differently, he could not stand poor leadership. He had enough of it in the Western Confederacy for half a dozen careers. Floyd and Pillow surrendered Donelson when it was completely unnecessary. Beauregard slept out his greatest opportunity at Shiloh. Braxton Bragg was fairly good at organization, but a novice as a fighting commander. Hood was gallant and brave, but also intemperate and slow thinking. Forrest told all what he thought of them, profanely and brutally. He came near to blows with Van Dorn and Wheeler. Excuses in plenty can be found, but the fact still remains that Forrest was not a good soldier in this respect.[129]

Second, Forrest's reckless exposure of himself was a fault. His death might have meant disaster for his entire command. It is a miracle that he survived. Perhaps this personal fighting was necessary for his type of morale, but the gamble does not seem warranted.

Third, what of Forrest's methods of discipline and punishment? We tend today to dismiss his beating and killing of his own men as common occurrances of those times. They weren't. Officers did not use physical force for disciplinary purposes in the Confederate service any more than they do in the United States army today. Forrest was a law unto himself; only his own personal prowess, reputation, and record saved him from serious consequences. These violent actions and outbursts were military faults, even though they worked. He never tried to hide any emotion; anger, joy, and sorrow were there for all to see. He once executed two innocent men for desertion;[130] and he probably executed without trial a prisoner captured at Murfreesboro.[131]

[128] Stanley F. Horn, *Invisible Empire* (Boston, 1939), 113 and *passim.*

[129] Wyeth, *Forrest,* 152, puts it well—"He was born a leader of men, not a follower of any man."

[130] *Ibid.,* 589.

[131] The prisoner roundly deserved it; see statement of Judge Richardson quoted in Wyeth, *Forrest,* 90-92.

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Forrest's strategic and tactical mistakes of any considerable magnitude are harder to find. He was surprised at Parker's Crossroads, even though his precautions against what happened could hardly have been more thorough. Perhaps he attacked too early when Wheeler's command endeavored to take Fort Donelson by storm in February of 1863. The inconclusive battle against Wilson at Selma in April, 1865, was actually a Union victory. But the military faults are of a piece with his genius. They, as much as his virtues and successes, went into the "Wizard of the Saddle" legend. The Western Confederacy needed something like it after the "milk-toast" surrender of Donelson. Old Bedford was loved as much for his faults as his virtues; he was good for his country. The mistakes speak for themselves. Where else can you find a record with so few?

FORREST'S PLACE IN HISTORY

The accomplishments of Forrest's men were known throughout the Western armies, both Union and Confederate, long before they had penetrated into the higher circles at Richmond. Partly because of Bragg's personal animosity, he was considered a raider only. The dauntless courage with which his men occasionally could fight as infantry for hours on end and then mount their horses to pursue the enemy far into the night was not the kind of fighting that raiders do. But President Davis didn't realize this until too late.

There are men who say that even in the fall of 1864, the placing of the Tennessee campaign in the hands of the practical realist Forrest, instead of Hood, would have meant the salvation of the Confederate cause. Certainly, had Forrest been in Bragg's position, Chickamauga would have been fought days sooner and piecemeal, before the Union army could concentrate. Why was Forrest not sent against Sherman's communications in the critical four months before the fall of Atlanta? Such ideas, while interesting, are entirely hypothetical. The "ifs" of the Confederacy are well known.

Forrest was a great soldier—great despite his lack of formal and military education and his lack of previous military experience. He succeeded because of an almost unique aptitude for war and because of his experience in handling somewhat similar problems in civilian life. Professional soldiers will do well to continue to study Forrest; military historians yet unborn will consider and reconsider his place in fame; and Americans of yesterday, today, and tomorrow can take pride in a great native hero.

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