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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

*Where Duty Called Them:
Comparing the Lives and Civil War Service of Generals
Jerome Bonaparte Robertson and his son, Felix Huston Robertson*

A Dissertation Submitted

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Jerod Thomas

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Doctoral Dissertation Committee:

Director: Dr. Leah Tarwater

Reader: Dr. Robert L. Glaze

Reader: Dr. Frank J. Smith

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Abstract

Jerome Bonaparte (J.B.) Robertson and his son, Felix Huston Robertson, are two figures from Texas whose significance to Texas history and Civil War history has been overlooked. J.B. Robertson was a physician who came to Texas to participate in the Texas Revolution. He became a local leader and politician who took part in the state secession convention. The Robertsons were the only father and son generals to serve the Confederacy other than Robert E. Lee and his sons. J.B. Robertson was the longest serving commander of the famous Hood's Texas Brigade and Felix Robertson was the only native-born Texan to become a Confederate general. Both men took part in several significant battles of the war. Felix Robertson participated in the beginning of the war, a brutal and almost forgotten massacre during the war, and was present for the dissolution of the Confederate government. Felix Robertson was also the last Confederate general to pass away. Despite their many connections to historically significant events, a detailed study of the two men has been nonexistent. This dissertation seeks to provide an account of the lives and contributions of J.B. and Felix Robertson to identify their value to studies of Texas history and Civil War history to demonstrate why both men deserve more recognition in these fields.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Possibly no other subject in American history has been analyzed and examined more than the Civil War, a time when the country faced its greatest crisis and stood on the precipice of destruction. In a 2001 book review of *The Jewish Confederates* by Robert Rosen, historian Jonathan Sarna, a professor at Brandeis University, estimated there were at least 50,000 books written about the American Civil War.¹ Now, twenty-four years later, that number has likely surpassed 75,000 and continues to grow yearly as more scholarly works are offered to continue discussions of the war and change our understanding. With so many works available regarding the war, an obvious question that many ask is, do we need more studies of the war? In a war that included thirty-six states and counted almost four million soldiers involved throughout the numerous battles, many topics can be covered, some that deserve to be reconsidered and, surprisingly, some topics that have yet to be discussed.² A comparison between the service of two Confederate generals from Texas, father and son, Jerome Bonaparte (J.B.) Robertson and Felix Huston Robertson is one such topic that has been neglected and deserves attention.

Tales from the rich history of Texas often detail the events and people who have helped carve out a reputation as unique as the state itself. However, in discussions of Texas during the Civil War and the people who served in various capacities during the war, the names of the two Robertsons are not ones with which even native Texans are familiar. The only year in the Texas public education system in which Texas history receives attention is during the seventh grade,

¹ Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Jewish History* 89, no. 3 (2001): 335.

² For a breakdown of figures from the years of the Civil War, the Nation Park Service has an excellent and concise source available on their website: "Civil War Facts: 1861-1865." National Park Service. Last updated: October 27, 2021. Accessed, April 1, 2022. <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/facts.htm>

which is one probable reason the Robertsons are not well known. The Texas Education Agency's (TEA) list of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies for the course on Texas history lacks much focus on the Civil War era and does not include a list of notable Texans who served in the war.³ Had the TEA bothered with listing key individuals from Texas who gained attention during the war, the Robertson men would likely still be absent in favor of more well-known soldiers such as Albert Sydney Johnston, John Bell Hood, or John B. Magruder.

The two Robertsons had very different life experiences before entering the war. Their service carried them into different engagements, setting them on different paths as they both rose to the rank of brigadier general. Before joining the Confederate Army, J.B. Robertson, a native of Kentucky, had arrived in Texas to join their revolution for independence from Mexico. Even though the war was already over when he arrived, he made a life there that included military and political service. The elder Robertson had a role in the secession convention, which voted to take Texas out of the Union, before he quickly volunteered for military service in the newly formed Confederate States of America. J.B. Robertson spent most of his service in the Confederate Army with the famous Hood's Texas Brigade. The brigade gained renown under the leadership of General John Bell Hood, and Robert E. Lee even recognized them for their value on the battlefield.⁴

The son of J.B. and Mary Elizabeth (Cummins) Robertson, Felix Huston Robertson was a student at Baylor College in Independence, Texas, now known as Baylor University, in Waco. He once had aspirations of graduating from West Point in 1861 but instead tendered his resignation

³ Texas Education Agency. Texas Administrative Code. Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 113, Subchapter B, Rule §113.19, Social Studies, Grade 7, Adopted 2018. Accessed April 17, 2022. [https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=2&ch=113&rl=19](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=2&ch=113&rl=19)

⁴ Douglas Southall Freeman, *R.E. Lee: A Biography, Vol. III* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 287.

just months before his graduation and joined the Confederate Army. Before being assigned to a command, the younger Robertson found early accolades by being part of the inaugural parade of Confederate President Jefferson Davis as assistant marshal. Following his glamorous induction to the Confederate Army, Robertson was commissioned as a second lieutenant and then committed to the cause of the South as an artilleryman in Charleston under General Pierre Gustave Toutant-Beauregard (P.G.T. Beauregard) but, over time, served with enough distinction to earn a field commission as a brigadier general.

Though father and son fought in the same war, both men were part of the Confederate Army and served in the Eastern Theater, they served in different units. Therefore, their experiences and paths to promotions differed. Between the two men, they served in numerous notable engagements across the Eastern Theater of the war, such as the shelling of Fort Sumter, the battles of Shiloh, Second Manassas, Murfreesboro, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, and the Atlanta Campaign. During their service, both men found themselves the focus of two very different scandals, which called their reputations into question. Following the war, both men returned home to Texas, taking different paths initially, though they found their paths converged as they attempted to adjust to life during Reconstruction in Texas.

The lives and service of these men deserve a closer examination to understand how two men from the same household, though of two different generations, approached the war. Examining these two men together will provide an opportunity to compare several aspects of their lives. This study will answer the following questions: What motivated each man to go to war and fight for the Confederacy? How did each man come to earn their promotions and the distinction of their commanding officers? How did each man fit into their roles as officers, and what was their leadership like? How did their service impact the units they served with and the

battles in which they were engaged? What was the nature of the scandals that each man faced, and how did it affect their reputations? What did each man do in the aftermath of the war, and how did they adapt to the changes of Reconstruction? This research will also ultimately help to address the question of why there has been a lack of a more extensive study of the Robertson men, as well as offer another comparison for a father and son who attained the rank of general beyond the studies of Robert E. Lee and his sons, George Washington Custis Lee and William Henry Fitzhugh Lee.

Approaching the topic of the Civil War service of Jerome Bonapart Robertson and Felix Huston Robertson must be undertaken with an awareness of the historiography that has preceded this research. To fully understand the scope of their service, an exploration of their background and their lives after the war will also be necessary. Revealing this information will yield additional obstacle biases related to Texas history and the Reconstruction South.

One problematic aspect of Civil War history related to the Confederacy deserves a brief discussion about studies often referred to by some historians as the “Lost Cause” history of the Civil War. Those who support the theory of the Lost Cause believe that there has been a tendency for historians of Confederate history to glorify the South or idealize the men who fought in the war by disregarding certain truths about the war. Within these works, historians have often focused on causes of the conflict that detract from the role that slavery played, turning the Confederacy into a group of people fighting for the cause of freedom. The Lost Cause began almost as soon as the war had ended, with people who had supported the Confederacy attempting to provide more glamorous reasons for their participation in the war, glorifying the cause they supported.

In his 1980 article, “The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion, 1865-1920,” Charles Reagan Wilson describes the Southern need to find meaning in their defeat. Beyond the losses on the battlefield, many southern towns had been devastated by the war, leaving many with a sense of hopelessness for the future. Southerners and soldiers of the Confederacy alike had seen their cause as a righteous one in which God was on their side; their religious faith and sense of belonging had been deeply shaken and challenged by their defeat. Wilson details that to deal with the crippling feeling of loss; the South essentially developed a civil religion which became the Lost Cause, to address “the problems of providing meaning to life and society amid the baffling failure of fundamental beliefs, offering comfort to those suffering poverty and disillusionment.”⁵

For Southerners trying to grasp the measure of defeat they felt at the war’s end, the Lost Cause became more than a short-term solution and began to turn into a new way of life. As Reconstruction turned bitter in the mouths of Southerners, their hold on the ideals they were creating in the Lost Cause became cemented into the fiber of their beings. The defeat of their army is portrayed as inevitable due to superior numbers as Confederate veteran groups formed to discuss their shared valor and the justness of their cause, as described by Caroline E. Janney in *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (2013). The Lost Cause symbolized Southern bravery, embodied in memorials erected around the South, reassuring those coping with defeat. Janney describes that the Lost Cause also gave Southerners a sense of unity, which allowed them to “rebuke Reconstruction” and went so far as to “foster a separate sectional

⁵ Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion, 1865-1920,” *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 2 (1980): 220.

identity, an extension of Confederate nationalism that would encourage resistance and defiance for years to come.”⁶

The goal of this study is not to explore the causes of the Civil War or the Southern states' motivations for secession but rather to explore two soldiers who became generals in the Confederate Army, a father, and son, and detail their experiences as a way to compare and contrast their different approaches to service. While it would be an alluring temptation to engage in a discussion of the Lost Cause further, the purpose of this work is not to dispute authors who advance the narrative of the Lost Cause but to provide insights into two neglected figures of the war. Though the two men in question were Confederate soldiers from Texas, this research desires to discuss their actions and deeds for what they were, not to interpret their lives to fit a desired narrative.

This study is an effort to present their record as it happened and to conclude details about their lives using historical documents. This study will allow history to speak for itself and reveal each man's character by examining their service and how they returned to life in the postbellum world rather than trying to present an idealized depiction. Prior to this research, the topic of Jerome Bonaparte Robertson, or his son, Felix Huston Robertson, has been neglected as the focus of a significant study. The two Robertsons have each shown up or been included in other studies but have not been the sole focus of a more thorough examination. To date, as far as can be determined, no work exists that evaluates their service and compares the two soldiers together.

⁶ Caroline E. Janney. *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*. University of North Carolina Press, 2013. 134; There are many other works beyond Wilson's and Janney's that address the issues of the Lost Cause and its impact on Civil War historiography. These two works are useful in providing examples and quotes, but there are many other works that focus on exposing the arguments that falsely glorify the Confederacy and the South.

Memoirs can provide valuable insight into the people who lived through an event. One such example of a book that discusses a personal experience during the Civil War is John Bell Hood's *Advance and Retreat*. In his memoirs of the war, Hood details his service and the events he witnessed, providing excellent context for the discussion of J.B. Robertson. Though Hood barely touches on the service of Robertson, who served under him as one of his top colonels and went on to replace him as the commander of the Texas Brigade, serving under him at Gettysburg, Hood's description of events which Robertson was present during, offers the valuable perspective of a commanding officer, which reflects upon Robertson's service.⁷ Another influential work on the Civil War that contains helpful information for this discussion is Douglas Southall Freeman's three-volume work, *Lee's Lieutenants*, which chronicles the generals of the Confederacy throughout the war. J.B. Robertson is most heavily featured in the third volume, where Freeman details the court martial that Robertson faced. Though the books do not go into significant detail about Robertson, they are the first reliably researched sources written about him.

Both Robertsons served in the Eastern theater of the war. Therefore, books that examine the conflict in the East are valuable. Benjamin Franklin Cooling's *Counter Thrust* and Brooks D. Simpson's *The Civil War in the East* both do an excellent job of discussing the battles in the East and their significance in the scope of the war.⁸ Understanding the importance of the fighting in which the Robertsons were involved will help create a more detailed depiction of the nature of their service and the circumstances they found themselves in throughout the war. The soldiers on

⁷ John Bell Hood, *Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States and Confederate States Armies* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN; 1959).

⁸ Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Counter-Thrust: from the Peninsula to the Antietam* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).; Brooks D. Simpson, *The Civil War in the East: Struggle, Stalemate, and Victory* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011).

both sides of the war dramatically felt an urgency for the conflict that Cooling and Simpson each describe. Examining the struggle at large will help provide a clearer picture of the events the Robertsons were caught up in, which can help to add perspective on the decisions each made during the war.

Jerome Bonaparte Robertson is most featured in works associated with the famous Texas Brigade, which became known as Hood's Texas Brigade, named after General John Bell Hood, the second brigade commander. J.B. Robertson begins to appear in historical accounts in 1910 with Joseph Benjamin (J.B.) Polley's *Hood's Texas Brigade, Its Marches, Its Battles, Its Achievements*.⁹ In addition to being the historian for Hood's Texas Brigade, Polley also served with the men as a private in most significant battles throughout the war. Polley's 1910 work was his second book regarding his experiences during the war. Each book sought to paint a favorable picture of not only the men he served with but also the gloriousness of their service, often for the sake of accuracy.¹⁰ Though Polley speaks favorably of J.B. Robertson, Hood is given the scope of attention associated with the brigade's leadership, even though he did not command the brigade as long as Robertson. Despite the focus on Hood, Polley's observations offer a record of the men and events with which Robertson was associated during his time with the Texas Brigade.

The subsequent essential contributions regarding the Texas Brigade, following the work of Polley, can be found in the works of Colonel Harold B. Simpson. During his career as a historian, Simpson became the authority on Hood's Texas Brigade, authoring and editing numerous works focused on the brigade's service. While working at Hill College, Simpson utilized a wealth of primary sources to put together works that detailed the Texas Brigade's

⁹ J.B. Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade, Its Marches, Its Battles, Its Achievements* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Press, 2017).

¹⁰ The first book written by Polley in 1908, *A Soldier's Letters to Charming Nellie*, is now seen to likely have been largely manufactured in the post-war error, which must be considered when referencing this work.

actions throughout the war. Simpson's *Hood's Texas Brigade: Lee's Grenadier Guard* provides a researched and detailed account that goes beyond the limitations of Polley's work.¹¹ Additionally, Simpson also explored aspects of the Texas Brigade beyond the battlefield to examine how the men were seen and remembered, as he presented in *Hood's Texas Brigade In Poetry And Song*, a collection that presents multiple poems and songs about the brigade and the war to demonstrate their lasting impression.¹² Beyond these two books, Simpson also contributed additional books and scholarly articles to various journals regarding the Texas Brigade, which are valuable resources.

In more recent years, Civil War historiography shifted to new directions, such as the interest and focus on the soldiers who were part of the conflict. Historians began to seek to answer questions of who the men who fought in the war were beyond their role as soldiers. One such example is in a 2001 article that appeared in *The Journal of Southern History*, wherein Charles E. Brooks began to evaluate social and cultural concerns relating to the Texas Brigade.¹³ Brooks utilized contemporary studies on the topic of the men who had fought in the war, their motives and desires, and multiple primary sources in the form of letters belonging to the soldiers.

Continuing to look beyond the Texas Brigade's time on the battlefield is Susannah J. Ural, who broadened the scope of her research to include more information about who the soldiers of the Texas Brigade were and also a look at their families in her 2017 book, *Hood's Texas Brigade: The Soldiers and Families of the Confederacy's Most Celebrated Unit*.¹⁴

¹¹ Harold B. Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade: Lee's Grenadier Guard* (Fort Worth, TX: Landmark Publishing, 1999).

¹² Harold B. Simpson, Ed, *Hood's Texas Brigade In Poetry And Song* (Hillsboro, Texas: Hill Junior College Press, 1968).

¹³ Charles E. Brooks, "The Social and Cultural Dynamics of Soldiering in Hood's Texas Brigade," *The Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 3 (2001).

¹⁴ Susannah J. Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade: The Soldiers and Families of the Confederacy's Most Celebrated Unit* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2017).

Similarly to Brooks's work, Ural utilizes strong contemporary secondary sources and excellent primary sources in the form of letters, diaries, newspapers, and memoirs. While Ural discusses Robertson more than Brooks, both works are more concerned with a larger narrative than focusing on Robertson's service.

Several significant battles are necessary to examine to understand better who each of the Robertsons was as a soldier and their path to becoming Confederate Army generals. Beginning with the first shots of the Civil War at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, the Robertsons were involved with the war as Felix Robertson took place in the shelling of the fort, which Wesley Moody's *The Battle of Fort Sumter: The First Shots of the American Civil War*, explores the events in detail.¹⁵ Additionally, Ron Chepesiuk's comments in his article, "Eye Witness to Fort Sumter: The Letters of Private John Thompson," will be valuable in accompanying Thompson's account of the events that occurred at the fort.¹⁶

Following the shelling of Fort Sumter, Felix Robertson served in Pensacola, Florida; therefore, Edwin C. Bearss' three-part series of articles, "Civil War Operations In and Around Pensacola," which appeared from 1957-1961 in *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, will provide details about the nature of Robertson's service during his time there.¹⁷ Another battle that Felix Robertson participated in was the Battle of Murfreesboro, also known as the Battle of Stones River, which Christopher Losson discussed in his 1982 article, "Major-General Benjamin

¹⁵ Wesley Moody, *The Battle of Fort Sumter: The First Shots of the American Civil War* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2016).

¹⁶ Ron Chepesiuk and John Thompson, "Eye Witness to Fort Sumter: The Letters of Private John Thompson," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 85, no. 4 (1984): 271-79.

¹⁷ The articles appeared in three parts as follows: Edwin C. Bearss, "Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1957): 125-65.; Edwin C. Bearss, "Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola Part II," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1961): 231-55.; Edwin C. Bearss, "Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola Part III," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1961): 330-53.

Franklin Cheatham and the Battle of Stone’s River,” which appeared in the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*.¹⁸

One of the most discussed battles of the war is undoubtedly the Battle of Gettysburg, during the Confederate invasion of the Northern states by Robert E. Lee. Though Felix Robertson was not present for the battle, J.B. Robertson led the Texas Brigade during the conflict. While numerous sources discuss and describe the events of July 1-3, 1863, a solid work on the subject is Allen Guelzo’s 2014 book, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*.¹⁹ The resolve of Lee’s army and that of Robertson and the Texas Brigade was tested during the fighting, especially in such a great defeat. Discussing the actions of Robertson and how his men conducted themselves during the battle will be a valuable addition to depict the nature of his leadership.

Though both Robertsons may not have been present at Gettysburg, they did find themselves together at the Battle of Chickamauga. Examining this battle will be crucial as father and son both had an opportunity to conduct themselves in the same field of battle, which will provide an excellent opportunity to evaluate their service through a more direct comparison as no two battles of the Civil War were the same. Some of the key works which will add considerable value to this discussion are Steven E. Woodworth and Grady McWhiney’s 1998 book, *A Deep Steady Thunder: The Battle of Chickamauga*, David A. Powell’s 2014 book, *The Chickamauga Campaign* and the recent 2022 release by Scott L. Mingus Sr. and Joseph L. Owen, *Unceasing Fury: Texans at the Battle of Chickamauga, September 18-20, 1863*.²⁰

¹⁸ Christopher Losson, “Major-General Benjamin Franklin Cheatham and the Battle of Stone’s River,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1982): 278–92.

¹⁹ Allen C. Guelzo, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York, NY: Vintage Civil War Library, 2014).

²⁰ Steven E. Woodworth and Grady McWhiney, *A Deep Steady Thunder: The Battle of Chickamauga* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 1998).; David A. Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2014).; Scott L. Mingus Sr. and Joseph L. Owen, *Unceasing Fury: Texans at the Battle of Chickamauga, September 18-20, 1863* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2022).

Examinations of the Civil War, the actions and men of Hood's Texas Brigade, and the battles that the Robertsons fought in all provide depth to the discussion of Jerome and Felix Robertson. Though not many works have focused on these men individually, a few authors have touched on the subject, no matter how briefly, and their works will undoubtedly provide direction and insight that will be valuable to this account of their lives and service. One such work that helps to provide context and details to the scandal involving J.B. Robertson is historian Jeffrey D. Wert's 1993 book, *General James Longstreet: the Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier: a Biography*.²¹ While Robertson is not the book's focus, Wert discusses the events and controversy surrounding the court-martial event, which provides additional valuable information for creating a more detailed account.

J.B. Robertson is featured in many of the books previously discussed, but the most significant focus on him appears in Simpson's 1964 work, *Touched by Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood's Texas Brigade*, in which he devotes a single chapter to Robertson's life, though its value is apparent as many authors have since referenced it in their discussions of Robertson.²² The book is an excellent primary source for Robertson's papers from the war and a reference point for historians discussing any details relating to Robertson. Though there was no extensive work written by Simpson regarding Robertson, Simpson's focus on primary sources to tell the story of the Texas Brigade is invaluable to any study that includes them. These earlier works, except for the chapter in Simpson's *Touched by Valor*, were primarily concerned with J.B. Robertson's service in the war whenever they included him. Though many authors have mentioned J.B. Robertson and his leadership of the Texas Brigade, there has yet to

²¹ Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: the Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier: a Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

²² Harold Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood's Texas Brigade*, (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas; 1964).

be a substantial study of his life and service to Texas or during the Civil War. One purpose of this work will be to examine those aspects of J.B. Robertson and seek to fill in gaps in the historiography of the Civil War and Texas by providing a complete picture of Robertson in a single volume.

While much of this discussion has focused on J.B. Robertson, it is because he has received more attention, though admittedly not extensive attention, than his son, Felix Huston Robertson. One historian, James H. Colgin, has endeavored to write an account of the life of Felix Huston Robertson, which appeared in the journal *Texana* in 1970.²³ The article discusses the younger Robertson's life and service during the Civil War but is the only detailed study focused on him. Though Felix Robertson was not the sole focus of this subsequent work, an account that discusses the scandal during the Battle of Saltville in October 1864 is William C. Davis's 1971 article in *Civil War Times*, "Massacre at Saltville," in which Robertson was involved.²⁴ Davis, a professor of history and a prolific author of Civil War histories, includes Robertson's participation in the battle and the massacre on the following day as part of his exploration of the topic. Davis's 1992 biography on General John Breckinridge, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol*, contains information regarding Saltville from the perspective of General Breckinridge, adding to his earlier work on Saltville.²⁵ In 1998, Thomas D. Mays, a professor of history and author, released his study on the subject, *The Saltville Massacre*, expanding on Davis's works.²⁶ Professor of history Brian D. McKnight's chapter "Violent War, Violent Peace: October 1864–April 1865," in the 2006 book *Contested Borderland: The Civil*

²³ James H. Colgin, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Texana* 8 no. 2 (1970): 154-182.

²⁴ William C. Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," *Civil War Times*. Volume IX, Number 10 (February 1971): 4-11, 43-48.

²⁵ William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

²⁶ Thomas D. Mays, *The Saltville Massacre* (Abilene, TX: McWhitney Foundation Press, 1998).

War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia, also discusses the Battle of Saltville, the massacre, and adds more recent information to the conversation of the events.²⁷

Though the younger Robertson has not appeared in many studies, he has been given some attention in general works of history, which record his ranks and battles, such as Ezra J. Warner's *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders*.²⁸ Warner's work focuses on describing each of the generals who served the Confederacy and a brief commentary on their service, which works well as a reference resource. Warner's work includes both Robertson men, which is also true of works that focus on the Chickamauga campaign, which both men were involved in and discuss, often as a passing mention, the role of Felix Huston Robertson, though with a greater focus on J.B. Robertson as he commanded the Texas Brigade during the battle.²⁹

Following the Robertsons's service in the Civil War, each man returned home to Texas to continue their lives. Examining what the two men did following the war and how they settled into Reconstruction Texas will solidly conclude the discussion of their lives. Harold Simpson's *Touched With Valor* and James H. Colgin's "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" touch on how the Robertson men returned to their lives in Texas after the war.

This work will primarily focus on military history, though social and political history will factor into the Robertsons' narrative. Multiple primary and secondary sources of varying types and formats will be required to examine the history of J.B. and Felix Robertson. Physical

²⁷ Brian D. McKnight, "Violent War, Violent Peace: October 1864–April 1865," In *Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia*, 206–26, (University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

²⁸ Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959).

²⁹ Another general reference work which features information regarding J.B. Robertson is Bruce S. Allardice and Hewitt Lawrence Lee, eds., *Kentuckians in Gray: Confederate Generals and Field Officers of the Bluegrass State* (University Press of Kentucky, 2008).; Works focusing on the Chickamauga campaign include, David A. Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2014).; Steven E. Woodworth and Grady McWhiney, *A Deep Steady Thunder: The Battle of Chickamauga* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 1998).

archives, digital archives, state and local records, books, and scholarly journals will all be relied upon to investigate the history and service of both men. One such source that provides valuable insight into the Texas Secession Convention and J.B. Robertson's participation is the 1912 book, *Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas 1861*, edited by Ernest William Winkler.³⁰ The digital collection of newspapers maintained by the University of North Texas as part of "The Portal to Texas History," is another crucial source for research into the Robertsons and Texas history.

To thoroughly investigate the Civil War service of father and son, a detailed search of the U.S. War Department's *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, from here on referred to as the *Official Records*, will be necessary to gain insight into their actions on the battlefield and how their superior officers perceived them. Numerous people meticulously assembled the war reports of the Union and Confederate Armies over many years to feature accounts from the entirety of the war.

Discussing the time that Felix Huston Robertson spent at West Point, or the United States Military Academy (USMA), as it is officially known, required the generous cooperation of the USMA's archivists. Obtaining Robertson's records was helpful to this research. It revealed a little of his nature at the academy compared to other cadets in his class, such as George Armstrong Custer, who chose to stay through graduation. In contrast to Custer and others, Robertson resigned from the academy to serve in the Confederate Army.

In Texas, a few excellent archival resources will provide insights into the lives of the Robertsons. For records relating to their war service, Hill College in Hillsboro, Texas, maintains the Texas Heritage Museum, which contains a massive collection of letters and personal

³⁰ Ernest William Winkler, ed., *Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas 1861* (Texas Library and Historical Commission, the State Library. Austin: Austin Print. Co., 1912).

documents from Texas Civil War soldiers. Additionally, county records from Washington and McLennan Counties are available through digitized online sources. Records maintained within their county libraries will prove highly valuable as sources for the lives of the men before and after the war. This study will also include multiple books on Hood's Texas Brigade and the crucial battles in which each Robertson man was involved.

The scope of this research will help demonstrate that each of the Robertson men played an important role in Texas history. This study will also reveal that the two Robertsons were part of influential military units and battles during the Civil War. Furthermore, the two men participated in historically significant events that identified their importance to the period. Revealing the details of their lives through military and social-historical inquiry will help present another perspective of those periods and demonstrate that the two men's historical significance should be recognized along with other notable Texans.

Delving into the history of the Robertsons will require a look into three different aspects of each man's life to understand who they each were and why they are historically significant. Examining their lives before the Civil War, their service during the war, and their lives in the years following the war during Reconstruction will provide a complete portrait of both Robertson men's lives. From an association with the Texas war for independence from Mexico to the war-torn Eastern Theater of the Civil War, all the way to the expansion of the railroad system across the Lone Star State, both J.B. Robertson and Felix Robertson lived their lives amongst some of the most defining aspects of Texas' history.

The second chapter of this dissertation will evaluate the lives of J.B. and Felix Robertson to the late 1850s as the tensions of sectionalism were building toward war. The chapter will seek to answer the following questions to provide context to his life. What were the details of J.B.

Robertson's life as a young man, and how did he become a doctor? What brought Robertson to Texas and made him make it his home? Once Robertson had settled in the town of Washington-on-the-Brazos and started a medical practice, how was he involved with the city, and how else did he serve his community beyond his role as a physician? During the years of the Texas Republic, how did Robertson serve his new country in a military capacity, and in what engagements did he participate during his service? When Robertson became a politician, what positions did he hold, and what influence did his role have?

During the second chapter, there will also be a shift to focus on Robertson's oldest son, Felix Huston Robertson, to provide the same context for his life before he attended West Point. Though not much information is available on Robertson's younger life, the examination will begin by attempting to identify what his life was like growing up before attending Baylor University, which was in Independence, Texas, at that time. This chapter will also determine what Robertson studied while attending Baylor and his years at the Texas Military Institute.

The third chapter will continue to explore the lives of the Robertson men in tandem to evaluate the shift in their lives as the country broke apart and went to war with itself. This chapter will address the critical question of J.B. Robertson's role in the Texas Secession Convention and what aspects of his life demonstrate his support of the secession movement. Felix Robertson attended West Point beginning in the late 1850s, so this chapter will evaluate his experience while he attended the military academy. This discussion of Felix Robertson's early life before joining the Confederacy will also address why he resigned from the academy rather than completing the last few months of his education before graduating in 1861. Finally, the chapter will include the younger Robertson's enlistment in the Confederate Army and his first role in the Confederacy.

The fourth chapter will focus on the beginnings of the Robertson men's service to the Confederacy. This chapter will explore Felix Robertson's experience at Fort Sumter to identify his role during the attack. The central question this chapter will focus on is how Ft. Sumter served to establish Felix Robertson's presence in the Confederate Army and acted as the launching point for his wartime service. This chapter will also explore the first several months J.B. Robertson spent in the Confederate Army to identify his early positions, places of service, and the development of his role in the war. The third chapter will answer the following questions related to J.B. Robertson. How did Robertson become involved in the Confederate Army? How did the volunteers he organized become a part of the Texas Brigade? What were the early months of the war like for the men of the Texas Brigade? How did the winter of 1861-1862 shape the Texas Brigade and prepare them for their first significant engagements?

The fifth chapter separates the discussion of the two Robertsons to focus solely on Felix Robertson's first year of service during the war. The questions addressed in this chapter include the following. What did Robertson learn from his time stationed in Pensacola, Florida? Which generals did Robertson serve under as a staff officer, and what lessons did he learn from them? How did Robertson gain his first command, and what role did he play during the Battle of Shiloh? What occurred after the battle, and what happened to Robertson and his command? The chapter will establish how Robertson's first year of service established him within the army and helped him to make meaningful connections.

Following the discussion of Felix Robertson, the sixth chapter will return to J.B. Robertson to explore the early battles of the war that the Texas Brigade fought from Eltham's Landing through November 1862, when Robertson received his commission as a brigadier general. Identifying Robertson's rise through the ranks will help to develop who he was as a

leader and how he interacted with the men he served alongside. Other vital questions include what positions Robertson had in the Texas Brigade and how he conducted himself. The chapter will then evaluate the time that Robertson spent as general of the brigade in the winter of 1862-1863 and through the Battle of Gettysburg. This section of the chapter will help to address the question of Robertson's effectiveness as commander of the brigade through various hardships. An additional question the chapter will address is, during the engagements that Robertson was involved in, did his actions warrant recognition from his fellow soldiers or commanding officers?

The conclusion of Gettysburg provides a solid transition to stop and return to Felix Robertson. The seventh chapter will follow the younger Robertson's time with General Braxton Bragg in Kentucky to the Battle of Stones River and the political scandal in which he became involved afterward. The exploration of Robertson's service will evaluate his rise through the ranks and the posts he served in during the early years of the war. An important question this chapter will address will focus on the commanders that Robertson served under to identify their examples and how their leadership may have influenced him. Furthermore, this chapter will also explore the nature of Robertson's service and whether his actions deserved recognition and earned the attention of his superiors. This chapter will also address the first of Robertson's controversial predicaments to identify what happened and its effect on his military service.

In the wake of the defeat at Gettysburg, the Texas Brigade saw the following significant action at the Battle of Chickamauga, where Felix Robertson had the opportunity to serve with the brigade and his father. The eighth chapter will not only return focus on J.B Robertson, but it will be the first opportunity to examine both of the Robertson men's Civil War service simultaneously. This chapter will evaluate each of the Robertsons's services during the battle while also allowing for a comparison of how each man fought and led the men they were

responsible for through the struggle. How each of the Robertsons participated in the battle and whether their actions contributed to the victory will be important questions for this chapter to resolve. Following the fight, Felix Robertson earned a promotion from major to lieutenant colonel, so this chapter will also seek to identify how the younger Robertson's service earned this advancement. The chapter will also investigate the aftermath of the Confederate victory at Chickamauga and the experiences of the Robertson men around Tennessee and Northeastern Georgia. An essential question this section of the chapter addresses will be what led up to the scandalous events that marked crucial turning points in the service of both Robertson men.

The Robertsons fought in several major battles and were recognized by their commanding officers, serving with distinction in the Confederate Army. Despite their success, their paths came to an interesting conclusion. The ninth chapter will first focus on J.B. Robertson to address the remainder of his time as the commander of the Texas Brigade. Why Robertson lost command of the brigade will be a central question for this chapter, which requires a thorough examination to respond to the following questions. What was the nature of the scandal that Robertson was involved with, and what were the conditions of the brigade following the harshness of the Gettysburg and Chickamauga campaigns? Evaluating the critical leaders associated with Robertson's scandal and their motivations will also be essential to this chapter's inquiry. The nature of the court martial that Robertson received, and an examination of the facts will attempt to provide insight into the validity of the charges that he faced.

After focusing on his father, the ninth chapter will shift to Felix Robertson's promotion to brigadier general several months after Chickamauga, becoming the only native Texan to earn that distinction. An exploration of Robertson's continued service will be an essential focus of the ninth chapter, along with the engagements he was part of through the end of 1864. One of the

most critical aspects of Robertson's service that this chapter will focus on is the scandal that he faced. Discussing the nature of the scandal and Robertson's role within it will be necessary to see how his reputation was affected and whether it was deserved. Questions surrounding Robertson's ability to follow orders during the Atlanta campaign will also be addressed to explore their connection to his scandal.

The tenth and final chapter will address what J.B. Robertson did in the wake of his court martial and the final phase of his service through the end of the war. Once the war had ended, the Robertsons returned home and did their best to find their way in a changed home. The chapter will address what each man did following the war and how they attempted to return to civilian life. For Felix Robertson, this would be the start of a new chapter in his life as he had only known school and military service, so it will be essential to identify what career path the younger Robertson settled on and how successful he became. Additionally, the question of how J.B. Robertson returned to public service will be explored, as well as whether he continued to practice medicine or explored other opportunities during Reconstruction. Finally, the interactions of the two Robertsons in the aftermath of the war will also help to answer the question of how the war affected the two men. This chapter will conclude the research and examine the two Robertson men by highlighting who they were during and beyond the Civil War. This examination will establish that Jerome Bonaparte Robertson and Felix Huston Robertson, father and son Confederate soldiers, who each rose to the rank of general but approached their service differently, each deserve greater recognition and inclusion in discussions of Texas history and Civil War history.

Chapter 2

Building a Life in Texas

The Robertson men are connected to two of Texas's most impactful and tumultuous periods. The first occurred when Texas was an independent nation, the Republic of Texas. The second period occurred during the Civil War, to which both Robertsons committed themselves deeply, and was a time of upheaval and division for the nation and the state of Texas. The years that Texas spent as a republic were formative for the young nation and the Robertsons, and the Civil War tried not only the fiber of Texas and her people, but also the Robertsons as they thrust themselves into the thick of the conflict. This chapter will focus on examining J.B. Robertson's participation in the Republic of Texas and Texas state politics once the nation was annexed by the United States to demonstrate that his contributions and connections to Texas's history. Additionally, the chapter will include information regarding Felix H. Robertson's early life and education in Texas and at the United States Military Academy. Through evaluating the early lives of the Robertsons, their participation in historic events, and associations with historic figures and places, this chapter will begin to establish the significance of J.B. and Felix H. Robertson as important historical figures. Their story and the Robertsons's connection to Texas began during the Texas Revolution in February 1836.

Winter had set in, and many Texians, as the people of Mexican Texas were referred to at that time, were divided over the best way to prepare for the continued war with Mexico or even if and when that war would continue. The second issue became a moot point with the arrival of Santa Anna and the Mexican Army in San Antonio de Bexar on February 23, 1836. The arrival of such a large army prompted a flurry of activity and emotion as the people either fled or prepared to defend themselves. The following day, inside the walls of Mission San Antonio de Valero, also

known as the Alamo, William Barrett Travis penned his famous and impassioned call for help, while pledging his life and those of his men to the cause with his immortal words, “victory or death.”¹ News of the besieged defenders spread across Texas like wildfire, and before long, copies of Travis’s letter were being sent across Texas and to major cities around the United States.

Word of Travis’s plea, the fate of the Alamo, and the desperate plight of Texas eventually reached Daviess County, Kentucky, and the ears of Jerome Bonaparte (J. B.) Robertson. Like many Americans who heard about the dire situation, the patriotic call to arms and other pleas from Texas ignited Robertson's commitment to liberty. Travis’s words, “I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism and everything dear to the American character,”² were answered by people from around the United States, including Robertson and his brother, James C. Robertson, who responded to the call by joining with a group of Kentucky volunteers in Owensboro, bound for Texas.³ Robertson was elected within the company of volunteers, as their second lieutenant and their journey was underway. Though the volunteers burned to join the fighting and help to liberate Texas from the clutches of tyranny, the length of the trip and a delay in New Orleans caused the men to miss the entirety of the conflict and arrive to officially join the Texan Army in September 1836, several months after the conclusion of the conflict.⁴

Though the war had concluded in April, tensions between Texas and Mexico were still high, and there was a need and a demand for soldiers. The company from Kentucky was

¹ William B. Travis to The People of Texas and All Americans, February 24, 1836, letter, February 24, 1836. Texas State Library and Archives Commission, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/treasures/republic/alamo/travis-full-text.html>

² William Travis letter, February 24, 1836.

³ *Muster Roll of Capt. Holmes Co. of Kentucky Volunteers August 27, 1836 Velasco, Texas*. Courtesy of the Texas General Land Office.

⁴ Harold Simpson. ed., *Touched With Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood's Texas Brigade* (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas; 1964), 4-5.

welcomed in Texas at Velasco on August 27. On September 9, James L. Holmes, the company captain, was promoted to a major in the Texas Army and sent to the Regimental Headquarters. Robertson was elected to replace him as captain. Robertson and his company of Kentucky volunteers served for the rest of 1836 and into 1837 under Thomas Jefferson Rusk in the Texas Army of the Southwest until Rusk was appointed Secretary of War under the new Republic's first president, Sam Houston. With this change, a new commander by the name of Felix Huston took charge of the army and made a strong impression on Robertson, considering he chose to name his firstborn son in his honor.⁵

The liberation of Texas may have already occurred, but plenty of soldier's work was available in the young country. To fill the ranks of their army, the Republic of Texas had issued land grants, termed bounty grants, which enabled soldiers who had served in the Revolution or enlisted before October 1, 1837, to earn 320 acres of land for every three months of service, up to 1,280 acres.⁶ Likely, the lure of so much land in a country that was full of opportunities weighed heavily on Robertson and the rest of the Kentuckians, who made the most out of their long trip by staying to enlist and serve. Beyond the tenuous nature of the relationship between Texas and Mexico, the frontier was hostile for new settlers due to attacks from Native American tribes who were not as eager to see their lands changing hands. Such an untamed land held seemingly limitless possibilities for a young man such as Robertson, who was only 21 at the time of his arrival in the Republic. Robertson was among the numerous people who came to the young Republic and recognized that the dreams of what this new country could be were there to be taken by anyone bold enough to claim them. For a young man like Robertson, Texas likely

⁵ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 5-6.

⁶ Texas General Land Office. "Categories of Land Grants in Texas." Texas General Land Office. January 2015. Accessed April 29, 2023. <https://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/forms/files/categories-of-land-grants.pdf> Texas General Land Office hereafter referred to as Texas GLO.

seemed a paradise compared to what he had left back home in Kentucky, and this was his chance to carve out a piece of this new land of plenty for himself.

Before setting out on his Texas adventure, J.B. Robertson had endured a harsh and staggered start to life. Born in Christian County, Kentucky, on March 14, 1815, Robertson was the fourth child of five born to Scottish emigrant Cornelius Robertson and his wife, Clarissa Hill Keech of Maryland. Robertson's father was a successful farmer and had managed to do very well for himself by building a sizable estate of land and several slaves. Sadly, the fortunes of the Robertson family took a turn for the worse in 1819 when two tragic blows struck the family, the first coming from financial loss due to the Panic of 1819 and the second from the death of Cornelius Robertson. The double tragedy and the mismanagement of the Robertson estate left Clarissa Robertson and her children struggling. They resulted in J.B.'s three older brothers being apprenticed to local tradesmen to provide them with the skill to learn a new trade and provide for their well-being. Robertson was only four years old at the time, but he was apprenticed to the care of a local hatter once he turned eight.⁷

Robertson's time with the hatter was not something he remembered favorably when he later described it to his son, Felix. Felix later wrote about it in a letter to his daughter, explaining that his father considered himself "an inmate to his master" during that time. During the almost ten-year period that Robertson spent learning the trade of a hatter, he accompanied his master to live in St. Louis for several years, which allowed him to gain a small amount of formal education. Though this education lasted only a few months, it significantly impacted Robertson's

⁷ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 2-4.; Hood's Texas Brigade Files, Texas Heritage Museum-Historical Research Center, Hillsboro, Texas. The information in this paragraph and the two preceding ones is based upon Colonel Harold B. Simpson's efforts to piece together a glimpse of what J.B. Robertson's life was like before coming to Texas. To the best of my ability, I have not been able to uncover any documentation for these events, beyond the correspondence which Simpson had with the descendants of Robertson, who relayed their knowledge of their family history to him. Some of this correspondence is part of the records kept by Colonel Simpson available at the archives in the Texas Heritage Museum.

life, and the influence was apparent later in his life through his commitment to education. Throughout his time with the latter, Robertson had wisely managed whatever money he made and only spent what he needed sparingly. As a result, on his eighteenth birthday, he was able to buy out the rest of his contract and return to Kentucky, where he desired to pursue further education and become a physician.⁸

Returning to Kentucky in 1833, Robertson met Dr. W.W. Harris in Owensboro, and the young Robertson must have made a good impression on Harris as he sought to help continue Robertson's education personally and provide him with a job as his office assistant. Working with Dr. Harris and learning from him first-hand set Robertson up for a successful experience as he pursued his formal medical education at Transylvania College, now Transylvania University. During the 1834 and 1835 terms, Robertson attended the college and completed the necessary education to become a physician in his own right.⁹ He had barely finished his education when Robertson decided to answer Texas's call for aid. While there likely would have been good opportunities for a young doctor in Kentucky, the offer of land and adventure was too strong for Robertson to resist. The choice to fight for Texas set Robertson on a course that altered his life and bound his success to the fate of the new nation.¹⁰

Though there are no specific records of the service that J.B. Robertson or his brother James provided to the young Republic, in May 1837, President Sam Houston issued "indefinite furloughs to all but six hundred members of the army," which cut their service short. The leave

⁸ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 2-4.

⁹ Ibid. Though these dates are the product of Colonel Simpson's correspondence with the descendants of J.B. Robertson, a search of the records at Transylvania University did not yield any record of his attendance during the 1834-1835 period. Transylvania University. *Transylvania University Board of Trustees Minutes, 1827-1839*. Original Handwritten Book. Courtesy of Transylvania University Library. 324-327, 341-345.

¹⁰ Ibid.; Hood's Texas Brigade Files, Texas Heritage Museum-Historical Research Center, Hillsboro, Texas.

was made permanent by a congressional action six months later.¹¹ However, the brothers did not allow this to stall their plans for their respective futures in Texas, and each sought to gain the land grants that the Republic was issuing. Under the Second-Class Headright Grants, “[h]eads of families were eligible for 1280 acres and single men were eligible for 640 acres,” which both men took advantage of. James Robertson received 1280 acres, and J.B. Robertson received a substantial amount more with a full league and labor, which amounted to 4605.5 acres of land.¹² The amount of land received by J.B. Robertson was equivalent to what those eligible for First-Class Headright Grants received. However, these grants were only issued to settlers who arrived before March 2, 1836, when the Texas Declaration of Independence was signed. Since his land grant records his emigration to the country as July 1836, Robertson would have been ineligible for the grant, though Washington County records indicate he received the full league and labor.¹³ Within the same record as his land grant, Robertson is also listed, along with Willet Holmes, as administrators of the estate of James L. Holmes, Robertson’s former Captain in the Kentucky Volunteers.¹⁴

Willet Holmes was the eldest son of James L. Holmes and Nancy Ann Griffith and, according to some reports, had come to Texas in 1826 before becoming involved in the Revolution against Mexico and then returning to Kentucky to help organize volunteers for the fight.¹⁵ Perhaps this was part of the reason that his father, James L. Holmes, was so enthusiastic about raising a company in support of the Texas cause. Without a doubt, J.B. Robertson must

¹¹ Henry W. Barton, “The Problem of Command in the Army of the Republic of Texas,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (1959), 306.

¹² Texas GLO, “Categories of Land Grants in Texas.”; *Washington County Returns, 2nd Class, From the 1st of Feb to 1st Aug 1838.* and *Washington County Returns, 1 & 2 Class, August 1838.* Washington County, Republic of Texas.

¹³ Certificate 82. “Jerome B. Robertson.” Land Office Washington County, Republic of Texas.

¹⁴ Texas GLO.

¹⁵ *Owensboro Messenger* (Owensboro, KY), March 18, 1891.; Carolyn Hyman, “Holmes, Willet,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed May 3, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/holmes-willet>.

Texhave made an impression on the elder Holmes in the few months they spent together since he was named an administrator of Holmes's land grant. While serving the Army of the Republic at Camp Johnson, Holmes was struck with "camp fever" and passed away on December 15, 1836, with officials from the Army later expressing their sympathies publicly in an article that appeared in the *Telegraph and Texas Register*.¹⁶

Whether before the passing of James L. Holmes or afterward because of the conditions on the land grant, Willet Holmes and J.B. Robertson were brought together at some point and got to know one another. The younger Holmes likely trusted his father's judgment regarding Robertson, as his father was known to be "high-minded, noble-hearted, as ever the confines of glorious old Kentucky poured forth."¹⁷ Willet Holmes married Amelia Cummins, the daughter of a surveyor who worked for Texas Empresario Sterling Robertson, Moses Cummins. When exactly Holmes and J.B. Robertson met is uncertain. Still, their meeting likely led to another significant encounter in Robertson's life: his introduction to a young woman named Mary Elizabeth Cummins, the sister of Holmes's wife, Amelia. Though when and where the meeting took place has been lost to time, Robertson returned to Kentucky in the fall of 1837 to settle his affairs for his move to Texas. Once he concluded his business, Robertson left Kentucky to make Texas his home, taking his brother James, Willet Holmes, Moses Cummins, and his daughter Mary along with him.¹⁸

¹⁶ G.& T.H. Borden. *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, TX), Vol. 1, No. 50, Ed. 1, January 3, 1837.

¹⁷ G.& T.H. Borden. *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, TX), Vol. 1, No. 50, Ed. 1, January 3, 1837.

¹⁸ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*; 6-7. Colonel Simpson records Willet Holmes as "Uncle Willet Holmes," which other authors have taken as a reference to Holmes being Robertson's uncle. The reality is that Holmes was Robertson's brother-in-law, but would have been an uncle to Robertson's son, Felix, whose family letters were the basis for Simpson's research, which explains the use of the term "uncle." Though those letters remained with the descendants of Felix Robertson, an attempt at locating any surviving descendants was unsuccessful as census and genealogical records reports indicate the family line expired with the last descendants passing away in the 1960s and 70s and it is unknown where the letters are today.

Upon returning to Texas in December 1837, J.B. Robertson settled in the same town where Texas' independence was born, Washington-on-the-Brazos, and established himself as a doctor. Before he could enjoy a comfortable life in the new country, Robertson responded to the call of duty again. The Republic of Texas contained a large amount of land, much of which was controlled by Native American tribes, such as the Comanche, who greatly resented the increasing number of settlers pushing into their territories. A local militia company was organized in Washington-on-the-Brazos to lead a campaign up the Navasota River against hostile Indians. Robertson was elected company captain, likely due to his previous experience with the Army of the Republic. Robertson's election to captain started a series of military adventures that Robertson engaged in against Indians as well as Mexican forces over the next six years.¹⁹

Robertson was not one to let the grass grow beneath him, and upon returning from his militia excursion in 1838, he began to make his mark on Washington County. Springtime was wonderful for Robertson as he married Mary Elizabeth Cummins on May 24.²⁰ The same year, Robertson's work as a physician earned him further recognition from the community as he earned the position of Washington County Coroner.²¹ The work that Robertson performed as a coroner was his introduction into public office and was the first of several positions he held throughout his lifetime. The following year, the Robertsons welcomed their first child, Felix Huston Robertson, on March 9, 1839. Later that year, J.B. Robertson transitioned from being the coroner of Washington County to serving as the mayor of Washington-on-the-Brazos.²²

¹⁹ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 8.

²⁰ Marriage Record. Jerome B. Robertson to Mary Elizabeth Cummins, May 27, 1838. Washington County, Republic of Texas. May 24, 1838. Accounts such as Colonel Simpson's list the marriage as having occurred on March 4, 1838.

²¹ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*

Though Robertson's term as mayor ended in 1840, his role as a public official continued as he became the Postmaster for Washington County the same year, a position which he held into 1843.²³ During Robertson's first year as Postmaster, he also began to dabble in selling land; his first foray was a three-hundred-and-fifty-acre plot that he sold to Helen Kiger for \$1,000. Since 1838, Robertson had been purchasing land in Washington County, adding to the land he had already received from the Republic of Texas. Robertson was involved with several land deals around Washington County during the late 1830s through the 1850s.

While his young family, public service, work as a doctor, and land deals occupied Robertson's daily affairs, the call to duty was something he could never ignore. The years that Texas spent as an independent nation were seldom peaceful, and 1842 was no exception. One year earlier, Santa Anna had returned to power in Mexico and set out to prove that the Texans' hold on their territory was weak. Border harassment gave way to invasions, the first occurring in March, led by Mexican General Rafael Vásquez, who successfully captured San Antonio for a brief moment before they were repelled. Not long after, a Mexican force about one thousand strong made a second attempt to invade Texas, though they were turned away before making any real progress. In the summer of 1842, Mexican forces led by General Adrián Woll invaded Texas and once again captured San Antonio. Just as before, the Mexican force needed to be expelled from the city, and the Texan forces responded furiously, which drew the attention of many Texans, including J.B. Robertson.²⁴ Following this incursion of Mexican troops into Texas, the population of Texas demanded a response to teach Mexico a lesson.

²³ D. H. Fitch, *The Morning Star* (Houston, TX), Vol. 2, No. 95, Ed. 1, September 15, 1840.

²⁴ "G.W. Terrell to The Governments of Great Britain, France and the United States, October 15, 1842," In Eugene Barker and Amelia W. Williams, eds., *The Writings of Sam Houston, 1813-1863 Vol. III December 20, 1822-January 31, 1844*, (The University of Texas Press: Austin, TX; 1940), 179-184.; G.W. Terrell was the Attorney General and acting Secretary of State for The Republic of Texas and it is widely believed that Sam Houston was the true author of this document, though it was signed by Terrell, see the footnote by Barker and Williams.

Sam Houston, the former commander of the Texas Army who had defeated the Mexican forces led by Mexican President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto and then become the first president of the Republic of Texas, was serving as the third president of Texas in 1842. Houston took the Mexican invasions seriously and viewed them from a military standpoint, believing that this latest adventure was part of a greater Mexican plot to draw attention away from Austin, the capital of the Republic, “to leave Austin exposed, and [to] sack and burn it.”²⁵ Though the capital business had already been relocated to Washington-on-the-Brazos earlier in the year due to the dangers presented by the earlier invasions, the people of Texas and their president wanted to take action to ensure they could quickly respond to any threat to their sovereign lands.

J.B. Robertson was one of many Texan patriots who volunteered for duty, eager to defend their country and assist in routing the Mexican forces from their lands. Texan troops assembled in November 1842 at Camp Leon, the Headquarters of the South-Western Army, where they hatched a plan to take the fight to the Mexicans. Once again, Robertson assumed his duty as a Captain amidst the general mood in the camp, which was a determination “to invade the enemy’s country” and to “keep a constant intercourse between this frontier and our position in Mexico.”²⁶ After the abuses Texas had endured from the Mexican forces throughout 1842, the mindset of the day was that the time had come for Texas to take a stand. President Houston agreed with the sentiment that was so strongly felt across the young republic. The month before, Houston wrote

²⁵ “Sam Houston to Morgan C. Hamilton, September 20, 1842,” In Barker and Williams, *The Writings of Sam Houston*, 162-163.; In 1842, Morgan Hamilton was the acting Secretary of War and Marine for the Republic of Texas.

²⁶ *The Morning Star* (Houston, TX), Vol. 4, No. 435, Ed. 1, December 17, 1842.

to Brigadier General Alexander Somervell, directing him to gather all the troops who were able and to act swiftly if the opportunity for a successful invasion into Mexico presented itself.²⁷

Somervell had been directed to gather his men and begin their training, removed from the vicinity of San Antonio, to keep the Texan plans a secret to ensure every possible chance of their campaign's success.²⁸ Though Robertson may have missed his opportunity to engage the Mexican forces during the Texas Revolution, he now had the chance to rectify the situation. Before Somervell led his men towards Laredo and an invasion of Mexico, the gathered men were drilled and prepared to meet and bring the fight to their enemy.

Though the campaign suffered delays, Somervell finally advanced his men to Laredo so that they could fully repulse the Mexican force led by General Woll from Texan land. On December 8, the expedition was able to peacefully capture Laredo as the Mexican force had forsaken the town and settled across the Rio Grande.²⁹ Somervell gathered his men, intending to push across the Rio Grande and into Mexico. However, some of his men believed their mission had been accomplished and turned back for home, leaving Somervell with around five hundred men, including Robertson. The campaign continued but did not resemble the glory and honor of defeating a Mexican force as Somervell had hoped. Even Somervell's attempt to take the town of Guerrero fell short as the local Alcalde was unable to muster the help he promised the Texans due to the Mexican Army having already depleted the city of their resources. This incident, along with recent rains, forced Somervell to realize that any hope of a stirring victory was not within their grasp, and he ordered his men back to Texas.³⁰

²⁷ "Sam Houston to Alexander Somervell, October 3, 1842," In Barker and Williams, *The Writings of Sam Houston*, 170.

²⁸ "M.C. Hamilton to Alexander Somervell, October 13, 1842," In Barker and Williams, *The Writings of Sam Houston*, 177-178.

²⁹ Sterling Brown Hendricks, "The Somervell Expedition To The Rio Grande, 1842," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1919), 125-126.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 129-135.

The weather had a detrimental effect on the expedition, which was already low on supplies. Moses Austin Bryan, the nephew of Stephen F. Austin, was a member of the Somervell Expedition. Bryan recalled that the expedition was caught in a storm without “tents or protection,” during which “most of the ammunition was destroyed.”³¹ Food and ammunition had been spread all across the “western country” of Texas before the onset of their campaign, creating logistical issues in getting the necessary supplies delivered.³² Many of the men lost the desire to continue to fight or pursue the Mexicans after the weather ruined their ability to supply enough ammunition to carry out their offensive operations.

Most of Somervell’s men, including Robertson, returned to Texas and their homes; those who chose to remain in Mexico burned to make an example and dissuade future invasions of Texas. One hundred eighty-nine of the Texans were captured in what is now known as the Mier Expedition when they attempted to attack the Mexican town of Mier but were defeated. As a whole, Somervell’s entire expedition was viewed as a failure, primarily as it resulted in an even greater tension between Texas and Mexico. Even Sam Houston walked back the enthusiasm that he once held to insinuate that though an invasion of Mexico had been “permitted,” it was “never advised.”³³ The new outlook of the president was that if Mexico would not trouble the Texans, then they should “attend to the raising [of] good crops” rather than worry about fighting their southern neighbor.³⁴

Regardless of the failure that the men of the Somervell Expedition endured, there had been an opportunity for Robertson to learn from the experience, which he tucked away and

³¹ Wilson E. Crook, ed., *Reminiscences of Moses Austin Bryan: Houston Archaeological Society Report No. 27* (Houston, TX: Houston Archaeological Society, July 2016), 45-46.

³² “M.C. Hamilton to Alexander Somervell, November 9, 1842,” In Barker and Williams, *The Writings of Sam Houston*, 193-194.

³³ “Sam Houston to George W. Hill, January 24, 1843,” In Barker and Williams, *The Writings of Sam Houston*, 305-306.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

remembered later in his military service. With their lack of success and the changing attitude in Texas, Robertson returned home to his family and welcomed his daughter, Julia Ann Robertson, on January 29, 1843. Robertson continued his duties as Postmaster during 1843, which was likely an exciting time in Washington County as the capital of Texas continued to reside in Washington-on-the-Brazos that year before it returned to Austin.

Over the next two years, as the Robertson children grew, J.B. and Mary Robertson began to consider the future of young Felix and Julia with a mind on their education. Ensuring that their children benefited from the quality of a good education was evident through the actions of Robertson. Beyond his medical practice and military service, Robertson established himself in Washington-on-the-Brazos as one of the community's three trustees for the local school. Not far from their home at Washington-on-the-Brazos, the community of Independence was growing and quickly becoming a beacon for education in Texas with the founding of Baylor College in 1845. In November of the same year, the Robertson family decided to relocate to Independence for the educational opportunities the town could provide for their children and his medical practice as well.³⁵

The Republic of Texas was poised to make a move of its own along with the Robertson family's move to Independence. The young nation desired to join the United States for their support and protection. Early attempts to join the Union had fallen short due to the Texan commitment to the institution of slavery, which would have created turmoil by adding another slave state. However, many American attitudes began to change over the years, partially due to the desire to claim the Texas lands before Mexico recaptured the country, as it appeared they might during 1842. American President John Tyler fiercely desired the annexation of Texas to

³⁵ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 8.

expand American territory in the west. Tyler was able to force the issue through Congress on December 12, 1844, with a joint resolution to approve the treaty he created, which he got approved and then signed on March 1, 1845, just two days before he left office.³⁶ Despite the outcry of abolitionists, Texans voted to accept the treaty in June, then drafted a state constitution, after which the state was annexed into the United States on December 29, 1845.

Following their admission to the United States, Texas became a battleground between Mexico and the U.S. over the disputed boundaries of the state. During 1846 and 1848, the two countries went to war over the issue. Though the conflict likely would have suited Robertson and his abilities, he found a new way to serve his state during the conflict by expanding his political career to enter office at the state level. On December 13, 1847, J.B. Robertson took the oath of office alongside his fellow Texas State Representatives in Austin, who joined the Second Legislature.³⁷

During his first day in office, Robertson was in the presence of some notable figures of Texas history. Presiding over the oaths of office was the Secretary of State, David G. Burnett, who had served as the interim president of the Republic of Texas during the war for independence until the citizens of Texas could hold a formal election. After the members had taken their oaths, Burnett moved on to the next order of business for the day, allowing the members of the House to elect their Speaker. Nominations were presented to the members of the House, offering James W. Henderson of Harris County and a man who was well known to any of the members who had been living in Texas during the Republic period, former president Mirabeau B. Lamar of San Patricio County.³⁸

³⁶ U.S. House of Representatives. "Joint Resolution Annexing Texas, December 12, 1844." 28th Congress, 1843-1845. December 12, 1844, Washington D.C.

³⁷ John S. Ford, *The Texas Democrat* (Austin, TX), Vol. 2, No. 49, Ed. 1, December 15, 1847.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The House members voted and selected Henderson as their speaker, denying Lamar an opportunity to return to political glory. The election proved crucial for Henderson's career, as he was elected Lieutenant Governor in 1851, just a few years later. Texas Governor Peter Hansborough Bell resigned to join the U.S. Congress in 1853, making Henderson the fourth governor of Texas. Another noteworthy member of the House who served with Robertson was John H. Reagan from Nacogdoches County. Like Robertson, this was the beginning of Reagan's political career at the state level, and both men eventually served the Confederacy during the Civil War; though Robertson became a soldier, Reagan served politically, first as a representative from Texas and then as Postmaster General.³⁹

During his term in the Texas House, Robertson was able to make good use of his experience as a postmaster while serving on the Post Routes Committee. In addition to this committee, Robertson was also a member of the House Committee on Contingent Expenses. Other than serving as a member of these two committees, Robertson also acted as the chairman of the House Committee of Internal Improvements and House Committee on Public Debt and Outstanding Liabilities of the Late Republic of Texas. The later committee was undoubtedly an important one at the time, considering the actual amount of public debt from the Republic was uncertain, and it fell to the Second Legislature to have the state auditor and the comptroller of public accounts determine the items included in the debt and their actual values.⁴⁰ The debt matter continued for the next few years, and Robertson again faced the issue when he advanced his political career.

³⁹ John S. Ford, *The Texas Democrat* (Austin, TX), Vol. 2, No. 49, Ed. 1, December 15, 1847.

⁴⁰ E. T. Miller, "Debt of the Republic of Texas," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed June 12, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/debt-of-the-republic-of-texas>.

Texas politics favored Robertson, who pursued a seat in the Texas Senate following the end of his term in the House. Robertson won the election and served from November 3, 1849, through November 5, 1851, representing his home county, Washington, along with Burleson, Milam, and Williamson counties. During his two years as a state senator, Robertson was busy serving on multiple committees, co-chairing one and chairing two others. Robertson demonstrated his leadership abilities as the chair of the Committee of Federal Relations and the Committee of Public Land Claims while co-chairing the Committee on Public Debt, Select. These leadership roles helped set Robertson's service apart in Congress, and the people of Washington County did not forget the responsibility he demonstrated.

Through his service in the Texas Senate, Robertson once again brushed elbows with people who had been or would become influential in Texas politics, serving on the Senate Committee on Penitentiary alongside Edward Burleson, who had been a vice president of the Republic during Sam Houston's second term and then became president pro tem of the First Legislature of the Texas State Senate. Robertson also served with Elisha Pease, the fifth and thirteenth governor of the state, on the Quieting Land Titles of the State, Governor's Message Committee, Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, and the Senate Committee on Education. While part of the Governor's Message, Select Committee, Robertson worked with Louis Trezevant Wigfall, and the two would serve together again in the war when Wigfall led the Texas Brigade before becoming a Confederate Senator for Texas. Robertson was also a member of the Senate Committee on Fire-Proof General Land Office Building, Governor's Message, as well as the Comptroller and Treasurer, Examine.⁴¹

⁴¹ Texas Legislative Reference Library.

Other than serving as a member of various committees and leading others as chair or co-chair, one of the most notable committees that Robertson was part of was the Public Debt Select Committee, which he acted as the co-chair of, along with Darwin Massey Stapp, who was appointed from the Texas House of Representatives.⁴² The House created the committee in November 1850 in response to the public debt crisis, which aimed to ascertain the amount of the public debt and provide evidence of the debts. According to one report, Texas's debt had reached almost \$12.5 million, and the Texans had planned to pay off the debt in land payments at fifty cents per acre, but the creditors would not accept the plan. The issue of settling the public debt continued until the agreement included in the Compromise of 1850, when Texas received \$10 million from the Federal Government in exchange for 67,000,000 acres of land, giving Texas the funds they needed to settle their debts.⁴³

During his time in the Texas Senate, Robertson further established himself as a man firmly committed to his duties. The Senate came into session on November 5, 1849, as appointed by law, and they immediately set the business of naming members to the various committees. Once that process had ended, Robertson, newly elected to the Senate, brought forth a petition from Elijah M. Pease, who was contesting the recent election of John B. Jones to the Senate seat for Brazoria and Galveston Counties, the 11th Senatorial District.⁴⁴ This petition began a short-lived but attention-grabbing spectacle regarding the contested seat of John B. Jones, who took his place with the other members of the Texas Senate despite his precarious position. The issue was given to the Committee on Privileges and Elections, of which Robertson was a member, to

⁴² Texas Legislative Reference Library.

⁴³ Miller, "Debt of the Republic of Texas," Handbook of Texas Online.

⁴⁴ Texas State Library, *Senate Journal: 3rd Legislature, Regular Session. November 5, 1849 through February 11, 1850* (Austin, TX. November 5, 1849), 7. Hereafter referred to as *Senate Journal* with date.

review the documentation provided by both Pease and Jones to decide who the seat truly belonged.

As soon as November 6, the contested seat of Jones, who was a judge from Galveston, and the challenger, Pease of Brazoria County, who had served Texas as a soldier during the revolution against Mexico and in various public offices since the time of the Republic, was “exciting considerable interest” throughout the city of Austin.⁴⁵ Over the next two days, the committee reviewed the available documentation and then decided that Pease was the rightful winner of the election and that Jones’s proposal that he also be granted a seat to represent Galveston County was not within their ability to decide since it had only been suggested within the committee and was not a directive of the Senate.⁴⁶

Reporting their findings to the Senate for the majority of the committee was Senator David Aaron Gage, who stated that the election returns from the district showed Pease as the narrow winner of a very tight race, garnering 393 votes to Jones’s 376. Within their respective counties, each man was a clear winner and hometown favorite, which prompted Jones’s desire to request his seat for Galveston County. Though the election totals were close, the real reason for the turbulence came from the actions of the Chief Justice of Galveston County. In early August 1849, at the time of the election, the Chief Justice of Brazoria County was not in the state and therefore unable to certify the election results, which was then done by two of the county commissioners and then submitted to the Chief Justice of Galveston County within the legal time frame. Once in his possession, Galveston’s Chief Justice “rejected the returns of Brazoria, upon the ground that they were not certified by the proper officer,” and awarded the seat to Jones

⁴⁵ Francis Moore Jr. *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston, TX), Vol. 14, No. 46, Ed. 1, November 15, 1849.

⁴⁶ *Senate Journal*, November 8, 1849, 98-99.

rather than Pease.⁴⁷ Adding to the public drama that was unfolding in Texas was the fact that as early as August 16, 1849, ten days after the election, the *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* stated that the election had been “quiet and harmonious” and though Jones had won Galveston County, many believed that Pease had “been chosen by the District.”⁴⁸ Then, just over a week later, on August 25, the *Texas State Gazette* reported a victory for Pease as a member-elect to the Texas Senate.⁴⁹

Near the end of September 1849, the Chief Justice of Brazoria County returned to Texas and resumed his duties. By this time, Jones had already been granted the certificate of election based upon the findings of the Chief Justice of Galveston County. However, one of the duties the Brazoria Chief Justice undertook was to officially certify the election results from his county, which upheld the counts previously submitted by the county election commissioners. On September 25, the official election results, now certified by the appropriate official of the State, were submitted. These results were the critical question amongst the Committee on Privileges and Elections, who deliberated over whether or not to exclude them from the calculations of the District. The Committee determined that they should not exclude the results from the election counts, which granted Pease the victory.⁵⁰

Furthermore, Senator Gage also addressed the other concerns that had arisen in the wake of the contested seat. First, that fraud or unfairness had occurred in two of the Brazoria precincts, Pease having won the county with 218 votes to Jones’ 88. The committee stated that no evidence supported the claim beyond considering them as “informalities” and further indicated that should

⁴⁷ *Senate Journal*, November 8, 1849, 98.

⁴⁸ Francis Moore Jr., *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston, TX), Vol. 14, No. 33, Ed. 1, August 16, 1849.

⁴⁹ R. C. Matthewson, *Texas State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 1, No. 1, Ed. 1, August 25, 1849.

⁵⁰ *Senate Journal*, November 8, 1849, 98.

they disregard the votes from those precincts, “the result would only be varied by a single vote.” The second concern before the Committee involved evidence challenging the “legality of a number of votes.” After evaluating the “mass of evidence” provided to them, the committee deemed it “unsatisfactory.” They noted that only four votes could be “considered doubtful, and if thrown out, would not change the result.” Based on their findings, Senator Gage, voicing the majority opinion, stated that the majority of the Committee had “no hesitation” that the people of the 11th District had “plainly and undoubtedly expressed in favor of E.M. Pease.” Following this declaration, Gage added that the Committee had chosen not to consider the petition to allow Jones a separate Senate seat to represent Galveston County so as not to assume any powers vested by the Constitution to another branch of the State government.⁵¹

Following the majority report given by Senator Gage, the next day on November 9, Robertson offered the minority opinion on the issue, which supported Pease and the decision of the Committee on Privileges and Elections, though he added an interesting point of view.⁵² Rather than dismissing all of Jones’s claims with the majority of the committee, Robertson not only supported the results of the election that were in favor of Pease but also believed that it was within the power and authority of the Senate to declare a seat for Jones to represent the people of Galveston County. Robertson acknowledged that President of the Senate John A. Greer’s rejection of Jones’s credentials did not invalidate them, as the Senate themselves had not rejected them. Beyond this point, Robertson went on to explain that “the Constitution expressly declares that each House shall be the judge of the election and qualification of its own members,” therefore, if the Senate acted upon the recommendation of the majority of his Committee “it

⁵¹ *Senate Journal*, November 8, 1849, 99.

⁵² Francis Moore Jr., *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston, TX), Vol. 14, No. 48, Ed. 1, November 22, 1849.

would deprive the Senate of [that] Constitutional right.” The last of Robertson’s concerns focused on the rights of the people of Galveston County to be represented by the person of their choosing rather than being included with Brazoria County.

It was apparent to Robertson that recognizing the authority and power of the Senate was just as important as recognizing and respecting the people's will and their right to their chosen representation. By demonstrating his firm stance on these points, Robertson established himself as a man who stood firm in protecting Texas's established powers while proving that he was willing to defend the people's will. Both of these traits, along with his service directly to the people of Washington County, later proved to be precisely what the men he served with during the Civil War wanted in an officer, leading to their choosing Robertson as a commander.

On November 23, 1849, Robertson brought a proposal to read for the first time before the Legislature. The bill called for a law “to prohibit slaves from carrying fire-arms in [Texas] without the written consent of their owner, employer or controller.”⁵³ The law proposed by Robertson echoed one from the days of the Republic of Texas, which made the same declaration but extended the prohibition to any deadly weapon, as well as empowering any person to lawfully take the weapon.⁵⁴ The next day, the bill was read a second time, with Robertson recommending a minor adjustment to the wording, and then the bill was adopted and referred to the judiciary committee on Robertson’s motion.⁵⁵ Though Robertson himself did not comment on his reasoning for proposing the ban on firearms for slaves, the action does demonstrate a growing concern in slave states to protect the institution and limit potential uprisings among slaves. At the beginning of November, a stampede of armed slaves had occurred in Missouri, and

⁵³ *Tri-Weekly Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 1, No. 12, Ed. 1, December 3, 1849.

⁵⁴ 1839 Texas General Laws, 172, An Act Concerning Slaves, §6

⁵⁵ R. C. Matthewson, *Texas State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 1, No. 16, Ed. 1, December 8, 1849.

though it had not been successful, news of that nature undoubtedly concerned Texas slave owners and likely led to Robertson's resurrection of the old law from the Republic era.⁵⁶

Near the end of November 1849, Robertson and the Committee on Federal Relations were tasked with evaluating Texas mail routes to expand the growing population's mail service. The Senate worked with members of the House to identify the requirements for getting mail delivered across the state, including an evaluation of which routes could be carried on horseback and which needed carriages due to the large amount of mail being transported. On the 28th, Chairman Robertson delivered the findings and recommendation of the committee, noting that, should they be denied, the purpose that the Legislative Branch was established for would have failed.⁵⁷

Altogether, there were recommendations on fifteen different mail routes, eight of which would require horse carriages, the busiest of them transporting mail from Shreveport and New Orleans, Louisiana, into Texas. Mail arriving from New Orleans was to be delivered via steamships to the ports of Galveston, Paso Cavallo (at Matagorda Bay), and Aransas Pass, and the mail from Shreveport was to be taken twice a week to San Augustine, Texas, in four carriages, the only route to be delivered more than once per week.

Shortly afterward, in early December 1849, Robertson issued a protest on the Senate floor decrying a joint resolution passed the month before, which authorized and required the Commissioner of the General Land Office to accept promissory notes from the Republic of Texas. The same day that Robertson had delivered the recommendation relating to the main routes, he also voted against the joint resolution, the only senator to do so, and registered that he

⁵⁶ *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), November 6, 1849.

⁵⁷ R. C. Matthewson, *Texas State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 1, No. 15, Ed. 1, December 1, 1849.

would be bringing a formal protest before the Senate.⁵⁸ Robertson spoke up against this resolution on the basis that there was “no such currency lawfully in circulation” since a previous law, passed in 1848, had provided an opportunity for those holding notes from the Republic to turn them in for an alternate and legal “character of indebtedness.”⁵⁹ The nature of Robertson’s protest fell on the idea that those who had followed the law and turned in the notes, of which about four-fifths had been received, would not benefit from the new resolution, but those who had not bothered to follow the law would be the only ones to gain. Ultimately, his position was that the latest resolution was “illegal, unjust, and an infringement on the just rights of our other creditors.”⁶⁰ Based upon his position regarding the promissory notes from the former Republic of Texas and with Robertson’s involvement and role within the Public Debt Select Committee, clearly Robertson strongly valued a fair application of laws and fiscal responsibility.

At the end of his term as a State Senator, Robertson returned to his home in Independence, his medical practice, and his family. Even while Robertson was in Austin serving the people of Washington County, he continued to be mindful of his family’s needs. In addition to his duties as a congressman, Robertson also busied himself as a newspaper agent to help provide for his family.⁶¹ Among Robertson’s activities that focused on his community was his association with Baylor University, which not only “received Dr. Robertson’s benefactions” but also his support as he worked to help the young and growing college.⁶² During his terms as a legislator, Robertson continued to be an active member of his local community back home by working with Baylor University. As the father of two children, Robertson had a vested interest in

⁵⁸ R. C. Matthewson, *Texas State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 1, No. 15, Ed. 1, December 1, 1849.

⁵⁹ R. C. Matthewson, *Texas State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 1, No. 17, Ed. 1, December 15, 1849.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ J. Lancaster, *The Texas Ranger, and Brazos Guard* (Washington, TX), Vol. 1, No. 1, Ed. 1, January 16, 1849.; R. C. Matthewson, *Texas State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 1, No. 6, Ed. 1, September 29, 1849.

⁶² Lois Smith Murray, *Baylor at Independence* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1972), 51.

the success of the new college in Independence and the creation of the girl's school. In 1849, Robertson had worked with the Board of Trustees at Baylor, sitting in as a proxy for one of the university's founders, Robert Emmett Bledsoe (R.E.B.) Baylor.⁶³ Part of Robertson's association with the college stemmed from his work as a school trustee in Washington-on-the-Brazos and from his experience on the Education Committee while he served in the Texas House of Representatives. It is also possible that Robertson and R.E.B. Baylor shared a common bond as they came from the same county in Kentucky before emigrating to Texas.

In 1851, Felix Huston Robertson turned twelve and was ready for the next phase of his life. That year, Felix H. Robertson entered Baylor University as a part of their "Primary Department" to begin his formal education, which helped bring his parent's desire for their children to have an education closer to reality.⁶⁴ Robertson's first school year consisted of a rigorous course of study that included lessons in English grammar, arithmetic, a Latin reader, geography, penmanship, Colburn's mental arithmetic, Greek grammar, American history, and bookkeeping.⁶⁵ Along with the demands of his educational life, Robertson and his classmates were also required to live up to Baylor University's Moral Culture standards. Part of the expectations of the school was that students displayed good moral character, which they learned as they attended morning and evening prayers at the chapel, though the school paid "very special attention...to the bible recitations and the Sabbath School."⁶⁶

⁶³ R.E.B. Baylor, *The Minutes of The Board of Trustees of Baylor University at Independence, Texas, April 7, 1845 to 1897*, Original Handwritten Book, Baylor University Records, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, 37.

⁶⁴ Baylor University, *Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers & Students of Baylor University, Independence, Washington County, Texas 1851-52* (University "Lone Star" Office, 1852), The Texas Collection, Baylor University, 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

The following school year, 1852 to 1853, the thirteen-year-old Felix H. Robertson advanced from the Primary Department and entered into the freshman level of the university.⁶⁷ Candidates for the freshman class were required to pass an examination that covered “English, Latin, and Greek grammar, Caesar, Virgil, Cicero's Select Orations, Greek Testament, arithmetic and algebra, as far as equations of the second degree” to earn the right to advance.⁶⁸ Robertson’s ability to pass this exam after only attending the university for a single school year is impressive, especially as several names of students who were also in the Primary Department with Robertson the previous year were still listed in the same department during the 1852 to 1853 term. Though it is not certain if J.B. Robertson had arranged for his son to have a tutor before his admission into the university during the 1851 to 1852 term or whether the younger Robertson’s natural abilities led him to excel, the fact remains that Felix Robertson advanced to the freshman class during his second year of attendance at Baylor University.

During his freshman year at Baylor, Felix H. Robertson studied Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, Livy, algebra, Latin composition, geometry, Spanish, German, Latin grammar, Greek grammar, French, and *Telemachus*.⁶⁹ During the next school year, 1853 to 1854, Robertson continued his education as part of the Freshman class, engaging in the same course of study as the previous year.⁷⁰ In the second year of Robertson’s freshman studies, the class size dropped from fourteen students to only four. During that same school year, the eldest son of one of Independence’s new residents and possibly most well-known family joined the student body at Baylor. Sam Houston

⁶⁷ Baylor University, *Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers & Students of Baylor University, Independence, Washington County, Texas 1852-53* (Offices of the N.O. Baptist Chronicle: New Orleans, 1853), The Texas Collection, Baylor University, 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁹ Baylor University, *Catalogue of the Trustees, 1852-53*, 9.

⁷⁰ Baylor University, *Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers & Students of Baylor University, Independence, Washington County, Texas 1853-54* (“The State Gazette” Job-Office: Austin, 1854), The Texas Collection, Baylor University, 3, 6.

brought his family to Independence in 1853 to take advantage of the city's educational opportunities through the college. Robertson became the upperclassman to Sam Houston Jr., who entered Baylor University's Primary Department for the 1853-1854 term.⁷¹ By the 1854-1855 school year, Robertson had advanced to the Sophomore class where he studied Horace, Geometry, Ancient History, Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Plane and Spherical Trigonometry, Natural Philosophy, Natural History, Homer's *Iliad*, Cicero de *Amicitia*, Spanish, German, French History of the United States and French Grammar.⁷² During the same year, Sam Houston Jr., who was now eleven years old, continued his education in the Primary Department.⁷³

During Robertson's second Freshman term, his father also had an active year with his nomination to run for Lieutenant Governor of Texas in 1853 against the Honorable David Catchings Dickson of Grimes County.⁷⁴ The 1853 election not only saw J.B. Robertson attempt to return to the realm of politics, but it was also interesting as the elder Robertson's friend from the Texas State Senate, Elijah M. Pease, was the favored candidate for governor that year. Though J.B. Robertson carried his home county of Washington by a large margin of 589 votes to Dickson's 44 votes, displaying the confidence that the people still had in their former State Senator, Dickson won the election overall and joined Pease in Austin.⁷⁵

By October 1854, J.B. Robertson could see the value of the education provided at Baylor University through Felix's experiences. Undoubtedly, now that his daughter Julia had turned eleven, Robertson was urged to offer a similar opportunity for her as well. That month, a committee that had evaluated the need for new accommodations for the "Female Academy" gave

⁷¹ Baylor University, *Catalogue of the Trustees, 1853-54*, 4.

⁷² Baylor University, *Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers & Students of Baylor University, Independence, Washington County, Texas 1854-55* ("The State Gazette" Job-Office: Austin, 1855), The Texas Collection, Baylor University, 3, 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁴ J. Lancaster, *Texas Ranger & Lone Star* (Washington, TX), Vol. 4, No. 47, Ed. 1, June 2, 1853.

⁷⁵ J. Lancaster, *Texas Ranger & Lone Star* (Washington, TX), Vol. 5, No. 4, Ed. 1, August 13, 1853.

their recommendation, which the board approved. They then appointed Robertson and two other men to begin collecting funds to build the facility.⁷⁶ The following summer, on July 12, a contract was made to have a “two-story stone schoolhouse” built to provide a facility for the “Female Department.”⁷⁷ Robertson was again named as the local agent to collect funds for the building.⁷⁸

The following school year was Felix Robertson’s last year at Baylor, during which he was designated as a “Second Year” student in the “Scientific Course” for the 1855 to 1856 academic year.⁷⁹ The designation attached to Robertson during this school year identified his academic pursuits as being associated with the modern designation of a Bachelor of Science as opposed to a Bachelor of Arts, which is a designation Baylor University adopted beginning in the 1855 to 1856 school year.⁸⁰ The coursework for Robertson during this final year included trigonometry, evidences of Christianity, logic, mensuration, political economy, rhetoric, surveying and navigation, and natural philosophy, which included an emphasis on mechanics, hydrostatics, and hydraulics.⁸¹

That same year, Sam Houston, Jr., who had turned twelve in May, was still listed as part of the “Preparatory Department,” the new designation for the Primary Department.⁸² The designation of Houston is essential as it indicates that Baylor took their academics seriously and that, likely, Robertson was not promoted out of the Primary Department after his first year as any

⁷⁶ Baylor, *The Minutes of The Board of Trustees, 1845-1897*, 84-86.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Baylor University, *Fourth Annual Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers & Students of Baylor University, Independence, Texas 1856* (The Civilian Book and Job Office: Galveston, 1856), The Texas Collection, Baylor University, 6.

⁸⁰ Sylvia Hernandez, Baylor University Archivist, the Texas Collection. Personal Correspondence with the Author via email. November 11, 2022.

⁸¹ Baylor University, *Fourth Annual Catalogue of the Trustees*, 12.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

sort of favor or special treatment towards his father. Instead, it is most likely that students transitioned from the Primary Department once they reached the age of thirteen and were mature enough to attempt the rigor of the higher academic program. Had the university only promoted Robertson as a favor to his father, Sam Houston, Jr. would have also received such a promotion. Instead, the students at the university earned their education by completing their coursework. The rigor of the program that Robertson experienced at Baylor laid the foundation for his future educational success.

Following the 1855 to 1856 school year, Felix Robertson disappeared from the Baylor University records during the 1856 to 1857 term. The catalog for that school year lists, for the first time in the Scientific Course, a breakdown of students by traditional classes, senior through sophomore, from which Robertson's name is missing.⁸³ While it is uncertain why Robertson left the university without being listed as a graduate, the catalog only lists four students in the Senior Class of the Scientific Course, three of whom were among the ten total students, including Robertson, in the Second Year of the Scientific Course the year before.⁸⁴

While he may not have graduated from Baylor, Robertson had not abandoned his academic pursuits; instead, he changed his focus. In 1856, Robertson attended The Texas Military Institute at Galveston (TMI), the same year the institute was consolidated with Rutersville College. No record indicates the reason for this shift in Robertson's educational pursuits; regardless of his reasons, the young man performed well in his new school, continuing to prove his academic prowess. In August 1856, the TMI held examinations and a demonstration

⁸³ Baylor University, *Fifth Annual Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers & Students of Baylor University, Independence, Texas 1857* (The Civilian Book and Job Office: Galveston, 1857), The Texas Collection, Baylor University, 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; Baylor University, *Fourth Annual Catalogue of the Trustees*, 6.

of their cadets, which Robertson participated in at the collegiate level, despite other cadets who “quailed before the inquisition, and absented themselves at the cost of their cadetship.”⁸⁵

Robertson was part of a three-way tie for the highest geometry and trigonometry exam score in the examination portion. In addition to his academic success, it was also noted that Robertson was clear of demerits, “which has great prominence in all military schools.”⁸⁶ The various events occurred over several days, and Robertson took part in “an exceedingly well-written and well-delivered controversy” with his fellow cadet, W.L. Thornton of Galveston, “on the relative powers of the pen and the sword,” to help conclude the demonstrations.⁸⁷ With so many accolades earned, it is hard to imagine which accomplishment Robertson would have been the most proud of, and yet, there was one that stood out among the honors already listed. During the proceedings, an announcement identifying five cadets who had achieved the honor of being “distinguished in general merit” listed Robertson first.⁸⁸

The strong performance that Robertson accomplished in his short time at the TMI did not pass unnoticed and likely contributed to the reason he received an appointment at The United States Military Academy (USMA). The appointment was given to Robertson courtesy of Texas Governor Peter Hansborough Bell, who suggested it to J.B. Robertson.⁸⁹ Though Robertson’s education at Baylor University may have ended without graduation, his formal education was far from over as the following year brought a significant shift in his life and set him on a course that helped to define him.

⁸⁵ *Galveston Weekly News* (Galveston, TX), Vol. 13, No. 21, Ed. 1, August 12, 1856.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Galveston Weekly News* (Galveston, TX), Vol. 13, No. 21, Ed. 1, August 12, 1856.

⁸⁹ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

The USMA, also known as West Point, has a long tradition of educating and preparing some of the best Army officers in America's history. Notable USMA graduates include Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, as well as numerous other generals from both sides of the Civil War. On July 1, 1857, Felix H. Robertson joined the ranks of the military cadets in New York at West Point.⁹⁰ Over the next three and a half years, Robertson learned from the experts in training U.S. military officers and began to be molded into the man who later became a general in the Confederate Army. Though Robertson attended the prestigious school, he could not claim to have been a graduate of the academy as he resigned his post on January 29, 1861, as the threat of a war between the states loomed on the horizon.⁹¹

Other than knowing the courses and his progress at Baylor University, there are no records of how Felix H. Robertson conducted himself as a student at the young college. According to Sylvia Hernandez, an Archivist at Baylor University's Texas Collection, the university did not maintain student records while it was located in Independence, so his grades, attendance, and behavior have been lost to the past.⁹² Additionally, while Robertson may not have earned any demerits while at the TMI, he was only at the school briefly. In the absence of records from Baylor and the brevity of his tenure at the TMI, it is necessary to rely on the detailed accounts from the USMA to evaluate the type of student that Robertson may have been based on his actions while attending West Point. Within the records of Robertson's time at the USMA, there is a handwritten ledger detailing his numerous delinquencies while a student at the

⁹⁰ *Cadets Admitted 1857*, Handwritten Ledger, Archives and Special Collections, Courtesy of the United States Military Academy.

⁹¹ *Casualties 1860-1861*, Handwritten Ledger, Archives and Special Collections, Courtesy of the United States Military Academy.

⁹² Sylvia Hernandez, Personal Correspondence with the Author via email, November 11, 2022.

academy, from his first offense, just a few days after his arrival on July 21, 1857, to his final recorded offense on January 25, 1861, just four days before his resignation.⁹³

Over the forty-three months that Robertson spent at the USMA, he accrued 262 delinquencies, an average of 6.1 per month. The highest accumulation of delinquencies that Robertson received occurred during his final year at the academy, which only lasted eight months, during which time he garnered seventy-six. The infractions against Robertson covered several issues, such as not marching in formation correctly, inspection violations for his uniform, quarters, and weapon, not following the proper protocols while in formation, not filling out his paperwork and forms correctly, visiting when he should not have been, being up after hours, and being absent from meals, reveille, and parade. The most common offense that Robertson was guilty of during his time at West Point was tardiness. Looking over his delinquency record, it appears that if there was a place that Robertson could report late to, he was guilty of it, and over one hundred of his delinquencies were for reporting late to his destination.⁹⁴

Given Robertson's fondness for being tardy or absent from duty, a story he shared in an interview with Helen Pool about his court-martial at West Point is unsurprising. Near the campus was the home of Benny Haven, which Robertson described as "a sort of open house for the cadets," and whenever the rules permitted, many cadets enjoyed visiting the home.⁹⁵ Naturally, Robertson was among the cadets who frequented the house, and he recalled that one day, he "left his quarters unceremoniously" to visit "Benny Haven's place." On that particular day, because Robertson was away, he was found to be absent without leave during an inspection of his

⁹³ *Registers of Cadet Delinquencies 1857-1861*, Handwritten Ledger, Archives and Special Collections, Courtesy of the United States Military Academy, 270, 371.

⁹⁴ *Registers of Cadet Delinquencies 1857-1861*. 270-271, 370-371.

⁹⁵ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

quarters, which earned him a court martial.⁹⁶ Though Robertson did not disclose the court-martial result, he continued his education at the academy.

Without the records available from Baylor University, Robertson's behavior during his time there may remain a mystery. Still, his frequent disregard for the structure of the USMA certainly indicates that there may have been similar issues at Baylor as well. The only contradiction would be the positive report provided by the TMI, though there could be another explanation for that as well. Due to the proximity of his father and the association that the elder Robertson had with the college and faculty at Baylor, perhaps the younger Robertson may have been more disciplined while at Baylor and the TMI. Therefore, it could be that the distance from the supervision of his family may have triggered the rebellious spirit he displayed while attending West Point. By comparison, Robertson's classmate, George Armstrong Custer, who was a fellow member of the Class of '62, also entering the USMA in July 1857, is considered to have "received some of the highest numbers of demerits in his time at West Point."⁹⁷ Though the two students were not close, Robertson did know Custer, at least in some small way, and recalled him as being "a good-looking blond youth."⁹⁸

According to the USMA records, Custer accumulated over four hundred delinquencies before his early graduation in June 1861 due to the outbreak of the Civil War.⁹⁹ Custer managed to surpass Robertson's total delinquencies by January 1860, and by the time Robertson resigned from his commission, Custer had accumulated 382 delinquencies and then added a little more

⁹⁶ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

⁹⁷ "USMA Library Homepage: USMA Library Archives and Special Collections: Our Collections," Our Collections - USMA Library Archives and Special Collections - USMA Library Homepage at U.S. Military Academy. Accessed April 25, 2022. <https://library.westpoint.edu/asc/collections>

⁹⁸ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

⁹⁹ *Registers of Cadet Delinquencies 1857-1861*, 192,193; 342,343; 448,449.

than fifty by the time of his graduation.¹⁰⁰ While many of the delinquencies are similar, Custer sprinkled in a few more flavorful offenses, such as having tobacco smoke in his quarters and cooking utensils in the chimney.¹⁰¹ Though Robertson's record is nowhere near exemplary, he seems a much more model student when compared to the antics of Custer's time at West Point.

In the interview he provided late in life, Robertson recalled some of his antics while attending the military academy, revealing that he was a rascal as a young man. Though Robertson did not reveal exactly when the events occurred, he recounted a story about how the cadets were suffering through a period of poor food at the academy, particularly with stewed fish, which Robertson said was served on a platter "surrounded by a material euphoniously called sauce, which might have been used to starch shirts."¹⁰² The cadets had been complaining about the quality of the food to such a degree that it had caught the attention of the Board of Visitors, who sent one of their members, Jefferson Davis, to inspect the food. On the inspection day, the dreaded fish was set out to be served when Davis arrived. The eyes of all those who had gathered were fixed upon Davis's entrance, except for Robertson, who utilized the distraction to pull out several of his hairs, which he then "proceeded to sprinkle [them] hurriedly over the platters of things finny."¹⁰³ He acted quickly, with no one being the wiser, as Davis approached the table to inspect the food prepared for the students. Robertson "meekly" lifted the platter towards Davis, who reacted with "amazement and indignation," which ensured that fish stew would not be featured on the menu at West Point for many days to come.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *Registers of Cadet Delinquencies 1857-1861*, 192,193; 342,343; 448,449.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, March 8, 1858 and June 5, 1858. 192,193.

¹⁰² Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Robertson's caper had been a success, and he was "secretly and fervently congratulated by his classmates afterward," but it was not the only time that the young man from Texas engaged a member of the Davis family while at West Point.¹⁰⁵ While fulfilling his role on the Board of Visitors, Davis stayed in a nearby hotel for ten weeks and brought along his wife, Varina, their son, Jefferson Davis Jr., and daughter, Winnie. Though Robertson recalled that Davis's young daughter's name was Winnie, he was mistaken because Winnie was not born until 1864, so the girl he met would have had to have been Davis's oldest daughter, Margaret, who was born in 1855.¹⁰⁶ Robertson likely made this mistake, not just due to his age at the time of the interview but also because the younger Miss Davis had achieved more notoriety in her life by being known as "The Daughter of the Confederacy" since she was born at the Confederate White House in Richmond, and that would have likely triggered the memory of her name over her less notable sister.¹⁰⁷

During the weeks that the Davis stayed near West Point, Robertson recalled that there were some of the cadets who enjoyed helping to teach young Jefferson Davis Jr. to "cuss a ring around the moon," which the Davis's young daughter was quick to pick up on as well.¹⁰⁸ Robertson reflected on the occasion of Mrs. Davis's "intense horror" when she discovered the children's newly acquired "expressions" as a vivid memory in his mind.¹⁰⁹ Though Robertson does not indict himself, his knowledge of the events, his inclination to mischief, and his reputation for not being where he should have been all indicate that he was most likely involved

¹⁰⁵ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

¹⁰⁶ Carol K. Bleser, "The Marriage of Varina Howell and Jefferson Davis: 'I Gave the Best and All My Life to a Girdled Tree,'" *The Journal of Southern History* 65, no. 1 (1999): 14,22.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

in corrupting the Davis children's vocabulary. Beyond the shock Mrs. Davis received from her children, Robertson reflected on her memory fondly, remembering her "sweetness and tendency to mother" the cadets, so she must have made quite the impression upon him.¹¹⁰ Though Robertson did not mention any encounters with Davis himself, there were connections between the two that could have possibly caught Davis's attention if the two men had had the opportunity to visit. The pair would have likely discovered that Davis had also gone to college at Transylvania University, just like J.B. Robertson; though Davis attended in the early 1820s, it is possible that this connection, along with their shared bond of being West Point cadets, may have helped endear Felix Robertson to Davis.¹¹¹

Despite the issues Robertson may have had regarding his youthful roguishness, punctuality, and conforming to the other demands of West Point, the fact that he could remain in the academy and manage his courses is another testament to his intellectual abilities. Shortly before Robertson joined the cadets of West Point, the academy experienced a shift in its approach to educating the future military leaders of America. The primary educational focus of the USMA had been on the principles of engineering, mathematics, and natural philosophy, with "71 percent of the total number of classroom hours in the four-year program...devoted to these three subjects, compared to 29 percent for all the others, including military tactics."¹¹² Though the academy was producing cadets with an unrivaled education in engineering, there was enough criticism from Army officers and prominent visitors tasked with evaluating the USMA that the

¹¹⁰ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

¹¹¹ Holman Hamilton, "Jefferson Davis Before His Presidency," In *The Three Kentucky Presidents: Lincoln, Taylor, Davis*, 10–19. (University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 11.

¹¹² James L. Morrison, "Educating the Civil War Generals: West Point, 1833-1861," *Military Affairs* 38, no. 3 (1974): 108.

Secretary of War set out to correct the academy's neglect of other academic subjects and military sciences by adjusting the curriculum from a four year to a five-year program.¹¹³

Beginning in 1854, the USMA instituted the new five-year curriculum for all new cadets, which included courses in Spanish, History, and Law, while increasing the time spent on English and the professional military subjects offered. Though the rigor of the USMA was high, the standards of admission were low by comparison, with candidates only being required to demonstrate a basic grasp of reading, writing, and mathematics along with passing a "superficial physical examination."¹¹⁴ This policy admitted 93.1% of the candidates who applied between 1833 and 1861. Out of the cadets who were accepted, "more than one-quarter of this group failed to graduate because of academic deficiencies."¹¹⁵ Felix Robertson's time at Baylor University likely prepared him for the demands of the classroom at the USMA. As he demonstrated at Baylor, Robertson's intellect became a valuable asset in helping him meet the requirements of West Point and prepare him for the next phase of his life.

The early phase of life for the Robertson men set them on a course to take an active role in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. Neither of the men likely suspected the oncoming war would propel them into roles where they witnessed some of the most influential moments leading to the war, during the war, and in its aftermath. J.B. Robertson's experience in his community, serving in the militia, and his role as a politician each played a part in earning him the trust and respect of the people in Washington County. Felix Robertson's experiences at Baylor College, the Texas Military Institute, and West Point prepared him to move on to the next phase of his life. Additionally, the time that the younger Robertson spent at West Point away

¹¹³ James L. Morrison, "Educating the Civil War Generals: West Point, 1833-1861," *Military Affairs* 38, no. 3 (1974): 108.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

from the supervision of his parents revealed more about the nature of his personality and character.

Chapter 3

Secession

Further exploration of the Robertsons's lives before the outbreak of the Civil War is essential to establishing their historical importance in Texas and American history. This chapter will identify the role that J.B. Robertson played in helping to commit Texas to the cause of the Confederacy and Felix H. Robertson's participation in early significant events of the Confederacy. Examining the actions of both Robertsons during the tumultuous period of American history that led to the outbreak of the Civil War further connects each man to the historical importance worthy of further study. The connections established in this chapter identify the need to recognize the Robertsons's participation and contributions to Texas and American history.

Jerome Bonaparte Robertson may not have successfully won his last major campaign for political office in Texas, but it was not the end of his political career. In October 1855, Robertson participated in a delegation to Austin from Washington County for the Democrat Party to voice their concerns, among others from around the state, regarding the growing pull and power of the Native American Party, better known as the Know Nothing Party, and the hold they seemed to be taking on Texas.¹ This meeting was likely a personal matter to Robertson as much as it was politically important to him. The previous year, the Know-Nothings began to emerge as a serious party in Texas, and in June 1855, they held secret meetings in Robertson's former hometown, Washington-on-the-Brazos, to establish their party beliefs, elect officers, and select candidates to

¹ J. Lancaster, *Texas Ranger* (Washington, TX), Vol. 6, No. 52, Ed. 1, October 13, 1855.

run for offices during that year's election cycle.² In addition to the fact that these new political rivals had set up shop in Robertson's backyard, they had also committed another personal insult to the man. One of the candidates that the Know-Nothings announced for their party was none other than Robertson's most recent political opponent for Lieutenant Governor, David C. Dickson, who left the Democrat Party in favor of the newcomers in his bid for governor.³

The swift and assertive actions of the Know Nothings shook the Democrats of Texas, who, in response, nervously gathered in Austin to discuss these developments and reaffirm their party for all to see. At the end of the session, referred to as "the bombshell convention," the Democrats announced their continued support of the Texas governor and friend of Robertson, Elisha M. Pease.⁴ Though the zeal for the Know-Nothings had been concerning, the response of the Texas Democrats had been effective. The 1855 election proved to be an upsetting outing for the new party, which barely claimed any victories. Robertson undoubtedly shared the jubilation of other Texas Democrats as reports with "unmistakable evidence of a glorious democratic victory" came in, which also likely provided him with a great sense of relief and satisfaction to read that Dickson had been "soundly defeated."⁵

Following the August election, Democrats were still concerned about the lasting favorable outlook for the Know Nothings from the general public across the state. The Democrats called their October meeting to address their concerns, which Robertson attended. Having proven himself a dutiful Democrat in the past, Robertson was named to a Committee of Vigilance as a representative of Independence, along with Tacitus Clay, another prominent

² Ralph A. Wooster, "An Analysis of the Texas Know Nothings," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (1967): 414.

³ *Ibid.*, 414-415.

⁴ Wooster, "An Analysis of the Texas Know Nothings," 415.

⁵ W. S. Oldham & John Marshall, *Texas State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 6, No. 52, Ed. 1, August 11, 1855.; Wooster, "An Analysis of the Texas Know Nothings," 416.

member of the community who later joined Robertson in the Texas Brigade.⁶ The Democrats prepared themselves well, and once again, in the 1856 elections, the Know-Nothings suffered defeat, this time to such a degree that by the following year, “the party had virtually disappeared in Texas.”⁷

After Robertson’s involvement in political issues in 1855, he left political life briefly to focus on matters at home. In 1858, the Robertson family welcomed their third child, a boy they named Henry Bell Robertson.⁸ That year was a joyous time for the Robertson family as they were also able to celebrate the graduation of Julia Robertson from Baylor Female College, which must have been a proud moment for J.B. Robertson to see that his work and association with the school had proven to be so beneficial for both of his children. Sadly, the happiness of the Robertson family was not to last, and as was so often the case among children during the period, with almost 47% of children in the world not surviving their first five years of life, young Henry passed away on October 23, 1860.⁹ Though it is not known why the child died, the family doubtlessly grieved over their loss and buried him in what is known today as Old Independence Cemetery, where his headstone can still be seen.

Amidst the personal loss and tragedy his family faced, Robertson also saw and heard the political turmoil that his state and nation were facing. Before the highly intense election of 1860, Texans were already committing themselves to the sectionalist divisions of the period. The Texans demanded that the cause of “Southern Rights” be championed and demonstrated their loyalty to the cause when their delegates to the Democratic National Convention walked out over

⁶ J. Lancaster, *Texas Ranger* (Washington, TX), Vol. 6, No. 52, Ed. 1, October 13, 1855.

⁷ Wooster, “An Analysis of the Texas Know Nothings,” 417.

⁸ Harold Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood’s Texas Brigade* (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas; 1964), 7.

⁹ Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie, and Bernadeta Dadonaite. “Child and Infant Mortality.” *Our World in Data*, May 10, 2013. <https://ourworldindata.org/child-mortality#child-mortality-around-the-world-since-1800>; Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 7.

the nomination of Stephen A. Douglas as the party's presidential candidate.¹⁰ Texas Democrats were divided the year before over sectional issues, which contributed to the victory of Sam Houston in the governor's race; even though he ran as an Independent, Houston was seen as part of the "Union Democratic label" and was openly opposed to disunionist ideas.¹¹ Despite this division, events that occurred after the Texas election in August 1859, such as John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry, rumors that there were "slave arsonists and abolitionist emissaries at work in East Texas," and the turmoil around the presidential candidates of 1860, each brought Democrats who had been Houston supporters back together to support their favored Southern Rights candidate, former vice president, John C. Breckinridge.¹²

The reaction of Texans to the news of potential abolitionists stirring up rebellion among the slaves of Texas would not have been taken lightly. In 1857, Texas slave rebellions, though small in scale, had become a common occurrence beginning the previous year and increased tensions within the state against abolitionists.¹³ Multiple reports indicate that white men often supported the slave rebellions of 1857 and were punished along with the captured slaves whenever they were also apprehended.¹⁴ During this period of frequent uprisings, Robertson likely found himself busy with his work on the Committee of Vigilance, which was not only expected to keep an eye on the political climate but also functioned to monitor the activities within their county to help keep the peace. One such committee, located in nearby Colorado County, reported that they had stopped a man named William Merhmann from "inducing some

¹⁰ Robin E. Baker and Dale Baum, "The Texas Voter and the Crisis of the Union, 1859-1861, *The Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 3 (1987): 395.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 397, 400.

¹² *Ibid.*, 395, 400.

¹³ Wendell G. Addington, "Slave Insurrections in Texas," *The Journal of Negro History* 35, no. 4 (1950): 408. Addington does not provide a specific number for how many insurrections occurred, though he does note that "concerning insurrections of any size, accurate reporting apparently almost never occurred. Normally such news would be suppressed, minimized, or alluded to indirectly and belatedly by the Southern press." *Ibid.*, 409.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 416-418.

of the Negroes of Colorado County to run away” and had forced him to leave the county under the penalty of “thirty-nine lashes” should he be found within the county after twenty hours.¹⁵

The stories of arsonists in Texas proved to be accurate, with reports of fires beginning in Dallas on July 8 and continuing the following day. During those two days, multiple fires occurred around Denton, Pilot Point, Waxahachie, Ladonia, Milford, Honey Grove, Black Jack Grove, Millwood, Austin, and Jefferson. In some cases, locals managed to catch and extinguish the fires early. Cities such as Honey Grove, Waxahachie, Austin, and Jefferson reported that the people stopped the fires before severe damage occurred. However, other cities were not so fortunate and lost homes, businesses, and other valuable property to an estimated \$555,000 in damages, which would be the equivalent of almost \$21.2 million in today’s dollars.¹⁶

One of the Dallas businesses destroyed during the fires was the Dallas *Herald* newspaper; however, the editor, Charles R. Pryor, did not allow the destruction of his press to stop him from spreading the news uncovered in Dallas during the investigation of the fires. In a letter that Pryor sent to the Austin *State Gazette*, he reported on the damages done by the fires between July 8 and 9, as well as indicating that a “scheme...conceived with infernal ingenuity” had been discovered and that abolitionist preachers and “many whites are implicated.”¹⁷ Pryor describes that the plot included a plan to assassinate the prominent citizens of the area as they fled their burning homes, indicated by the fact that “arms have been discovered in possession of the negroes.”¹⁸ A warning regarding the discovery of a future plot to incite “a general insurrection and civil war at the August election” was also reported in Pryor’s letter, along with the information that the people of

¹⁵ W. S. Oldham & John Marshall, *State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 8, No. 6, Ed. 1, September 27, 1856.

¹⁶ William W. White, “The Texas Slave Insurrection of 1860,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (1949): 259–261.; "Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past," MeasuringWorth, 2023, accessed November 12, 2023. www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/

¹⁷ John Marshall, *State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 11, No. 51, Ed. 1, July 28, 1860.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Dallas expected the worst and slept on their “arms” not knowing what the next hour may bring.¹⁹ The fiery rhetoric contained within Pryor’s report and warning certainly unnerved Texans and ignited their fears and passions surrounding the presidential election as their fears of an abolitionist plot against their lifestyle seemed to be coming true.

Across the Southern states, presidential ballots during the 1860 election were noticeably void of the Republican party’s candidate, Abraham Lincoln. With Democratic support divided across sectional concerns between Douglas and Breckinridge and then further pulled away by John Bell of the Constitutional Union party, Lincoln carried enough states to garner the electoral victory. Along with Lincoln’s election came the outrage of Southern states, who began to make good on their promises to leave the Union should the election go in favor of the Northerner from Illinois. The first state to confirm its secession was, unsurprisingly, South Carolina. The State had first threatened to secede during the presidency of Andrew Jackson amidst the famed Nullification Crisis regarding tariffs and whether or not a state had the authority to nullify federal laws they deemed hazardous to their livelihood. Though Henry Clay, “The Great Compromiser,” had been able to quell the inflamed passions of the past, he passed nearly a decade before, and compromise between the regions seemed a distant memory. There would be no more talk, and South Carolina refused to wait for the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln. Once South Carolina formally decided to separate themselves from the Union on December 20, 1860, they set into motion a series of events in which the other devoted slave states of Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana announced their secession before February 1861.²⁰

¹⁹ John Marshall, *State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 11, No. 51, Ed. 1, July 28, 1860.

²⁰ William J. Cooper, “The Critical Signpost on the Journey Toward Secession,” *The Journal of Southern History* 77, no. 1 (2011): 5.

Not unlike her sister states that had voted in favor of disunion, Texas was a cotton-producing state where the foundations of the state were embedded with slavery. His county appointed Robertson to serve as a delegate to the Secession Convention in January 1861. The members were tasked with the question of whether or not to protect their right to maintain slavery by withdrawing from the Union.²¹ According to the account of S.G. Ragsdale, the editor of the *Texas Ranger* in Brenham, the county seat of Washington, the citizens gathered together and declared their “enthusiastic unanimity for immediate secession” and then appointed a committee to draft resolutions “expressive to the sense of the meeting,” which Robertson was selected to join.²² One of the resolutions the committee brought forth stated that Washington County should begin preparing for a statewide election to send delegates to a convention in Austin to decide on secession in an official capacity. The resolutions were unanimously adopted, and then Robertson motioned for the recommendation of three citizens “suitable to be voted for as delegates to the state convention,” to which the assembled citizens unanimously selected Robertson and two other men.²³

The response of the men from Washington County to urge for a convention to decide on the secession of Texas helps to demonstrate the overall attitude of the majority of Robertson’s neighbors. A significant reason that the temperature of the people of Washington regarding secession matters is that the county had the second largest population in the state of Texas in 1860, with 15,215 people, only about 600 fewer people than Rusk County, which boasted a railroad to boost their population.²⁴ Additionally, the enslaved population of Washington County was 7,941, which accounted for more than half of the people living there and was the second-

²¹ S.G. Ragsdale, *Texas Ranger* (Brenham, TX), Vol. 11, No. 20, Ed. 1, December 17, 1860.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ S.G. Ragsdale, *Texas Ranger* (Brenham, TX), Vol. 11, No. 20, Ed. 1, December 17, 1860.

²⁴ 1860 U.S. Census. State of Texas Table 2 - Population by Color and Condition. 484-486.

highest enslaved population within the state, falling behind Harrison County's enslaved population of 8,784.²⁵ With such large numbers of people, free and enslaved, living in Washington County, their fierce passion towards secession was likely noted by the rest of the state and seen as a source of encouragement and support.

Previous to calling for a convention, the people of Texas had been continuously stirred to action through inflammatory rhetoric published in Texas newspapers, such as that of newspaperman John Marshall, as he called upon Texans to "put the state upon a war footing," and proceeded to invoke religious imagery as he posed the question of whether or not Texans would permit the inauguration of Lincoln.²⁶ Texas governor Sam Houston counseled for a calmer approach than Marshall's; however, Texans did not heed his advice. Houston encouraged Texans to stay with the Union and reflect on the fact that should the treaty of her annexation be violated by an oppressive federal government, "Texas will be at no loss how to act," believing that Texas would "prefer restoration to that independence she once enjoyed to the ignominy ensuing from sectional dictation."²⁷

By the time Robertson traveled to Austin for the Texas Secession Convention in late January 1861, five more states had joined South Carolina. The inauguration of Lincoln was drawing closer, and tensions throughout the country, including Texas, were running high. Gathering together to decide the future of Texas's relationship with the United States were 177 influential men from across the state. Historian Ralph Wooster combed through census records to identify the interests that the members of the convention held and found the professions most heavily represented were that of attorney and planter/farmer, making up 40 percent and 35.3

²⁵ 1860 U.S. Census. State of Texas Table 2 - Population by Color and Condition. 484-486.

²⁶ John Marshall, *State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 12, No. 16, Ed. 1, November 24, 1860.

²⁷ John Marshall, "Sam Houston on Secession," *State Gazette* (Austin, TX), Vol. 12, No. 14, Ed. 1, November 10, 1860.

percent, respectively.²⁸ The men of the convention were not the stereotypical plantation owners who showed up in more significant numbers to other state conventions. Only thirty-five of the Texas delegates held personal property over \$25,000, and of those, only three of the men held property valued over \$100,000. Similarly, 117 of the delegates owned less than ten slaves, with fifty of them owning no slaves at all, compared to the twelve members who owned more than fifty slaves, of which only three owned more than one hundred.²⁹

J.B. Robertson was part of a minority group of members holding the occupation of physician, one out of nine. Robertson also reported having personal property valued at \$10,000, with a total of 230 acres of land, of which 160 acres were improved, and he was able to produce seven 400-lb bales of ginned cotton, though Wooster reported that Robertson did not own any slaves.³⁰ Wooster reports that the 1860 Census record shows that Robertson had no slaves listed. However, in examining the 1860 Census - Slave Schedule, Robertson is revealed to have owned six slaves.³¹ Even though Robertson was a physician, his example helps to bring attention to the fact that many people in Texas, regardless of their given profession, held agricultural interests in addition to their occupation. In total, nineteen of the delegates produced at least one bale of ginned cotton and reported to have an occupation other than being a farmer or planter; two delegates were merchants, there was also a judge, stock raiser, and a clergyman, the others were either lawyers or physicians, like Robertson.³²

Among the numerous delegates gathered at the convention, Robertson was joined by his former colleague from his days in the Texas Senate, Louis T. Wigfall. Also in attendance from

²⁸ Ralph A. Wooster, "An Analysis of the Membership of the Texas Secession Convention," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (1959): 324-325.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 326-327.

³⁰ Wooster, "An Analysis of the Membership of the Texas Secession Convention," 335.

³¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 1860 Census - Slave Schedule

³² Wooster, "An Analysis of the Membership of the Texas Secession Convention," 328-335.

Freestone County was John Gregg, the final man to hold command of Hood's Texas Brigade during the Civil War. The only man to command the Texas Brigade who did not attend the convention was the brigade's namesake, John Bell Hood. The convention began on January 28, 1861, with the appointment and election of officials to oversee the proceedings. The delegates elected the Honorable Oran Milo (O.M.) Roberts, a Texas Supreme Court Justice from Tyler, in Smith County, Texas, as president. After the election, Roberts addressed the convention to acknowledge the sovereignty of the people of Texas and declare that the purpose of those gathered was to consider questions "equally as momentous and more varied than those that were solved by our revolutionary forefathers of '76!"³³ There has been a rocky past of people who have defended the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, as well as those who have attempted to distance the commitment of Southern states to the institution of slavery by using patriotic rhetoric, such as the speech given by Roberts, the next section of his speech leaves little room to debate the commitment of those gathered at the convention. Roberts stated that the "crisis" the convention addressed not only concerned "the right of self-government, but the maintenance of a great principle in the law of nations - the immemorial recognition of the institution of slavery."³⁴

It is interesting to note the mentality of the delegates that had gathered together, however, as Roberts demonstrated in the conclusion of his speech. Roberts acknowledged that he knew he had been chosen to oversee the proceedings based on his role in the judiciary and noted that his selection was "an indication to the world that this movement of the people of Texas has not originated in any revolutionary spirit of social disorder."³⁵ Therefore, the men assembled believed that their purpose, though fueled by heated passion, was ultimately a rational response

³³ Ernest William Winkler, ed., *Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas 1861* (Texas Library and Historical Commission, the State Library. Austin: Austin Print. Co., 1912), 17.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

to their times. Other than being present at the convention that day, J.B. Robertson's only noteworthy contribution was to provide a motion for A.T. Logan to be named assistant to the sergeant at arms of the convention, which was "declared by acclamation."³⁶

Moving forward with the convention, Robertson fell comfortably into his politician role. On the second day of the proceedings, Robertson made a motion for an adopted resolution to be reconsidered and then joined the side of the "yeas" in supporting a resolution that stated that "it is the deliberate sense of this Convention that the State of Texas should separately secede from the Federal Union."³⁷ Just before the day's proceedings drew to a close, Robertson was appointed to be part of a committee to receive from the ladies of Austin "a flag that was to be tendered by them to [the] Convention."³⁸ Filling the role of committee member continued to suit Robertson's role in Austin as he was named to a committee to consider the resolutions that related to "the oaths proposed to be administered to the members and officers of the Convention" on January 30.³⁹

On the final two days of January 1861, the Secession Convention hosted a representative from South Carolina, read letters from various parties concerning the matters at hand across the states of the American South, and read and made final changes concerning the Ordinance of Texas Secession. On February 1, 1861, the convention was assembled to address their appointed task, their vote on the issue of Texas secession. Texas governor Sam Houston was announced to the convention by special invitation and accepted a seat on the president's right. The Ordinance of Texas Secession was read before the assembled men for a third and final time before the convention members cast their votes. The yeas far outnumbered the nays with 166 votes to 8.

³⁶ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

J.B. Robertson cast his vote in favor of secession, and the committee referred the Ordinance to the Texas Congress.⁴⁰

Following their appointed action, the Convention did not cease to be active but began to work on measures to formally prepare for Texas to separate from the United States. Robertson continued to play a role, accepting an appointment to serve as the chair of a committee whose responsibility was to communicate with the Texas House of Representatives and inform them “that the Convention had proceeded to business and desired its cooperation.”⁴¹ Robertson's role in communicating with the Texas House identifies a critical aspect of the Secession Convention. Though the people of Texas called for the convention and chose the delegates, it did not have any legislative authority, regardless of the official manner they conducted themselves. By communicating with the legislative body of Texas, the convention submitted to the authority of the people of Texas, just as O.M. Roberts had declared at the opening of their proceedings. Ultimately, the final decision regarding the secession of Texas from the Union was given directly to the people of Texas to vote on through a popular referendum.

Before the Texas voters could cast their ballots near the end of February 1861, there were a few other duties for the convention to perform on February 4. A convention had been called amongst the slave-holding states that had already declared secession to meet in Montgomery, Alabama, and the Texas Secession Convention was responsible for nominating delegates to attend the meeting so “that the views and interests of the people of Texas may be consulted.”⁴² The first meeting of the Provisional Congress of the Confederacy gathered the delegates in Montgomery, established a provisional constitution, and selected Jefferson Davis as president.

⁴⁰ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 48-49.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74.

That day, after numerous gentlemen were nominated to attend the Montgomery gathering, Robertson and two other men were appointed to be tellers, counting the votes of the members of the convention. Later that evening, the results were read to the convention, and two of the future commanders of Hood's Texas Brigade, Robertson's friend, Louis T. Wigfall, and John Gregg were among the seven delegates being sent to Montgomery to become part of the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States of America.⁴³

Following the convention's business on February 4, the sessions closed until the people of Texas could formally vote on the Declaration of Secession. On February 23, 1861, the voters of Texas had the opportunity to make their desire for secession known as they cast votes across the state. Collecting the ballots from across the state and counting the totals took several days. On Saturday, March 2, the Secession Convention was reassembled. J.B. Robertson reported back to his position and joined several other representatives who reported the credentials of newly elected representatives from their home counties, as former representatives had resigned their positions.⁴⁴ There was little for the delegates to do other than greet the new men joining their ranks since the votes were not officially tabulated; therefore, the proceedings adjourned until March 4.

Once they reconvened, the convention's first significant order of business was to declare the election results on the Ordinance of Secession. A committee was appointed to receive the votes from the secretary of state, who then brought the results before the assembled body as “[f]or secession 46,129 votes; against secession, 14,697 votes; majority for secession 31,432 votes; aggregate vote 60,826.”⁴⁵ Of the 154 counties in Texas at the time, 122 of the counties had

⁴³ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

been heard from, with only eighteen having voted against secession and six counties reporting no votes against secession; Robertson's home county of Washington voted heavily in favor of secession with 1131 for and only 43 against.⁴⁶

Following the announcement of the votes, the convention began to busy itself with the work of a body bent on establishing a new order within the state based on the news that the voters had declared themselves in favor of separation from the United States. The delegates resolved to have the secretary of state continue to tabulate votes as they were received through March 15. Robertson moved to lay the resolution on the table but lost, and the resolution passed. While the delegates conducted other business, Robertson was nominated and elected to replace a member of the committee of Public Safety just before the members of the convention made two major moves.⁴⁷ Two ordinances were introduced to the convention members; one called for removing United States troops from within Texas and was quickly approved. The second ordinance called for "a union between this State and the Confederate States of America," which got referred to a committee for consideration.⁴⁸

The following day, March 5, the convention continued their business as they had the previous day, with a particular focus on considering Texas joining the Confederacy. The convention attended to several other matters before outlining the details of a union with their sister southern states. One of those matters included forming a committee that the President of the Convention appointed Robertson to serve on to inform Governor Houston that the convention had reassembled, ratified the ordinance of secession and that Texas, as of March 2, "was a free, sovereign and independent State."⁴⁹ That afternoon, the Convention discussed their views on

⁴⁶ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 88-90.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

how to unite Texas with the Confederacy and proposed an ordinance which was then voted upon, though curiously, Robertson and his fellow delegate from Washington County were the only two members to vote against the ordinance.⁵⁰

Though it was not immediately clear why the gentlemen from Washington had objected to Texas aligning themselves with the Confederacy, Robertson made their intentions clear two days later. Before clarifying their intentions before the convention, Robertson was busy with work on the Committee for Public Safety and made a report regarding that work on March 6. Robertson discussed that they had been tasked with considering the matter of a flag adopted by Louisiana that closely resembled the Texas flag and had caused some concern. While Robertson indicates that the problems brought to the committee were not without importance, he requested that the members of the committee be released from considering the matter to focus on “the press of other business” but did not specifically divulge what their other work entailed.⁵¹

The following day, on March 7, Robertson brought a protest before the delegates regarding the vote on March 5. In the protest, Robertson clarified why the delegates from Washington had not supported the decision to join Texas to the Confederacy, which had nothing to do with the Confederacy but rather the power given to the delegates representing Texas within the Confederacy. Their objection centered on the idea that the delegates from Texas would have the authority to help create a constitution that would govern the Confederacy, as well as Texas. According to Robertson, the men from Washington felt it was “neither expedient or right to clothe said delegates with such unlimited powers as we conceive them to be clothed” by the ordinance. Robertson identified that they had not been able to voice their objection to that section of the ordinance at the time of the vote and had therefore voted against it, but that by allowing

⁵⁰ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 100-102.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

them to record their protest in the official journal of the convention, they were formally requesting to change their votes.⁵²

The business of the convention carried on, addressing various concerns related to joining the Confederacy and making decisions for the newly seceded Texas. As the meeting moved into their secret session for the day, William P. Rogers of Harris County revealed the matter that Robertson had been busy with in the previous days as he reported to the convention. Five men, including Robertson, were appointed to a committee to bring Governor Sam Houston a message from the convention and wait for his response. The message that the men delivered was important enough to warrant an official delegation as they were to inform the governor that the convention had reassembled, the Ordinance of Secession had been ratified, and that “the State of Texas is and has been, from the 2d of this month, a free, sovereign and independent State.” Robertson and the rest of the committee were further instructed to wait for Houston’s response to the convention.⁵³

The committee delivered its message to Governor Houston on March 5 and received his response the following day. Since Houston had been open about his feelings regarding secession before the formation of the Secession Convention, it is puzzling what response they expected. Houston made it clear that he did not recognize the authority of the assembled delegates, identifying that the expectation of the convention had only ever been to put the matter of secession before the people of Texas. Houston identified that once the body had fulfilled its job, it “would terminate the existence of the convention.” Furthermore, it seems as though Houston was further agitated by the presumption of the convention to reassemble and begin to assume the role of making decisions for the people, noting that it was his opinion their “powers

⁵² Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 110.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

were...exhausted.” Rather than respond to them directly regarding their assumed powers, Houston preferred to leave the decision to ratify the vote on secession for the Legislature, scheduled to reassemble later that month. Houston then took a dismissive tone regarding the convention by noting that it was the function of the Legislature to “take such action on the subject as it may think proper; and also to call a Convention directly from the people, who will fairly represent their wishes and opinions, and who will have authority to make such changes in the Constitution of the State as her present and future relations to the world at large require.” Though Houston closed his message by tendering his respect and esteem to the “gentlemen of the Convention,” his position on the matter could not have been clearer.⁵⁴

The communication received from Governor Houston infuriated the members of the convention by questioning their authority and legitimacy. There was an immediate call to express their dissent regarding his opinion and to declare that the convention was indeed operating in the interests of the people of Texas, following their Bill of Rights. The delegates further declared that the members would not “shirk from the responsibility devolving upon it as a convention of the sovereign people of this State, clothed with all the power that the people could confer.”⁵⁵ The final order of the day, before they adjourned, was to prepare to declare power for themselves, which Houston believed they were denied. The members called upon the Committee on the Constitution “to prepare and report an ordinance suited to vindicate the majesty of the people.”⁵⁶ The requested action came swiftly the next day as the convention unanimously voted on a resolution that specifically noted the communication from Houston questioning their power. In the resolution, the delegates seemingly took a step towards tyranny by declaring for themselves

⁵⁴ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 113-114.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

the authority to act on behalf of the people of Texas in any matter related to the issue of secession. The resolution stated that the convention had the power and authority “to do whatever may be incidental to the same, and that may be necessary and proper for the protection of the rights of the people and defense of the State in the present Emergency” in specific regard for the connection of Texas to the Confederacy.⁵⁷

The convention, possibly encouraged by their declaration of power, continued to act as a legislative body, making decisions about the future of Texas, making changes to the Constitution, and preparing to join the Confederacy. The delegates' actions were a transparent power grab and took advantage of the Texas Legislature not being in session. Despite the Constitutional abuses of the convention, Sam Houston seemed to be the only government official willing to speak against the delegates. Robertson acted in a manner that condoned the convention's actions as he continued to be present and act along with the other delegates, casting votes for and against various decisions and acting as a legislative body. The next act in the convention's battle against the governor began on March 14 in a letter requesting Houston to appear before the convention on the 16th so that they could administer a new oath of office. The duty of delivering this letter fell to George W. Chilton, who received an unsurprising response from Houston, which once again noted that he did not recognize the authority of the convention and did not consider their request to be binding.⁵⁸

At noon on March 16, 1861, the Secession Convention of Texas recognized that the hour had come to receive the various officers of the state government to administer a new oath of office, which would require the officers to pledge their allegiance to the Confederacy as they continued to serve the people of Texas. The first of the officials called was Sam Houston, the

⁵⁷ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 119.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 178-179.

former general of the Texian army who oversaw the victory over Mexico at San Jacinto and became the first president of the Republic of Texas. Though the records do not describe what happened as the convention members awaited his arrival, it is easy to imagine the tension throughout the room as the seconds passed without Houston's presence. When Houston did not arrive, "after waiting a reasonable amount of time," the business of the convention carried on, and they received oaths from the lieutenant governor, Edward Clark, along with three other officials. However, the secretary of state, Eber Worthington Cave, joined Houston in abstaining from the proceedings that day. Immediately following the administration of the new oaths, the convention unflinchingly moved to declare that Edward Clark was now the lawful governor of Texas due to Houston's absence and neglect in taking the oath of office and moved to swear Clark in on Monday, March 18. The convention took a brief break and gathered again later in the afternoon to finalize and then make their resolution formal, in which J.B. Robertson joined the side of the "yeas," casting his vote among the 127 to 4 in favor of removing Sam Houston from office.⁵⁹

Part of the business the convention addressed on the 18th, in addition to the oaths of office, was to secure their usage of the meeting chamber now that the House of Representatives was back in session. In an agreement with the House, the convention was allowed to continue using the hall after 2 pm, once the House had completed their daily business.⁶⁰ The agreement between the Texas House and the convention indicates that part of the Texas legislature condoned the power grab of the delegates. For the last several days of their existence, the convention adjusted their meeting schedule to accommodate their shared space. On March 19, early in the afternoon's proceedings, Robertson brought forth a resolution regarding any printing

⁵⁹ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 183-186.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

ordered by the convention to follow the procedures of the contracts established by the legislature, which passed without issue.⁶¹ The rest of the day primarily focused on making further adjustments to the Texas Constitution.

Robertson continued to be active in the meetings of the Convention, bringing forth another resolution on March 20; this time, the matter was military. Several days before, on March 9, the convention had unanimously resolved to place Major General David E. Twiggs, who had been with the U.S. Army, in charge of the military forces in Texas.⁶² The resolution proposed by Robertson was adopted and required that all of the “arms, ordnance stores, quartermaster’s and commissary’s stores at the various posts recently surrendered to the State of Texas” be utilized to supply “two regiments of mounted men...upon the requisition of the proper officers of said forces.”⁶³ That same day, the convention received a copy of the recently prepared Constitution for the Confederate States, and Robertson’s resolution on printing was put to good use as 200 copies were immediately ordered.⁶⁴ Additionally, the Convention also began to consider transferring “jurisdiction over the forts, navy yards, arsenals, and lighthouses in the State of Texas” to the Confederacy.⁶⁵ Though any armed conflict had yet to occur, the actions of the Convention suggested their willingness to fight for and defend their beliefs should the United States challenge their newly declared independence.

Over the next few days, the convention continued, in their somewhat self-appointed capacity, to conduct the business of Texas in matters related to the Confederacy and shaping the trajectory of the state. On the final day of the convention’s existence, March 25, 1861, there was

⁶¹ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 200.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 131.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 207-210.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

another discussion about military matters in Texas. The convention wanted to be sure that any members of the U.S. military still within the borders of Texas who wished to serve the Confederacy were able to do so freely by absolving them of their duty to fulfill their service if they chose to serve in the South. Furthermore, they began to establish a plan to recruit as many of these soldiers to the Confederate cause as possible, pending the governor's discretion in choosing a location for the recruitment stations. Robertson made his final contribution to the proceedings beyond casting a few more final votes in these matters. Once again concerning himself with the question of power and authority, Robertson moved to amend their resolution so that the legislature of the state would “have full power to alter, abolish or continue the policy herein created, at its pleasure” and that anything they created would also cease and “have no force” once the “government of the Confederate States shall take charge.”⁶⁶ The convention, feeling their purpose had been fulfilled, then turned their attention to their final orders of business before adjourning for the final time.

J.B. Robertson’s role at the convention was interesting. Even though he may not have held an important office, Robertson had been involved in a monumental shift in the balance of power within Texas and the United States. One state after another separated and formed themselves into a new country, directly aligned against their former country. Once again, Robertson had the opportunity to be a politician, a role which he fell back into quickly, and he also found a use for his previous military experience in a small way. Robertson played a role in the demise of Sam Houston, one of the most notable figures in Texas, which was likely something he regarded as part of the duty of the convention. Still, it marked the end of an era in which Houston’s influence no longer held sway in Texas. After he served his obligations to Texas

⁶⁶ Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 247-248.

and the convention, Robertson left Austin to return to his home in Independence, where he soon answered another call to duty.

While his father was busy helping to decide the fate of Texas, Felix H. Robertson was busy at the United States Military Academy, West Point, making decisions about his future. Amidst all of the tension throughout the country in 1860, Robertson and other cadets at West Point were receiving troubling news from home about family and local concerns related to the “trouble about the negroes.”⁶⁷ The letters, as Robertson described, indicated that “northern politicians were going to do all in their power to usurp states’ rights,” and he recalled that the “unrest” was “easily felt in the air.”⁶⁸ Robertson grew concerned and decided to send in his resignation from West Point and the Army to Washington, preferring “to be on his side of the house when trouble came.”⁶⁹

Once Robertson’s resignation was approved in Washington, the Superintendent of West Point, Colonel Richard Delafield, called him to his office. By Robertson’s account, Delafield “begged him not to quit at this juncture.”⁷⁰ The reality was that Delafield tried earnestly to strongly suggest that Robertson reconsider his resignation, which must have seemed flattering to the youth, who later recalled the behavior differently. At first, Delafield attempted to convince Robertson that the widespread commotion was just “a scheme gotten up by northern and southern politicians,” which Delafield believed would “blow over in three months.”⁷¹ If Robertson followed through with his resignation and Delafield’s theory proved to be correct, then Robertson’s time at West Point would have been for nothing because he would not be able

⁶⁷ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 2, 1927.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

to complete his commission nor receive the benefits of the academy's education and would be left "flat," according to Delafield.⁷² Furthering his case, Delafield added his observation of Robertson's potential within the Army by pointing out how well-matched the young man was for a career in the military and that he would ruin those chances with his resignation. Despite the praise from the colonel, Robertson seemed to have fixed his determination to resign.

Delafield was resolved to match the young man's determination and called for reinforcements, bringing in General Pierre Gustave Toutant (P.G.T.) Beauregard to reason with the young Texan. The general was at West Point because he was in the process of taking command of the institution from Delafield. Since he was a Southerner and the colonel was a Northerner, Delafield wanted to demonstrate to Robertson that he was not simply presenting a biased point of view. Beauregard was quick to offer his support to Delafield, which the colonel utilized to renew his attack on Robertson in an attempt to show him his sincerity, Delafield offered to "burn the acceptance letter from Washington" and asked Robertson to "let this be a little personal incident between you and me that we'll both forget soon."⁷³

Though the offer from the two officers must have been humbling and likely did resemble begging to such a young man who probably did not understand the concern the men had for him, Robertson fixed his mind and firmly committed to his course of action. Robertson disagreed with Delafield's assessment of the climate in America and believed that it was only a matter of time before war broke out since South Carolina and other states had already declared secession. In his final refusal of the offer, Robertson expressed his belief to Delafield and Beauregard, stating, "I feel like there's going to be a war, and I can't fight my own people."⁷⁴ With that, the matter was

⁷² Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

settled, and Robertson made arrangements to leave the academy behind, with the official records listing his resignation on January 29, 1861.⁷⁵ Robertson recalled decades after the war that on the day of his departure, he entered the mess hall a final time, dressed in civilian clothes, and received a cheer as his fellow students rose to salute him.⁷⁶

The young man from Texas was not without a plan and did not set out from West Point in an aimless fashion. Robertson headed for Montgomery, Alabama, the seat of the newly created Confederate government. Before he arrived in Montgomery, Robertson allowed himself a youthful indulgence as he traveled through New York City. After spending the last several years under close supervision at West Point and now officially on his own for the first time, Robertson allowed himself a vacation before continuing his journey. Without the scrutiny of either family or military instructors, Robertson spent a week “painting the town a glowing red,” enjoying the world of the big city far removed from the life he had known back in Texas.⁷⁷ No matter how alluring the pleasures of New York may have been, Robertson noted that he did harbor “passing regrets at leaving school.”⁷⁸

Regardless of his feelings, Robertson’s arrival in Montgomery renewed his sense of purpose as he felt “genuinely glad to get down to his field of action.”⁷⁹ Robertson’s entry into Confederate affairs was well-timed. The new government had elected officials, and Robertson’s former acquaintance, Jefferson Davis, won the position of president. Eager to begin his service and make himself useful, Robertson was able to secure a role in the inaugural proceedings by

⁷⁵ *Casualties 1860-1861*, Handwritten Ledger, Archives and Special Collections, Courtesy of the United States Military Academy.

⁷⁶ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

being appointed assistant marshal in the parade, which he rode through on horseback.⁸⁰ The ceremony took place on February 18, 1861, and according to the press in a message sent out by telegraph to papers across the South, “[t]he inaugural ceremonies constituted as a whole, the grandest pageant ever witnessed in the South.”⁸¹ The occasion marked a monumental shift in the history of the United States as the country, officially broken apart, was formally creating a new, adversarial country on the doorsteps of the Union. Spectators had gathered by the thousands to witness the momentous occasion and see the first inauguration of a president of the Confederacy. The people had been gathering for several hours before the ceremony started, and there were several state militias present to add to the proceedings in such a way that “the capital hill was filled with the beauty and chivalry of the South.”⁸²

Robertson was less than a month away from his twenty-second birthday and was not only a witness to the day's events but was an active participant, helping to lead the parade that preceded Jefferson Davis's arrival. For a young man such as Robertson, who had military service on his mind, Davis's inaugural address must have been rousing. Davis spoke of the legitimacy of the Southern cause, invoking the Declaration of Independence and declared that it was the duty of the people to “alter or abolish” their governments whenever they “become destructive of the ends for which they were established.”⁸³ The speech described various reasons for the division which had brought about secession before Davis concluded by committing the supporters of the new Confederacy to “the sacrifices to be made” and noted that their cause would be “sustained by a virtuous people.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

⁸¹ *The Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, TX), Vol. 26, No. 52, Ed. 1, February 26, 1861.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Whether or not Davis had intended his speech to guide anyone to commit themselves to military service directly, it certainly did nothing to dissuade Robertson's inclinations. A few weeks after his role in the inaugural parade, when Robertson presented himself to Confederate military officials, they accepted his experience at West Point, and he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Confederate Army Artillery Corps on March 16, 1861.⁸⁵ The first orders Robertson received were to report to General P.G.T. Beauregard in Charleston, South Carolina. Robertson later recalled that when he presented himself to the general, he did not presume to remind him of their conversation from only a few weeks before at West Point since he was only a second lieutenant, and the general also made no mention of the encounter.⁸⁶ As he gave Robertson his orders, it became clear that reminiscing was far from the general's mind, and his attention was on the matter. Robertson was "put in charge of a battery of mortars with instructions to prepare to fire on Fort Sumter."⁸⁷

Though the two Robertsons were hundreds of miles away from one another, each one was involved in the development of the Confederacy. While J.B. Robertson's role was political, he helped to set the stage for legitimizing the Confederate States of America by working to add Texas to the number of states joining the new nation. Felix H. Robertson may not have had his father's years of experience or political influence. Still, he joined in the spectacle of christening the leader of the Confederacy and, through his commitment to the Confederate Army, was about to be part of the first shots that literally and figuratively tore the United States of America apart. The disappointment within the connections that father and son share is that it is unknown how

⁸⁵ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214. 5

⁸⁶ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

much the two knew about the actions of the other at the time. J.B. Robertson's personal papers only contained the records he kept while leading Hood's Texas Brigade, and no letters between the two men have been uncovered so far. The lack of communication that has survived indicates that it is far more likely that there was little to no communication or that neither of the two men saved any of the correspondence, at the least. Regardless of whether either man knew of the other's actions, the lives of the Robertson men continued to intertwine themselves with the fate of Texas and now, too, the fate of the Confederacy.

Chapter 4

Going to War

To further identify why J.B. and Felix H. Robertson deserve to be included in discussions of the Civil War, this chapter will identify their roles in the early part of the war. Felix Robertson, though he was a young officer, participated in the opening shots of the first battle of the war, while his father, J.B. Robertson trained soldiers and eventually became an officer in one of the most famous infantry units of the war. Understanding how the Robertsons spent their early days serving the Confederacy is not only a vital part of their significance to history, but it will help to establish the wartime experiences that shaped them into the leaders they became during the course of the war.

When Felix H. Robertson received his orders to help protect Charleston Harbor in South Carolina as an artilleryman under the service of Chief Engineer Major Walter Gwynn, he was likely excited by the news.¹ Shortly after he arrived in Montgomery, Alabama, in March 1861, Robertson submitted an application to Confederate Secretary of War LeRoy Pope (L.P.) Walker that expressed his desire for a commission in the Confederate Army. As part of his request to Walker, Robertson expressed that he most highly desired a position in the artillery, with his second choice being the cavalry and then the infantry.² Robertson's order of preference is somewhat surprising, considering the typical Texan's desire to be a part of a cavalry unit. Ralph and Robert Wooster wrote about the Texas desire to join the fight for the Confederacy and noted that by the end of 1861, there were 25,000 Texans who had volunteered for service, and "fully

¹ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214. 21

² *Ibid.*, 28.

two-thirds of these were in the cavalry, as Texans showed a decided preference for mounted service.”³ Though Robertson could not have predicted that Charleston would be the setting for the outbreak of the war, his choice of duties undoubtedly contributed to his finding himself poised at the forefront of one of America’s most defining moments.

South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union following the election of Abraham Lincoln, prompting the formal beginnings of what became the Confederate States of America. Since South Carolina had formally dissolved its relationship with the United States, it declared that all public property within its borders, formerly held by the U.S., had been forfeited and now belonged to the people of South Carolina. Part of the state’s decision reflected its desire to control the various military installations so they could prepare to defend themselves and their newly declared intentions of independence. One area of South Carolina that was strategically important to the Confederacy was the city of Charleston. The Confederacy recognized that they would be dependent upon trade if their nation and economy had any hope of success, considering the lack of manufacturing capabilities across the South and the need to export cotton to make a profit. Due to the large harbor in Charleston, controlling the city and the port would be vital to the success of the Confederacy, whether a war came or not. Located in Charleston, around the harbor, were three strategic military bases, Fort Johnson, Fort Moultrie, and the newest of the military outposts, Fort Sumter, which was only about ninety percent completed in early 1861.⁴

Though there were already two forts protecting it, the construction of Ft. Sumter further fortified the harbor at Charleston. By situating the fort opposite Fort Moultrie, Sumter would help to create a crossfire that would close off and protect the main channel to the harbor, and

³ Ralph A. Wooster and Robert Wooster, “‘Rarin’ for a Fight’: Texans in the Confederate Army,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (1981): 392.

⁴ Patrick Feng, “Fort Sumter, South Carolina,” *On Point* 22, no. 2 (2016): 47.

along with the protection offered by Fort Johnson, the entire harbor would be in the range of artillery.⁵ Construction of the fort had been a slow process due to many factors such as budget issues, unhealthy work conditions, the high costs of building on such soft land, and the limited access to the site, but also because longevity and defense were crucial elements of the fort's design. Construction of the fort included New England granite as part of the foundation and locally produced bricks to compose the walls, which were five feet thick and rose fifty feet from the ground to create an imposing pentagonal guardian of the harbor.⁶ In addition to the sheer size of the fort, it included buildings to house a garrison of 650 soldiers to help man the 135 guns for the defense of the harbor. However, on the eve of the Civil War, Ft. Sumter sat empty in its incomplete state except for the few men who continued to labor upon its construction.

The announcement of South Carolina's secession and the refusal of U.S. President James Buchanan to remove the Federal soldiers from the state left the soldiers stationed in Charleston to fend for themselves against the growing tensions and potential hostility of the South Carolinians. With such a behemoth available to these soldiers, it comes as no surprise that Major Robert Anderson, who was in command of the men stationed at Fort Moultrie, built during the American Revolution, decided to abandon it in the quiet of the night on December 26, 1860, in favor of the protection of the highly defensible Ft. Sumter, no matter its lack of completion. According to Private John Thompson, who was among the men at Ft. Sumter, Major Anderson left behind a few men at Ft. Moultrie who "spiked all the guns, and then set fire to the gun-carriages, etc. at the abandoned Fort and then left it to quietly be taken possession of by the troops of South Carolina."⁷ The next day, the South Carolina troops did take the fort over with

⁵ Feng, "Fort Sumter, South Carolina," 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁷ Ron Chepesiuk and John Thompson, "Eye Witness to Fort Sumter: The Letters of Private John Thompson," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 85, no. 4 (1984): 273.

much celebration “and amid shouts, exultantly raised their Palmetto flag, to announce their bloodless victory.”⁸

President Buchanan attempted to send provisions to support the soldiers in Charleston, but his attempt failed when the ship came under fire from the shores at Charleston and forced the boat to return to New York. This action had some in the Union feeling that South Carolina had “virtually declared war,” and along with Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana seizing Federal property and forts in such a way that they were seen as having “hostile intentions,” those feelings began to turn into a call to action.⁹ States such as New York were calling on the U.S. Congress to “avow...their treasonable acts,” which only increased the tensions between the states.¹⁰ Following Abraham Lincoln’s inauguration, he inherited the problem in Charleston and recognized too that the soldiers inside of Ft. Sumter were in high need of supplies, so he notified authorities in South Carolina on April 6, 1861, that he was sending a ship carrying only provisions, but no troops, into Charleston Harbor.¹¹ Exactly one month before Lincoln’s communication, Felix H. Robertson received his orders to report to Charleston, so the young soldier from Texas was stationed there and had a front-row seat to the outbreak of the war amongst the states.¹²

Controlling the entirety of Charleston Harbor was essential for the Confederates led by Robertson’s acquaintance, General P.G.T. Beauregard. Upon receiving the news that Lincoln was attempting to resupply the men at Ft. Sumter, Beauregard became suspicious of the true

⁸ Chepesiuk and Thompson, “Eye Witness to Fort Sumter,” 273.

⁹ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881-1901), vol. 1, p. 60 (hereinafter cited as OR; except as otherwise noted, all references are to Series I)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Chepesiuk and Thompson, “Eye Witness to Fort Sumter,” 271.

¹² The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214. 20

intentions of the Federal forces. Beauregard's feelings regarding the Federal government's desires were not wholly unfounded or just the product of his imagination. In his April 8 report to the Secretary of War, L.P. Walker, Beauregard stated that the message he and the governor of South Carolina had received from Lincoln said that "provisions would be sent to Sumter peaceably, otherwise by force."¹³ Lincoln's message did not explicitly imply any specific threat of force to ensure the delivery of the provisions but rather stated that there would not be any attempt "to throw in men, arms or ammunition...without further notice, or in case of an attack upon the fort."¹⁴ Considering how Beauregard condensed the message for Walker, it is possible that he did not trust Lincoln or was itching for a chance to fight and was willing to twist Lincoln's words to help make it happen.

Lincoln's message to South Carolina regarding resupplying the fort caused a significant stir among the Confederates, not just Beauregard. Upon receiving Beauregard's message about Lincoln's communication, L.P. Walker promptly instructed Beauregard that he was "[u]nder no circumstances...to allow provisions to be sent to Fort Sumter," to which Beauregard responded by calling out the balance of contingent troops, no doubt expecting that military action was swiftly approaching.¹⁵ Walker shared Beauregard's concerns relating to the need for more troops in the field and sent a message to the governors of Confederate states requesting that they each prepare "for three thousand volunteers, to be drilled, equipped, and be held in instant readiness to meet any request from this department."¹⁶ The following day, April 9, 1861, Walker ordered

¹³ OR. vol. 1, p. 289.

¹⁴ Ibid., 291.

¹⁵ Ibid., 289.

¹⁶ Ibid., 290-291.

Beauregard to stop all mail coming into the fort to ensure that the fort be “completely isolated,” which Beauregard had already proactively taken this measure per his response to Walker.¹⁷

On April 11, 1861, Beauregard acted on his suspicions of the Federal forces and demanded that Major Anderson surrender, fueled by his fear that the Federals would use the tactic of resupplying the fort to begin a drawn-out occupation that would deny his forces the control of the harbor he desired.¹⁸ According to historian Ron Chepesiuk, Major Anderson responded to the demand, requesting that he and his men be allowed to surrender once their supplies ran out in a few days.¹⁹ However, according to the official records, Beauregard reported that Anderson denied his request to surrender based upon his “sense of honor” and “obligations to [his] government” and further stated that he would “await the first shot and if you do not batter us to pieces we will be starved out in a few days.”²⁰ It seems as though Beauregard was also willing to misrepresent Major Anderson’s desire to stay in the fort, possibly hoping that Walker would approve of him taking action against the Federal forces. When Beauregard forwarded this response to L.P. Walker, Walker let him know that they should not “desire needlessly to bombard Fort Sumter” and went on to state that if Major Anderson would establish a time for an evacuation and would commit not to use their guns upon Confederate forces, then Beauregard was “authorized thus to avoid the effusion of blood.”²¹ Though Walker’s offer was communicated to Major Anderson by Beauregard, the Federal forces chose to stay inside the fort despite their dwindling supplies.

¹⁷ OR. vol. 1, p. 291.

¹⁸ Chepesiuk and Thompson, “Eye Witness to Fort Sumter,” 271.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ OR. vol. 1, p. 301.

²¹ Ibid.

Doubtlessly, Beauregard and the Confederate leaders suspected the dire situation inside the fort as they had completely cut off the fort's communication and ability to receive any supplies; even so, the men inside Ft. Sumter remained hopeful. According to Private Thompson, the soldiers had been on three-quarter rations for a long time but were then reduced to half on April 8, which they "cheerfully submitted to, the hope of being reinforced or withdrawn having not yet entirely left us" but on the 11th, they were further reduced to a single biscuit each.²² Amidst the concern over their rapidly dwindling rations, Thompson also noted that the men inside of the fort were confident that "something was in the wind...[as] the rebels had doubled their watchfulness."²³ That afternoon, Confederate officers confirmed the suspicions of Thompson and the other men when they arrived around four o'clock to "formally summon our gallant Major to surrender," as Thompson stated.²⁴

The rebel forces were watchful but were also preparing to fire on the fort and awaited the orders from Beauregard. Felix H. Robertson recalled that he and his mortar battery were stationed 3,000 yards to the northeast of Ft. Sumter, and their efforts provided aid in the firing on the fort.²⁵ Based upon the map created by Robert Knox Sneden in his journal, the location of Robertson and his mortar battery was north of Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island, in between the Oblique Battery and Battery No. 1.²⁶ In addition to all that was occurring, Beauregard was likely further prompted to take action against the fort while he still had a clear advantage in the wake of a message he received from the Confederate Commissioners stationed in Washington D.C.

²² Chepesiuk and Thompson, "Eye Witness to Fort Sumter," 275.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

²⁶ Robert Knox Sneden, *Charleston Harbor S.C. Bombardment of Fort Sumter*; [to 1865, 1861] Map, <https://www.loc.gov/item/gvhs01.vhs00058/>.

warning him that an expedition was underway to provide for the relief of Ft. Sumter, which would also land a force that “would overcome all opposition.”²⁷

Early on April 12, 1861, around one o’clock, Beauregard sent word to the men within Ft. Sumter that he would begin firing upon the fort immediately. The news was not unexpected, according to Thompson, who noted that the defenders of the fort had already moved their “blankets under the bombproofs in anticipation of a bloody melee before morning.”²⁸ Once they received the communication, Thompson said that they began to “be up and get ready” until three o’clock when “[we] hoisted our colors the glorious ‘Star Spangled Banner’ and quietly awaited the [enemy’s] fire.”²⁹ It is hard to imagine the tension of those passing minutes on both sides after several weeks of waiting for action. Robertson did not record or mention his thoughts, though he likely longed for the opportunity to prove himself, possibly even as a means to measure up to the example his father had set.

The tension on both sides was broken at 4:30 that morning as the first shell blast resonated across the still harbor, signaling not only the beginning of the bombardment on Ft. Sumter but also heralding the start of the Civil War. Robertson recalled that the Confederate bombardment of the fort was significant as “there were as many guns trained on it...as Beauregard could get together in that brief time.”³⁰ From within the fort, though the artillery was heavily raining down upon the men, Thompson noted that “none were afraid, the stern defiant look on each man’s countenance plainly told that fear was no part of his constitution.”³¹ While Thompson and the Federal forces may not have felt fear during the opening of the Confederate

²⁷ OR. vol. 1, p. 301.

²⁸ Chepesiuk and Thompson, “Eye Witness to Fort Sumter,” 276.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune*. (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

³¹ Chepesiuk and Thompson, “Eye Witness to Fort Sumter,” 276.

guns, Ft. Sumter was so heavily under fire that the men were unable to return fire for three hours. Once the Federal forces began to return fire, Thompson noted that the “men were eager for the work, and soon had become perfectly familiarized to the bursting of bombshell[s],” meaning that they would run to the safety of cover as shots came in and then jump back to their business of returning fire once it was safe.³²

Though the Federal soldiers found a rhythm to work within, the heavy assault from the Confederates did not go without leaving a mark. Thompson noted that the damage to the fort was “considerable” but that the men were encouraged because there had been no injuries on their side, which he said was “something miraculous,” considering the fierce nature of the bombardment.³³ The battle raged throughout the day until a ceasefire was issued for the Federals that night, though the Confederates had no plans to let their assault on the fort slacken and continued to fire throughout the night. Beauregard’s plan had undoubtedly been to try and deprive the Federal soldiers of any rest throughout the night, and though it was a reasonable plan, the strength and safety of the fort denied him his goal. Thompson recorded in his letter that the Confederates “failed in their object, for I for one slept all night as sound as ever I did in my life.”³⁴ While it is likely that this was the sleep of exhaustion, Thompson’s words are also a testament to the strength of Ft. Sumter’s construction and why it was a prize that the Confederates so heavily desired beyond securing the harbor.

Just as the Federal soldiers boasted no severe injuries resulting from the first day of bombardment, General Beauregard also reported that all of his batteries were safe, none of his men were hurt, and that their heavy firing had helped to dismount several guns inside of

³² Chepesiuk and Thompson, “Eye Witness to Fort Sumter,” 276.

³³ *Ibid.*, 277.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Sumter.³⁵ With no noteworthy damages inflicted by their enemies, the primary concern of the Confederate forces was the arrival of four ships just outside the harbor. The Confederate commanders believed the boats were the expedition the Confederate Commissioners had recently warned Beauregard about. One of the commanders was J.B. Robertson's former colleague, Louis T. Wigfall, who was now a colonel in the Confederate army. Wigfall sent a message expressing these concerns along with his request for any available men to help defend their batteries in the event of a troop landing from the four Federal ships.³⁶ Beauregard made sure to redirect the support of new arrivals to the locations that were most vulnerable, though Federal troops never made landfall or assaulted their positions.³⁷

The following day, April 13, Beauregard reported that their assault had resulted in the Officer's Quarters catching fire, and several hours later, around three o'clock, Major Anderson hauled down the United States flag and replaced it with a white flag of surrender, prompting Beauregard to send aides to the fort.³⁸ Private Thompson recalled that the surrender of Fort Sumter occurred once Colonel Wigfall arrived at the fort under cover of smoke to meet with Major Anderson.

Wigfall only made his journey after getting the proper consent from his superiors, as Private William Gourdin Young of the Palmetto Guards described in his account of the events. Private Young accompanied Wigfall to Ft. Sumter and detailed the event of their crossing the harbor. Before their crossing began, Young noted that when Wigfall approached him and requested his aide, Wigfall said that he was acting on orders from General James Simons.³⁹

³⁵ OR. vol. 1, p. 306.

³⁶ Ibid., 307.

³⁷ OR. vol. 1, p. 308.

³⁸ Ibid., 308-309.

³⁹ May Spencer Ringold and W. Gourdin Young, "William Gourdin Young and the Wigfall Mission-Fort Sumter, April 13, 1861," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 73, no. 1 (1972): 31.

Though General Simons may have decided to investigate the situation at Ft. Sumter, not all of the Confederate commanders were aware of the plan, as shots from Ft. Moultrie came near to sinking Wigfall and Young's boat in an attempt to stop them from reaching Sumter.⁴⁰ Wigfall was determined to complete his mission despite their difficulties. He noted that "the fort was on fire, the flag down, and in all probability, the garrison was in great danger and unable to make their wants known."⁴¹ Young recalled that Wigfall had been charged with determining Major Anderson's intention to surrender and then offer aid to the Federal soldiers if required.

After over thirty hours of bombardment and raining down red hot shot into the fort, the Federal soldiers finally surrendered, ushering in the end of the first engagement of the war and the first Confederate victory as well. Felix H. Robertson may not have discussed his role in the battle in detail, but the overall action of each battery was successful. There is one detail that does speak to how well Robertson must have performed while in Charleston. Immediately after the surrender of Ft. Sumter, one of the concerns expressed by Secretary of War Walker related to the need to defend Pensacola, Florida. In his first communication with General Beauregard congratulating him on their victory, Walker immediately requested to know how many guns could be spared to send to Pensacola.⁴² Two days later, on April 15, Walker once again brings up the defense of Pensacola to ask Beauregard how well the "floating battery" worked, which was an early experiment with creating an ironclad ship, and if he could send Confederate Navy Lieutenant John R. Hamilton, who supervised the construction, to Pensacola.⁴³ With this location rating such a high priority in the mind of the Secretary of War, it stands to reason that young

⁴⁰ Ringold and Young, "William Gourdin Young and the Wigfall Mission," 31-32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴² OR, vol. 1, p. 310.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 316.

Robertson must have performed his duties as a soldier well because he received a transfer to the command of General Braxton Bragg in Pensacola on April 20.⁴⁴

While his son was busy contributing his efforts to the outbreak of the war, J.B. Robertson left Austin and his political career behind to return home to Independence. Robertson's exact thoughts on the war were unknown; however, his tendency towards military service must have been weighing heavily on him. Though the North and the South were stirring and mobilizing to commit themselves to the war in earnest, things in Texas were slow to move in those first several weeks. Finally, at the end of June 1860, Governor Clark responded to a call from Secretary of War Walker to Texas and her sister states and formally requested that the citizens of Texas form an infantry of 2,000 soldiers prepared to join the Confederate forces in Virginia.⁴⁵

Though it had been many weeks since Robertson had left his political life behind, he had not spent his time idly. Once Robertson returned to Independence, he began to prepare volunteers for service to their new country in a war that he must have known was inevitable. There was no shortage of men volunteering to serve under the former soldier of the Texas Republic. He drilled the men day and night "until a better disciplined or finer looking set of men was not to be found anywhere," according to the local newspaper.⁴⁶ Robertson's commitment earned the praise of his community when they declared that he was "without a doubt, one of the best drill officers in the Southern Confederacy."⁴⁷ Many of the men Robertson trained were anxious to put their training to use and began to grow weary of waiting for the orders that Robertson anticipated must be coming as he continued to drill and prepare them for battle. As the weeks passed with no

⁴⁴ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214. 17

⁴⁵ OR. Series IV, vol. 1, p 412.

⁴⁶ *The Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, TX), Vol. 27, No. 33, Ed. 1, October 30, 1861.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

marching orders, some men abandoned their training to join other companies that had received their orders and who, according to one observer, “have now to thank Capt. R. for many of their best-drilled men.”⁴⁸

Despite the weeks that passed by without receiving any orders, Robertson remained calm and collected, focusing on what he could do with what was available and training the men for war so they would not be completely unprepared. The patience and prioritization of the men in his care that Robertson demonstrated in those several weeks echoed his actions from his service in the Texas Army. They heralded the quality of his service to the men he would serve within the Confederacy. When Robertson finally did receive his marching orders, many of the original men he had begun to train had already departed, which forced him to hastily recruit new men for service in only a few days and start the process of drilling them all over again.⁴⁹

Once he gathered new volunteers, Robertson organized the men, and they formally elected him to be their captain on August 3, 1861.⁵⁰ Robertson’s new command adopted the nickname of “Texas Aides,” which they carried until they were formally incorporated into the 5th Texas Infantry as Company I a few months later in Virginia.⁵¹ In the early days of September, the Texas Aides made their way to Houston, led by Robertson, where they officially joined the service of the Confederate Army on September 7, 1861, before they left “for the seat of war” two days later.⁵² Robertson and his group of volunteers were highly praised by their community as

⁴⁸ *The Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, TX), Vol. 27, No. 33, Ed. 1, October 30, 1861.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0304. 85

⁵¹ Harold Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood’s Texas Brigade* (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas; 1964), 11.

⁵² *The Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, TX), Vol. 27, No. 26, Ed. 1, September 11, 1861.

being “made up of the very best material our country affords and with the discipline of Capt. R. is bound to make its mark when opportunity offers.”⁵³

The swift turnaround in the arrival of the Texas Aides to Houston, their being mustered and then sent on to Virginia, is remarkable and signifies a shift in the progress that Texas was making in sending troops to the Confederate cause. Many of the men who had volunteered their service began to arrive in Houston in July and then waited for a few weeks before they were finally called to muster and then sent for service in the Confederate Army. The Texas Aides had the good fortune to miss the early monotony of camp life and the anxiousness of waiting for word of their departure. One of the men who became part of the Fifth Texas Infantry, Benjamin Marshall Baker of Columbus, Texas, in Colorado County, wrote a letter home noting that “[s]oldier life don't go as easy as some credulous persons might imagine,” and lamented the chore of having to take care of his laundry in camp.⁵⁴ In another letter, written one week later, Baker discussed that though they had finally received word that the men would be beginning to leave for Virginia in a few days, his “division” would have to wait for several more until their turn, which left the men “ready and anxious.”⁵⁵

At the onset of Robertson’s journey to go to war, he was forty-six years old, almost twice the median age of the privates who fought with Hood’s Texas Brigade during the war.⁵⁶ The older veteran did not record his thoughts or feelings as he and his men departed Houston for the war in the East, but it is hard to imagine that Robertson was as elated as some of the other men

⁵³ *The Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, TX), Vol. 27, No. 33, Ed. 1, October 30, 1861.

⁵⁴ J.D. Baker & Bros, *The Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, TX), Vol. 4, No. 43, Ed. 1, August 10, 1861. Benjamin M. Baker served in Company B of the 5th Texas Regiment and was on the original noncommissioned officers of the company, their 4th Sergeant, as noted in Harold Simpson, ed., *Texas in the War: 1861-1865* (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas; 1964), 212. It is interesting to note that Colonel Simpson listed Company B’s local designation as “not known,” though Baker refers to his group by the nickname “Echo” in this letter, as well as in his letter published on August 17, 1861 (see the following footnote for citation).

⁵⁵ J.D. Baker & Bros, *The Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, TX), Vol. 4, No. 44, Ed. 1, August 17, 1861.

⁵⁶ Wooster and Wooster, “‘Rarin’ for a Fight’,” 395.

headed off to battle. The Reverend Nicolas A. Davis, who served as a Chaplain to Hood's Texas Brigade in the Fourth Texas Infantry, also departed from Houston for Virginia less than a month before Robertson and his men. When the time came for Davis and the men he was with to begin their journey, he noted that "[t]he hour of departure was hailed with rejoicings by the men."⁵⁷ Most of the men who left for the war in the early days had absolutely none or minimal military experience and had often been organized in their communities "by local political leaders or professional men with little military knowledge or background" themselves.⁵⁸

Since most of the young men were inexperienced in the harsh realities of war, their delight is understandable and was likely due to being filled with the pride of being able to serve their new country and the hope of gaining glory through their service. However, since Robertson had served before, fighting against Indians and Mexican invaders during the days of the Texas Republic, he had first-hand knowledge of what dangers awaited the men. Though Robertson himself is likely to have abstained from the "rejoicings," he had demonstrated his pride and commitment to the Confederacy through his previous actions in the Texas Secession Convention and "being one of the first to raise a company [of soldiers] for Confederate service."⁵⁹ Therefore, it is far more likely that he joined the men whose "hearts were high with hope and confidence, and...warmed by enthusiasm" as the Texas Aides started on their way to Virginia.⁶⁰

As the men from Texas began to make their way east, they faced their first obstacle, which defined one of the weaknesses of the Confederacy throughout the war: the inability to transport troops by rail efficiently. Though Texas had a short railroad system, for the Texans to

⁵⁷ Nicholas A. Davis, *Chaplain Davis and Hood's Texas Brigade*, Ed. Donald E. Everett (Principia Press of Trinity University: San Antonio, Texas; 1962), 35.

⁵⁸ Wooster and Wooster, "'Rarin' for a Fight,'" 387.

⁵⁹ J.B. Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade, Its Marches, Its Battles, Its Achievements* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Press, 2017), 10. Polley made note of this as he was describing the original officers of Hood's Texas Brigade, in which he went into more detail discussing Robertson's background than the other officers.

⁶⁰ Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 35.

reach the nearest Southern railroad connected to Virginia, the men first had to get to New Orleans, Louisiana. The fastest way to reach New Orleans from Texas in 1861 would have been by steamship, with the closest proximity to Houston being in Galveston. However, traveling by ship was not possible due to the Union blockade of the Confederate port, which contributed to the delay in mustering many of the troops who often quickened at even the mere rumor that an attempt to run the blockade and transport them might be undertaken.⁶¹

Many of the men from Texas made it to New Orleans under their own power with the rest of their companies by marching there since other means of travel were not available. Many of the men were able to get to the Sabine River by steamboat, but from there, they had to endure a march of approximately 150 miles until they reached New Iberia, Louisiana.⁶² Rufus King Felder, from Chappell Hill, Texas, was one of the men from Robertson's home county of Washington who mustered in from Buffalo Bayou outside of Houston. However, he departed a few weeks before Robertson and company arrived in the area. In King's letters home, he discusses the boredom and restlessness that the men experienced as they waited near Houston to receive their orders, along with the strenuous march they endured on their way to New Orleans, which at times found the men waist-deep in water and mud.⁶³ Another of the Texans to make the march, Mark Smither of Walker County, Texas, echoed the conditions described by King, though he recorded that they were up to their shoulders in mud and water, but added that they made their march in four days, which would mean that they averaged almost thirty-eight miles a day.⁶⁴

⁶¹ J.D. Baker & Bros, *The Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, TX), Vol. 4, No. 42, Ed. 1, August 3, 1861. The mention of the run on the blockade comes from the Benjamin M. Baker letter dated July 30, 1861, appearing in this newspaper.

⁶² Eddy R. Parker, *Touched By Fire: Letters From Company D 5th Texas Infantry Hood's Brigade Army Of Northern Virginia 1862-1865* (Hillsboro, Texas: Hill College Press, 2000), 19.

⁶³ Stephen Chicoine and Rufus King Felder, "... Willing Never to Go in Another Fight": The Civil War Correspondence of Rufus King Felder of Chappell Hill," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 106, no. 4 (2003): 576-577.

⁶⁴ Parker, *Touched By Fire*, 19.

Slogging their way through the tepid, murky waters of the marsh lands and bayous of southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana would have been a chore for the new Confederate soldiers. The conditions of the march, the humidity of the climate, along with not knowing what might lie in wait below the surface of the water decreased the joy of the experience, though it did not lessen their resolve to serve. The soldiers bore all of these conditions while packing their gear through the oppressive heat of a southern summer, which took its toll on the men. Due to the harsh conditions and likely the pace of the march, many of the Texans became sick along their journey. Upon their arrival to New Orleans, Benjamin M. Baker included in a letter home that the people of the city treated them with “some consideration” and had even “sent us some provisions, and gave us the use of a room during our stay in the city for the sick.”⁶⁵ Once the men of Texas reached New Orleans, they were loaded onto trains and sent on the comparably swift five-day journey to Richmond, Virginia.

Upon their arrival in Virginia, the men began to await their turn to be organized into fighting units that could then be deployed across the Confederacy to the areas where soldiers were deemed necessary. Many of the men from Texas had to wait for several weeks before it was finally their turn to be assigned a unit. Once formally organized into units in October, Robertson and his Texas Aides were placed with other soldiers from Texas in the Fifth Texas Infantry Regiment, which became part of the Texas Brigade. The Texas Aides officially became Company I, one of three of the ten companies that made up their regiment initially organized in Washington County. The other two units were Company E, once known as the “Dixie Blues,” organized on July 19, and Company F, who designated themselves “Company Invincibles,” were

⁶⁵ J.D. Baker & Bros, *The Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, TX), Vol. 4, No. 50, Ed. 1, September 28, 1861.

organized on July 11, though there were also men from Jefferson and Liberty counties joining their ranks.⁶⁶

While they awaited organization and unit assignment, there was little for the boys from Texas to do other than recover from their journey, prepare their camp, and engage in drill exercises. The rumor among the men was that the Confederate Army would wait to call them into service until some of the current soldier's terms of enlistment expired. However, they did not know how long that could be since some of the terms were for longer than twelve months. The time the men spent waiting benefited several who had been overcome with sickness during their journey from Texas by allowing them to rest and recover. There were mixed feelings regarding the time that the men spent waiting. Rufus K. Felder noted that many of the men were "growing quite tired of our inactivity" and further described his regrets about leaving Texas upon hearing rumors of a potential attack on Galveston, fearing he would miss the opportunity to be there to protect and "defend the state of [his] adoption."⁶⁷

Other men, such as Benjamin M. Baker, found different ways to occupy their time by taking in the sights of the area around them. Baker visited Richmond when he could and was quite taken with the capital city, especially the statues and the grounds. However, Baker was not as impressed with Virginia itself since he believed the state to be rich with fine homes and "palatial country-sites," but the area he saw was lacking both except for one country site that he described as "the richest one I have yet beheld... a Virginia maiden, with violet eyes and raven locks."⁶⁸ Though Baker did acknowledge that the railroad from which he had seen Virginia did not run through the finest parts of the landscape, reflecting that "of her mountains and hills,

⁶⁶ Simpson, ed., *Texas in the War: 1861-1865*, 213.

⁶⁷ Chicoine and Felder, "'... Willing Never to Go in Another Fight'," 577.

⁶⁸ J.D. Baker & Bros, *The Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, TX), Vol. 5, No. 1, Ed. 1, October 19, 1861.

valleys and streamlets, one can never grow tired of beholding.”⁶⁹ With such beauty as their backdrop, it may have been tempting for some men to allow their minds to drift away from their purpose in coming to Virginia. The Texans were finally organized into an official brigade in October, and along with it came all the headaches that accompanied the process of establishing their formal command.

The Confederacy organized many of the Texans into the First, Fourth, and Fifth Texas Infantry regiments, which were part of the Texas Brigade along with the Eighteenth Georgia Infantry and, later, Hampton’s South Carolina legion.⁷⁰ As the men joined their units, their first significant order of business was to elect their leadership. Two of the regiments had difficulty finding the right fit for the Texans. In the case of the Fourth Texas, a gentleman from Bastrop, Texas, named Robert Thomas Pritchard (R.T.P.) Allen was appointed as colonel over the regiment, which partially proved a rumor that Benjamin Baker had heard several days earlier, though he had believed Allen would become their colonel.⁷¹ Several of the men of the Fourth had previous experience serving under Colonel Allen while they waited to be mustered out at Camp Clark, Texas, and as Valerius Cincinnatus “Val” Giles of the Fourth Texas Infantry recalled, those men, “with remarkable unanimity, concluded that he did not suit their idea of a commander.”⁷² The men created a petition against Colonel Allen’s appointment, which every regiment officer signed, and the colonel headed back to Texas to be replaced by John Bell Hood. Though Hood was not a Texan, as Allen had been, the men still found him more desirable. Giles identified the

⁶⁹ J.D. Baker & Bros, *The Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, TX), Vol. 5, No. 1, Ed. 1, October 19, 1861.

⁷⁰ Val C. Giles, *Rags and Hope: The Memoirs of Val C. Giles, Four Years With Hood’s Brigade, Fourth Texas Infantry, 1861-1865*, Ed. Mary Lasswell, (Coward-McCann Inc.: New York; 1961), 48.

⁷¹ J.D. Baker & Bros, *The Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, TX), Vol. 5, No. 1, Ed. 1, October 19, 1861.

⁷² Giles, *Rags and Hope*, 42.

reason was that some of the men “had known him on the frontier of Texas as a good Indian fighter,” and so Hood “was accepted without much opposition.”⁷³

The complaints that the men and officers of the Fourth Texas Infantry had against Colonel Allen must have seemed tame by comparison to the fits that the Fifth Texas Infantry had getting their leadership established. The men of the Fifth Texas could not find a leader that suited the desires of the regiment. Though he was not in their unit, as an outside observer, Giles saw the men of the Fifth get rid of colonels, lieutenant colonels, and majors “faster than Mr. Davis and the Secretary of War could send them out,” as he further noted, the men “were in open rebellion against all comers.”⁷⁴ Chaplain Davis was another close observer of the chaotic scramble to find leadership for the Fifth Texas, which he recorded with greater detail than Giles by describing the escapades of the men in their efforts to get rid of their first candidate to command them as colonel.

Since the Confederate Army was still in its infancy and the men gathered around Richmond were volunteers, they were allowed to elect their company leaders rather than having them appointed to them. However, the leaders of the regiment would be directly appointed by the Davis administration, much to the contempt of the soldiers.⁷⁵ Without any input from, and possibly any thought to the soldiers they would potentially be leading, officers were appointed to lead a regiment and then just showed up to present themselves with their credentials to take over their commands.⁷⁶ The first gentleman to attempt to lead the Fifth struck an odd note with the men in the way that he showed up to inspect them. Though Chaplain Davis was uncertain of his

⁷³ Giles, *Rags and Hope*, 42.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁵ Susannah J. Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade: The Soldiers and Families of the Confederacy's Most Celebrated Unit* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 47-48.

⁷⁶ Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 45.

name, referring to him by rank only, he did recall the way that the colonel arrived in “all the pomp and circumstance befitting his high position,” in which he also had decorated his horse to be “glittering with the tinsel of gold.”⁷⁷

Chaplain Davis presented this account in his memoir; however, historian Susannah J. Ural describes the story by identifying the unknown colonel as Franz “Frank” Emil Schaller, the first lieutenant colonel for the regiment, serving under Colonel James Jay (J.J.) Archer.⁷⁸ As the new colonel expressed his satisfaction with the men he commanded, the men were not nearly as confident of Schaller. According to Davis, the men were perplexed by the sight of the colonel and debated exactly what had appeared before them, with one soldier demeaning the colonel with his exclamation that the colonel may well have been a man but that he would not pass for what was considered a man in Texas.⁷⁹ All of the Texans' remarks, along with their apparent disregard of Schaller, were done in full view of the newcomer, with no attempt to contain or restrain their contempt. The transparent lack of faith the Fifth had in the colonel was enough to shake his initial confidence that he could “manage *te* Texas poys,” as he had initially thought, and Chaplain Davis noticed that the colonel now displayed “some uneasiness and misgivings as to the task he had assumed.”⁸⁰

Whatever doubts Scheller may have had about his ability to successfully lead the men of the Fifth were put on display and paraded before him the following morning. The colonel set out to take a ride and requested his horse, but instead of the proud animal he had arrived on the

⁷⁷ Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 45.; The editor of Davis's memoir, Donald E. Everett, notes that the colonel's name was Shaller, but does not indicate any other name. Davis himself includes that he could not recall the man's name and was unsure if he'd ever even heard the name. Though he did recall that the man was Jewish, “a representative of the Tribe of Benjamin,” and it seems as though this was not a positive trait in the Chaplain's mind, which could also indicate another reason the men of the Fifth rejected the colonel.

⁷⁸ Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 49.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁰ Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 46.

previous day, his horse appeared “dejected in gait, and with downcast looks” because the men had cut off his tail during the night.⁸¹ The message that the Texans were sending the colonel was received loud and clear, as he immediately left without any comment or good-bye to the men and was never heard from again.

Beyond the confusion of Schaller’s rank and forgetting his name, Davis’s account of the events is verified by Ural through the accounts she presents from other members of the Fifth Texas who seemed to be unable to find any cause to praise Schaller, noting that he was “totally unfit to occupy the position.”⁸² The episode proved that the Fifth Texas Infantry held a high standard for its leadership and would not settle for just any leader. Equally, the colonel's treatment demonstrated that whoever took charge of the regiment must be made of stern, firm material to command their respect and earn their trust. It is unclear how many potential leaders were considered to command the regiment. However, Giles's earlier comment indicates that the regiment rejected several officers before someone finally took command of the Fifth Texas Infantry.

Colonel J.J. Archer from Maryland was able to fill the position and be the first to lead the Fifth Texas successfully. J.B. Robertson received the honor of being appointed as the lieutenant colonel of the regiment, which meant that he was officially promoted from captain, skipping the rank of major, on October 10, 1861.⁸³ The major of the regiment was Paul J. Quattlebaum of South Carolina, who did not inspire the confidence of the Texans, nor did their colonel, as the men noted that neither of them seemed to be fit to hold their positions.⁸⁴ Part of the problem with

⁸¹ Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 46.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸³ The National Archives, *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*, Publication number: M331, Nara Catalog Id: 586957, Record Group: 109, Roll: 0304. 85

⁸⁴ Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 48, 50.

both Archer and Quattlebaum was simply the fact that they were not Texans, as Benjamin M. Baker expressed in a letter home, “J.J. Archer is the Colonel of our Regiment, and at present very unpopular among the men in the majority of the companies—they preferring a Texan for Colonel.”⁸⁵ Baker was not necessarily in agreement with the rest of the men’s displeasure with Archer, though he did express that he would have been “better pleased with a Texan.”⁸⁶ Though Archer and Quattlebaum were not cut from the desired cloth of the high Texas standards, the men could at least take comfort in the fact that Robertson, who was well-known to them and experienced in warfare, shared the command of their regiment.

By their formal organization into the Texas Brigade, the men accompanying Robertson from Washington County had been away from home for just over two months. Though the men were far from Texas, the boys from Independence were not far removed from the thoughts and attention of those back home. Knowing that the winter months were approaching, the people of Independence made a considerable effort to create and send a “full supply of winter clothing...by special messenger to Virginia.”⁸⁷ The town's efforts did not slow down, even with the clothing en route to their friends and loved ones. The Female Department of Baylor University students also joined the cause by working on knitting projects for the soldiers. Even during their regular university activities, such as a composition evening in which the students took turns reading their work aloud, they were seen busy knitting, only stopping to read their compositions.⁸⁸ One observer noted that the ladies were always busy “sewing and knitting for our volunteers” and that

⁸⁵ J.D. Baker & Bros, *The Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, TX), Vol. 5, No. 3, Ed. 1, November 2, 1861.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *The Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, TX), Vol. 27, No. 33, Ed. 1, October 30, 1861.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

they had even petitioned the president of the university to get them a spinning wheel so that they could spin yarn to knit, as they were “so anxious...to do something for their native land.”⁸⁹

The young women at Baylor University were not the only ones keen to actively serve their country. Many of the Texans now organized into the First, Fourth, and Fifth Texas Infantry Regiments volunteered their service several months before and counted the days when they could scratch the itch of battle. Being formally organized was a positive step in the right direction for the men. Still, their first orders did not come until early November 1861, almost a month after their organization was finalized. While the Texans awaited their orders, rumors about where they might be sent were circulating. There were a few possible locations that the Texans could be destined for, such as West Virginia, the Peninsula near Richmond, the Potomac, or it was also likely they could be ordered to winter at “Camp Texas,” as the men had been calling their current home just outside of Richmond.⁹⁰

The Texan’s days of waiting were not spent idly, but rather, the new commanders of the regiments had their men drilling and practicing in anticipation of joining the fighting. The extra training was valuable to the Texans, as one incident in which Lt. Colonel John Marshall ordered the men of the Fourth to “fix bayonets” when they had already been fixed, brought about the laughter of the soldiers. Chaplain Davis wrote about the slight error and noted that it was better to make those kinds of mistakes there than once they were somewhere else.⁹¹ The need for continuous drills was undoubtedly the exact action that Robertson approved of given his commitment to preparing the volunteers in Independence before they left for Houston and then Virginia. Robertson and the other commanders of the regiments may have seen the value of the

⁸⁹ *The Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, TX), Vol. 27, No. 33, Ed. 1, October 30, 1861.

⁹⁰ Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 43, 47.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

drills, but there was no denying the relief that the men, who had been “spoiling for a fight,” felt upon finally receiving orders to become part of the “Army of the Potomac,” to which the men were “in a grand glee” upon learning.⁹² Though the name Army of the Potomac is often associated with the Union Army of the same name, early in the war, this was the name used to refer to the Confederate soldiers operating in northern Virginia. In July 1862 during the Battle of Bull Run, for example, the Confederate reports refer to themselves as the Army of the Potomac, which they remained until the spring of 1862 when the War Department reorganized the army and renamed it as the Army of Northern Virginia.⁹³

Joining the Confederate Army of the Potomac included defending the river from any potential Union advances by blockading the river during the winter of 1861-1862, utilizing cannon batteries to fire upon enemy ships. The Texans were stationed near Dumfries, Virginia, where they were finally officially organized into the Texas Brigade, and it was there that the Eighteenth Georgia Infantry joined them. Though the Texans and Georgians eventually worked and fought effectively together, their initial meeting did not reflect their future cooperation. Susannah Ural discusses the tension between the Georgians and Texans relating to the pride and esteem the men had for their states. The friction between the two groups of Southerners was short-lived and was soon replaced by the demands of their duty station, picket duty, building defenses and winter quarters, and all the normal duties of camp life, such as washing and cooking. Ural describes the time that the Texas Brigade spent during the winter assignment as the time that “forged the Texas Brigade,” through their “shared experiences [which] bonded the men and their officers.”⁹⁴

⁹² Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 47.

⁹³ OR. vol. 2, p. 484. General P.G.T. Beauregard’s report names his army the Army of the Potomac, as do other reports within this volume.

⁹⁴ Ural, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 58.

Now that the Texans were formally organized into a brigade, they were commanded by one of Robertson's old acquaintances from his political life in Texas, Louis T. Wigfall. The new commander made an interesting impression after meeting his new brigade for the first time. One of the men in Company D of the Fifth, William Lewis, wrote home to tell his brother about their first encounter with their new general and remarked that Wigfall made a speech in which he seemed "a little drunk, but he gave us a good one."⁹⁵ During the speech, Wigfall gave high praise to the Texans, encouraging them to live up to their reputation as fighting men and then pressed his expectation that they should spend their time drilling to be prepared to face the enemy so that they would not run once they began "throwing shot and shell on us."⁹⁶ While beneficial to the brigade, the commitment to drilling and preparation was also a product of Wigfall's premonitions that the enemy was always a moment away, which began to be demonstrated during their winter months on the Potomac.

Wigfall seemed to be overly on guard to the point that he allowed his imagination to run wild, which was "too often quickened by deep potations to be reliable," according to J.B. Polley's recollection of their first commander.⁹⁷ The men were all familiar with Wigfall's affection for imbibing in alcohol, but as Polley recorded, "[t]he colder the night and the more metallic the rustling of the pine tops above his quarters, the more plainly he could hear the rattling of oars in the oar-locks of boats transporting Federal troops across the Potomac," which would send Wigfall into a high alert.⁹⁸ On one such night while the men sheltered themselves from "a drenching rain," Chaplain Davis recalled that around midnight the men were suddenly notified that the enemy was crossing the river and "[a]ll hands were called up...in readiness for a

⁹⁵ Parker, *Touched By Fire*, 24.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 10.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

fight.”⁹⁹ Owing to the weather and likely the habit that Wigfall had established, Colonel John B. Hood of the Fourth Texas held his men back out of the rain, but at the ready, whereas Davis recalled that Colonel Archer of the Fifth Texas “marched his men out to meet [the Federals]...two miles from his camp.”¹⁰⁰ Davis did not hold Archer’s actions in high regard but rather praised Hood, who was “not fool enough to pitch his men out in the dark and rain,” though J.B. Polley provided a little clarity on the situation in his account.¹⁰¹

According to Polley, Wigfall ordered both the Fifth and the Fourth Texans out that night, which Archer obliged, but Hood “surmised that the order was based either on false intelligence or imagination,” and so he held his men back.¹⁰² This kind of rash jumping to conclusions was part of a regular occurrence for General Wigfall who, as Polley noted, “would have had the brigade on the double-quick twice a week while he remained in command...but for the restraining influence of Colonels Hood and Archer.”¹⁰³ Additionally, Polley further addresses Wigfall’s eagerness to seize upon his fits of imagination and identifies that the actions of the First Texas were partially to blame. Before the Fourth and Fifth Texans arrived at their station on the Potomac, Wigfall had been on his own with the First Texans. The men of the First had “run him half crazy” because they did not want to submit to Wigfall’s brand of discipline and “had manufactured more than one false alarm just to see what he would do.”¹⁰⁴

There’s no doubt that the men of the Texas Brigade could be a little unruly. Not only were they ready to fight and held themselves in high regard, but they expected much from their leadership and had proven that they would be unwilling to accept anyone who did not meet their

⁹⁹ Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 50.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁰² Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

standard. Though Wigfall was not their ideal leader, he did preside over the men during an influential period in the brigade's history. Their shared experiences during the winter brought the men together and helped to create a sense of comradery among the men. In addition to their training and the work of a soldier, the men were also able to spend their down time becoming friends over games of "cards, checkers, backgammon, and chess, and with the cards, more or less gambling for small stakes."¹⁰⁵

Not all of the events during the winter on the Potomac were full of drilling, construction, fun, or false alarms. There were also a few opportunities for the Texas Brigade to engage the enemy, though not in any major conflict. The small skirmishes served as a way to strengthen the bond of the men. Part of their duty in blockading the Potomac included keeping watch over the movement of the enemy across the river. There were men from each of the regiments stationed along the river and the men of the Texas Brigade "became a terror to scouts and pickets from the other side," as their accuracy and skill with their rifles became known to the Federal soldiers, who soon learned to provide the Texans with as few opportunities as possible to take a shot at them.¹⁰⁶

When they did not have the opportunity to shoot at one another, the men of the Texas Brigade and the Federal soldiers would satisfy themselves with trading insults, rather than bullets. Men from the Fifth Texas were able to get acquainted with the soldiers on the Maryland side of the Potomac, who were Duryea's Fifth New York Zouaves during the colder parts of the winter when the ice froze thick on the river, and they were able to get within hearing distance of one another. As often as they were able to take advantage of the situation, Fifth Texans and Fifth

¹⁰⁵ Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Davis, *Chaplain Davis*, 51.

New Yorkers traded good-natured boasts back and forth.¹⁰⁷ Though each regiment goaded the other with what would happen should they ever have the opportunity to meet in battle, neither realized at the time that they would finally get the chance to make good on their boasts during the summer of 1862, though it would not be the New Yorkers who were proven to be correct.

Beyond the threat of a nearby enemy, who never did provide a real fight, the Texas Brigade learned firsthand that disease was a far more dangerous and debilitating enemy to contend with. While they were still serving as scouts for the brigade and keeping a watchful eye along the riverbank, the men also fought against bouts of measles, pneumonia, and diarrhea, all of which “caused the death of many brave young men.”¹⁰⁸ The Fifth Texas Regiment was struck particularly hard by illness and at one point could not provide “more than twenty-five men fit for duty,” though they “had in camp fully eight hundred men.”¹⁰⁹ One of the men from the Fifth Regiment, Company D, was Mark Smither, who described the care that the sick men in his regiment received from the local population. Smither describes the locals as taking the sick men into their homes and then treating them as if they were their own sons.¹¹⁰ A major reason for the tender treatment of the men in the Fifth was due to the confidence that the locals had in them as they did not “commit any depredations on them,” as other members of the regiment were known to “steal their hogs and poultry” frequently.¹¹¹

Though the locals doubtlessly did all they could for the men of the Fifth, Smithers noted in a later letter that their regiment was suffering “a great many deaths...[b]ut thank God the health of our regiment is visibly improving.”¹¹² Due to the illnesses that claimed many of the

¹⁰⁷ Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Parker, *Touched by Fire*, 31.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

men in the Texas Brigade, especially in the Fourth and the Fifth Regiments, another product of their winter on the Potomac resulted in a recruiting effort back in Texas.¹¹³ The Confederate effort to find more soldiers was not limited to Texas, as many volunteers had terms of service that would soon expire. While the recruitment efforts were being conducted across the Confederacy, many were struggling due to the waning excitement for war. However, the efforts in Texas fared better with the Texas Brigade recruiters bringing in “just over 1,000 new men into the First, Fourth, and Fifth Texas Infantry Regiments in the spring of 1862.”¹¹⁴ Though there is no evidence recording whether or not J.B. Robertson employed his own skills as a physician to help the men of his regiment, based upon the care and concern that he demonstrated to his men later in the war, it is a safe assumption to believe that he administered to their needs as he was able.

Physical illnesses were not the only enemy that weighed heavily upon the men of the Texas Brigade during their first winter together. For most of the men, this was their first experience so far away from their homes, and combined with their youthful inexperience in life, many of them found that the pangs of homesickness afflicted them during the months of bitter cold. Dealing with homesickness was something personal for each soldier and though many of the men were faced with overcoming their feelings, it was an affliction that was often treated lightly. Val Giles also experienced issues with overcoming a longing for home, which he wrote about in his memoir, but what was most striking was his admonition of how the soldiers regarded one another for missing home and family. Giles stated that the men would “chide one another

¹¹³ Parker, *Touched by Fire*, 35.

¹¹⁴ Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 70.

about such weakness,” and went on to speculate that “genuine homesickness killed more soldiers in the army than died from measles.”¹¹⁵

The winter of 1861-1862 did not prove to be one that filled Robertson and the Texas Brigade with threats from their Federal enemies, but it did allow them time to bond and forge themselves into a confident unit. The winter months also allowed Robertson to find a place within the Texas Brigade to establish himself as a leader to the men of his regiment. Through various scouting missions across the river and small skirmishes that broke out here and there, the Texas Brigade learned to “hold their positions under enemy fire,” and along with the other lessons that the winter brought them, such as “the fundamentals of drill and discipline,” the men of the brigade found skills that proved to be “key to their future success.”¹¹⁶ The men learned to overcome fierce homesickness, found the strength to endure the harshness of winter and diseases, and through it all emerged stronger for what they had endured. As the winter months began to give way to spring, Robertson and the Texas Brigade found that they emerged as a solid unit and eagerly anticipated the campaigns that were ushered in by the warming weather. Though they had not yet been able to prove themselves in full combat, the men of the brigade were eager to rise to the challenge.

The Robertson men entered the Confederacy's service and had begun to commit themselves to the cause, though in different ways. Felix H. Robertson became a part of one of history's major turning points as he helped support the attack on Fort Sumter and his father, J.B. Robertson, was assigned to one of the most influential and effective infantry brigades that the southerners produced during the war. Though the two men's service had barely begun, their connections to historical events and people demonstrate that their stories are significant. As they

¹¹⁵ Giles, *Rags and Hope*, 61-62.

¹¹⁶ Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 69.

established themselves within the Confederate army, the Robertsons stood out as two Texans ready to make their mark and represent their state well. The beginning of their service provides enough of an example to encourage further study of both men, to identify exactly how each stood out and is worthy of being included among the other important figures of Texas's history from the Civil War period.

Chapter 5

Lessons in Warfare

In the wake of the Confederate victory at Ft. Sumter, Felix H. Robertson, who was only twenty-two years old, was likely brimming with pride in his service as part of the batteries that helped to bring about the surrender of the Federal soldiers inside the fort. Though his father's experience with the Confederate Army had yet to begin, Felix Robertson was now a veteran of the first official conflict in the war that tore the United States apart and redefined the nation. The younger Robertson was now set on a trajectory to take part in history by helping to shape the future of the United States and Texas through the course of the Civil War. As his father had participated in the disunion of the country, Felix Robertson had now helped to solidify the separation by demonstrating the resolve of the Confederacy to defend their beliefs through military action.

The focus of this chapter will be on Felix H. Robertson's experiences with the Confederate Army in Florida, the Battle of Shiloh and its aftermath. Examining these events of Robertson's service continues to describe the type of soldier and officer that he was becoming, as well as connect him to influential Confederate generals and an early influential battle. Analyzing Robertson's experiences and participation will further provide evidence to support including Robertson in discussions of the Civil War. Additionally, this chapter will also provide context to decisions that Robertson made later in the war to create a detailed understanding of the man.

In Robertson's communications, he did not dwell long on the subject of Ft. Sumter, but it is hard to imagine that the exuberance of youth kept him from catching the thrill of victory after his first taste of battle. Robertson must have provided admirable service during the shelling of Ft. Sumter. Otherwise, he would not have been sent to Pensacola, where the Confederates hoped to

replicate their strategy of the defense of Charleston Harbor. During Susan Pool's interview of Robertson in 1927, he glossed over his time in Florida, eager to discuss more interesting matters, such as returning to artillery service. However, Robertson's time in Florida provided a learning opportunity that helped to build his experience. Upon Robertson's arrival in Pensacola, Florida, he served under General Braxton Bragg at Fort Barrancas, near the United States Navy Yard.¹

Tensions ran high in Pensacola since January 1861, when the Federal forces began to take supplies and ammunition from Ft. Barrancas to keep the stronger and more defensible Ft. Pickens ready to defend against any attempt at taking the area from the Federal soldiers.² The state of Florida officially declared its intentions to support the Confederacy and seceded from the Union on January 10, 1861. The hunger of Florida and the Confederacy to control the port and navy yard at Pensacola was noticeable as state officials began to discuss plans for the possibility of using state troops or receiving soldiers from Alabama to help realize their desires even before secession was officially declared.³ Soldiers arrived to declare their intentions and take command of Pensacola, but the Federal forces refused, and though the situation could have been the site of the beginning of the war, the men were able to avoid hostilities for the time being.⁴ Their uneasy truce disappeared after the assault on Ft. Sumter, but no major fighting occurred until later in the year, which the young Lieutenant Robertson would be present to witness.

One lesson that Robertson likely took away from his time at Ft. Barrancas was related to the need to know the men who served under him and be aware of their attitudes and feelings. On September 8, 1861, a rowboat was taken out into the harbor for patrol by nine enlisted men who

¹ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

² Edwin C. Bearss, "Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1957): 126-128.

³ *Ibid.*, 129-131.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 134-143.

never returned to duty. General Bragg described the incident as resulting from “gross neglect on the part of the officer in charge of this service in not sending an officer in command on such a duty.”⁵ The incident could have been chalked up to a simple desertion of men who had lost the will to fight and saw an opportunity to slip away in the night, except that they returned a few nights later and brought back some new friends.

During the night of September 13, three Federal ships were able to successfully lead an attack on the Confederate position, burning one of the Confederate ships used by the harbor police. Had the guards been surprised by the attack, the incident may have been considered separately from the desertion. However, General Bragg noted that the attack had been permitted “by some strange neglect” and was “led, no doubt, by [the] deserters.”⁶ Understandably, Bragg was furious with the situation and was eager to identify those responsible for allowing the attack to occur. A few months later, when Robertson was allowed to form a battery, he made a conscious effort to carefully select his men, which was potentially related to seeing the consequences of dissatisfied soldiers while he was stationed at Ft. Barrancas.⁷

Just a few weeks after the desertion of men and subsequent destruction of a Confederate boat, another episode occurred, which provided Robertson with additional experience that would serve him well during the war. General Bragg had not yet recovered from the sting and embarrassment the Federal soldiers inflicted on his command and was determined to avenge the insult. During the shelling of Ft. Sumter, Robertson and the other Confederate soldiers had not come into direct conflict with the Federal soldiers. Therefore, Robertson had yet to witness or

⁵ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881-1901), vol. 6, p. 438 (hereinafter cited as OR; except as otherwise noted, all references are to Series I)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

participate in a direct battle with the enemy. Though it is unlikely that he participated in the attack, the assault was a major event for the soldiers in Pensacola, and it would have left an impression on Robertson.

During the night of October 8 and early morning of October 9, Confederate forces from Fort Barrancas struck out across the waters of Pensacola Bay to attack Federal encampments on Santa Rosa Island, near their main force located at Ft. Pickens. Once the men returned and reported the events of their expedition to Bragg, he excitedly issued an initial report on their actions to state that “we chastised the enemy on Santa Rosa last night for his annoyances.”⁸ The general went on to describe the success of their venture by celebrating the burning of enemy tents and stores and spiking their guns, all while driving them from their camp and capturing prisoners in the process of their success.⁹

Though Bragg’s initial exuberance is understandable in the wake of his recent loss, once the rush of adrenaline-fueled excitement wore off, he was able to glean more information from General Richard Heron (R.H.) Anderson and the other officers who participated in the assault, more accurate and sobering information came to light. One thousand Confederates were participating in the assault on Santa Rosa, and of that number, the commanders eventually established that fifty-seven soldiers were killed and another thirty were taken prisoner, which placed their casualties at about ten percent.¹⁰ While the Confederates still celebrated the action as a victory in their eyes, declaring “the object was attained, and the enemy taught a severe lesson for his marauding parties,” they paid a heavy price to teach their foes a lesson.¹¹

⁸ OR. vol. 6, p. 458.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 458, 462.

¹¹ Ibid., 460.

According to the Union reports related to the Confederate attack on their position, their losses were far less than the Confederate officers estimated. The Confederates believed that the Federal losses were more significant than their own, numbering at least fifty killed and an unknown number of wounded.¹² Colonel Harvey Brown, who was commanding at Ft. Pickens, reported that the actual Union losses were thirteen killed, twenty-seven wounded, and twenty-one missing, though their surgeon was confident that all those who were injured would survive.¹³ Additionally, having read the report of the Confederate success against his men in a local newspaper, Colonel Brown claimed that General Anderson's forces were not as successful as they reported. Brown said that the Confederates did not destroy any of their stores or even half of their tents, did not spike any of their guns, and though he acknowledged that the Confederates did capture several of his muskets, he also noted that his forces had gathered nearly double what had been taken.¹⁴

Regardless of the attack's effectiveness, the Confederates embraced it as a victorious triumph and an effective blow against their enemies. Robertson could undoubtedly have taken away from the events the value of celebrating even a small victory to boost morale. Still, the assault carried a far more valuable lesson for the young soldier. When General Anderson's men landed on the island, they aimed to catch the Federal soldiers unaware, which necessitated landing on the island's shore far from their position. The general's report identifies that his men traversed about four miles before engaging the enemy, an ordeal that was "rendered toilsome and fatiguing by the nature of the ground," and that they suddenly came upon a sentry who managed

¹² OR. vol. 6, p. 458.

¹³ Ibid., 443.

¹⁴ Ibid., 442-443.

an ineffective shot at the Southerners before they returned fire and killed him, negating their element of surprise.¹⁵

The Confederate soldiers received an order to rush the camp since they could no longer hide their presence from the Federal forces. Other than a few guards and outposts, General Anderson notes that the camp of Wilson's Zouaves had been "almost entirely deserted," and so his men set about setting fire to the tents, sheds, and storehouses of their enemy.¹⁶ The original plan had been to destroy the camp and then attempt to accomplish the same with the batteries that were between the camp and Ft. Pickens, but Anderson noted that the delay in getting the men to the island and the long march had left them without enough time to realize their goal fully.¹⁷ The men reassembled with the approaching dawn, and realizing that there was no longer any chance of surprising those Federal batteries, General Anderson settled for the destruction of the camp and called for the men to retire and march back to their awaiting boats.¹⁸

The noise of the Confederate assault finally alerted the Federal forces at Ft. Pickens, commanded by Colonel Harvey Brown, around 3:30 am, though the initial report that a force had landed was believed to have been false.¹⁹ When the fires from the camp became visible, the colonel immediately called his men into action and ordered them to send support and drive the enemy from their shores. Unaware that the enemy was closing in on them, the Confederate soldiers made the four-mile trek back to their boats to begin the journey back to safety. During their journey back, the first Federal forces confusedly encountered the Confederates. The Federal soldiers had taken a position behind a dense thicket of trees, waiting to catch the retiring

¹⁵ OR, vol. 6, p. 461.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 439.

Confederates.²⁰ Led by Major Israel Vogdes, the Federals became “completely intermingled with the enemy” due to the “obscurity of the night,” where he was recognized and immediately taken prisoner as a fight broke out between the two sides.²¹ The Federal soldiers finally disengaged themselves long enough to take a position and harass the Confederates, who began to retreat earnestly for their awaiting boats.

The Confederates, believing that they had driven their enemy off, finally reached the beach and hurriedly loaded themselves up to be taken back to Ft. Barrancas.²² However, the launch was delayed due to a complication from one of the boats, the *Neaffie*, which was unable to move because the mooring rope, called a hawser, had become entangled in the propeller, leaving the men exposed on the decks.²³ The Confederate forces busied themselves trying to untangle the hawser and determine a way to tow the ship with one of the others. Still, while they worked, the Federal soldiers arrived, and seeing that the Confederates were stranded, they “opened heavy fire at short range on the crowded masses.”²⁴ The assault from the shore continued “without doing much execution” until the Confederates finally untangled the *Neaffie* and were able to get underway, moving out of the range of the Federal rifles.²⁵

Though his later report told a slightly different story, General Anderson’s initial account of the aftermath of the Confederate assault noted that the men had successfully burned half of the tents belonging to the Sixth Regiment.²⁶ Additionally, Anderson pointed out that the Confederate attack plans had been “judicious,” and had they been successful, they would have been capable

²⁰ OR, vol. 6, p. 462.

²¹ Ibid., 440.

²² Ibid., 462.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 440.

²⁵ Ibid., 462.

²⁶ Ibid., 440.

of inflicting “serious loss.”²⁷ While the Confederates were disappointed that their expedition into the enemy camp had not borne more fantastic fruits, they were satisfied that they had returned the insult they had recently received. More importantly, General Bragg’s staff noted that the event had taught them a valuable lesson in vigilance, as the “want of it on the part of the enemy” was a key contributing factor that “greatly aided” the success of the mission.²⁸

Though Felix H. Robertson did not elaborate on his time at Ft. Barrancas, other than to say he was stationed there for “a short time” under General Bragg, a few conclusions can be drawn about his role and the impact of the events.²⁹ It is unlikely that Robertson took part in the assault on Santa Rosa Island since he was stationed in an artillery battery, which he noted when he mentioned receiving his orders to take to the field with Bragg when Bragg was later ordered to Kentucky to join the forces led by Robertson’s fellow Texan, General Albert Sidney Johnson.³⁰ Since it is clear that Robertson was a good student and had previously demonstrated his intelligence, the details of what transpired would not have been lost on a young man eager to learn and become a successful commander. The struggle of his fellow soldiers across challenging terrain and the need to execute orders in a timely fashion to achieve their objective likely made an impression on Robertson, aiding him in his rise through the ranks. Whatever his role and service while at Ft. Barrancas, Robertson was awarded a promotion while stationed in Florida. The young Texan’s service had certainly gained attention as he was promoted to captain and

²⁷ OR, vol. 6, p. 440.

²⁸ Ibid., 460.

²⁹ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

³⁰ Ibid.

assigned to serve under General Adley Hogan (A.H.) Gladden as his Assistant Adjutant General (A.A.G.) in late October 1861.³¹

Robertson only held the role of A.A.G. for a few weeks, until early January 1862, which was likely a relief to him, considering his preference to serve in the artillery. The role of an A.A.G would not have been glamorous to Robertson since the nature of the job was more of a clerical position and required keeping up with the general's paperwork and issuing his orders.³² In general, an adjutant general carried out the general's orders, acting as the general's line of communication between himself and the men who served under him, which necessitated that the position was primarily one of a desk officer. The role of an adjutant could range from "a glorified clerk or as a responsible administrative assistant" depending on several factors, which included "the ability of the individual staff officer, his commander's perception of the adjutant general's role, and the relations between the two men."³³ Given Robertson's level of education and West Point experience, he was more than a qualified candidate for Gladden to select, which indicates how Robertson likely conducted himself up to this point in his service to the Confederacy.

Having been taken away from serving in the artillery, Robertson missed the opportunity to participate in an artillery battle between the Federal and Confederate forces late in November 1861. The conflict demonstrated the power of the Federal guns to the Confederates and a fierce need for more ammunition as they had to return fire sparingly. Even so, the spirit of the men ran high due to their powerful response to the attack.³⁴ Although Robertson missed the opportunity to engage his skills as an artillery soldier, he did receive a different introduction to military life

³¹ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214. 2, 10

³² June I. Gow, "Military Administration in the Confederate Army of Tennessee," *The Journal of Southern History* 40, no. 2 (1974): 183.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ OR. vol. 6, p. 494-495.

while serving as Gladden's A.A.G. In December 1861, Robertson acted as a witness to a court martial proceeding, which must have been an exciting turn of events for him, considering his experience being on the defensive side of the proceedings while he attended West Point.³⁵

As the year drew to a close, General Bragg was continuously torn between the areas of his department, as the issues in Pensacola and Mobile, Alabama, seemed to demand his attention continuously. With the changing of the year, General Bragg also decided to make some changes with the command of his department, calling on General Gladden to withdraw from Pensacola to better support Bragg by taking over a neglected brigade in Mobile.³⁶ For several weeks, General Bragg had been dealing with problems in Mobile, which were in part related to the struggling brigade of General Walker, whose leadership had left the brigade "dispirited."³⁷ The general to whom Gladden relieved was someone Robertson had previously encountered when he first arrived in the Confederacy to offer his military service. The general was none other than the former Confederate Secretary of War, L.P. Walker.

Just a few months previous, in September 1861, Walker had decided to resign as the Secretary of War in favor of a commission into the Confederate Army as a brigadier general, and now he had established himself in Mobile.³⁸ Walker commanded an infantry unit, though he maintained his headquarters with a large and expensive staff. At the same time, his soldiers were left in crowded tents and huts without any medical facilities when they experienced an outbreak of disease that ran rampant through their ranks. Upon one of his inspections on January 2, 1862, General Bragg discovered these conditions and further noted that Walker did not have any

³⁵ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214. 10

³⁶ OR. vol. 6, p. 815-816.

³⁷ Edwin C. Bearss, "Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola Part III," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1961): 336.

³⁸ OR. vol. 6, p. 793.

established routines for the organization or training his men and that in the absence of leadership from their general, the regimental commanders were mainly making their own decisions in a general “state of anarchy.”³⁹

Walker and his men were camped along the road to Pascagoula, Mississippi, a few miles outside of Mobile, and Bragg compared the conditions in Mobile, which indicated good health among the troops and his confidence in their leaders, noting “everything indicates improving discipline and a close attention to duty.”⁴⁰ Walker made the bad situation worse by making various excuses for not being with his men when Bragg ordered him back to see to his command. Rather than wasting his energy on reprimanding his absent general, Bragg sought to replace him, stating, “[e]xcept as a matter of principle, I attach no importance to this absence of the general, as his want of knowledge and experience, and it appears to me an inaptitude for military command, render it impossible for him to supply the wants in that brigade. I consequently look for little improvement without a change.”⁴¹ Coming into Mobile under the command of Walker’s replacement, General Gladden, there is no doubt that Robertson’s position of A.A.G. for Gladden made him aware of the issues awaiting Gladden. Bearing witness to the mess created in the wake of an absent and unfit general left a noticeable mark on Robertson, as evident through his future actions as a commander, which bore no resemblance to the inept manner that Walker displayed.

Robertson’s arrival to Mobile with General Gladden also concluded his service as an A.A.G. for the general. Much to Robertson’s delight, he was made a captain of an artillery command, returning him to his preferred military occupation.⁴² Despite his excitement for his

³⁹ OR. vol. 6, p. 793.; Bearss, “Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola Part III,” 336.

⁴⁰ OR. vol. 6, p. 793.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

new command, Robertson did not get the opportunity to settle in and help support Gladden's effort to restore order in the Mobile infantry brigade. On February 8, General Bragg received orders from Secretary of War Judah Philip (J.P.) Benjamin, that General Albert Sydney Johnson's forces in Knoxville, Tennessee were "heavily outnumbered" and that he was to send all the troops he could spare "without immediate danger" to his command.⁴³ Bragg's response to the order included Gladden and, by extension, Robertson. Though Robertson may have missed participating directly in the action at Pensacola, the new orders set into motion his journey to the first major battle that he experienced firsthand.

By late February, Bragg had mobilized his forces, and they left the Gulf area to make their way north in support of General Johnston. According to one observer, Robertson and the rest of the 10,000 soldiers traveling with Bragg were "the finest and best-disciplined body of troops the Confederacy ever had," which was echoed by President Davis in a wire to Johnston stating that Bragg was bringing "disciplined troops" to support him.⁴⁴ General Ulysses S. Grant had brought an army of Federal soldiers into Eastern Tennessee and was threatening the forces led by General Johnston. To properly support Johnston, General Bragg was first tasked with helping to organize their forces and coordinate the supplies necessary for their endeavors. Instead of traveling straight into Tennessee, Bragg went to Corinth, Mississippi, just south of the Tennessee border. In Corinth, Bragg joined one of Robertson's previous commanders, General P.G.T. Beauregard. Before arriving in Corinth, Beauregard had been busy defending western Tennessee, trying to make his way to the east, during which time, he suggested that Bragg

⁴³ OR. vol. 6, p. 793.

⁴⁴ Grady McWhiney, "Braxton Bragg at Shiloh," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1962): 21.

support their efforts, acknowledging that he would be more willing to “serve under him than not have him [there].”⁴⁵

Bragg’s men were fortunate that there was a swift means of transportation available to them, and they could leave Mobile by train to make their way to Corinth. On this train ride, Robertson made note of a peculiar Confederate soldier who had requested to travel along with Bragg’s men, though he had come from New Orleans. Though Robertson did not recall the name of this soldier, his appearance and demeanor struck a chord with Robertson, who vividly remembered being impressed by the “stalwart and soldierly looking fellow wearing the striking uniform of some New Orleans command.”⁴⁶ The man from New Orleans stayed amongst the soldiers Robertson was with throughout the journey, and Robertson gathered a strong impression of the soldier’s nature and abilities. Robertson was so impressed with this soldier that he remarked, “While I did not at that time affect much love for the Yankees, I could hardly keep down some feeling of pity for such unfortunate Yanks as might come into contact with that Confederate.”⁴⁷ Though the soldier from New Orleans parted ways with Robertson and his fellow soldiers once they arrived in Corinth, it was not the last that Robertson saw of him.

Before the Confederate forces made their way to meet General Grant in battle, General Bragg set himself to organize the soldiers, gather supplies, and make the necessary preparations to aid in their victory. There was an understandable tension amongst the Confederates due to their fear that General Don Carlos Buell would soon join Grant. Bragg’s orders had come directly from General Johnston, who arrived in Corinth on March 24, 1862, to discuss the situation with Beauregard and Bragg, noting his grave concern that military action should be

⁴⁵ McWhiney, “Braxton Bragg at Shiloh,” 20.

⁴⁶ Felix H. Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, letter, April 25, 1909. Courtesy of Hood’s Texas Brigade Files, Texas Heritage Museum-Historical Research Center, Hillsboro, Texas, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

taken as quickly as possible before Buell arrived from Nashville with 25,000 soldiers to support Grant.⁴⁸ Johnston's trust in Bragg's abilities was well placed as it was said that Bragg "could discipline, organize, feed, and move troops better than any other Confederate general," and the defeat that the Confederates suffered during the battle was not related to a lack of supplies or organization beforehand on the part of General Bragg.⁴⁹

While the generals prepared for battle, Robertson took the opportunity to embrace his new role as a captain of artillery. Robertson's command included six total guns, four Napoleons, and two cast iron cannons, and he had leave to recruit men from General Bragg's command to fill out his battery.⁵⁰ As an incentive for joining his command, Robertson was allowed to offer the men a sixty-day furlough. The number of men he recruited was left to his discretion, and the inducement he offered helped him secure twenty-eight men for his battery, many of whom stayed under his command for the first years of the war.⁵¹ Reflecting on these early men that he had commanded, Robertson recalled that in those days, "there was a personal touch between officers and men in the Confederate regiments."⁵² Along with the tendency to group soldiers based on where they were from, which fostered the "acquaintances and comradeships formed long before a cloud of civil war had darkened the American horizon," Robertson noted that the Confederate ranks managed to display a level of "loyalty and dashing bravery" that was lacking in modern times.⁵³

⁴⁸ McWhiney, "Braxton Bragg at Shiloh," 20.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 20, 30. In his defense of Bragg, McWhiney identifies that part of the blame for the defeat of the Confederate forces at Shiloh was due to the decision of Johnston to put Bragg in the field and move Beauregard to Chief of Staff when both men were better suited to the other's tasks. 23

⁵⁰ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune*. (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.; Felix H. Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, 4; In the interview Robertson did with Helen Pool, he stated that all six guns had been Napoleons, but in a letter he wrote almost two decades prior to the interview, he noted the figures above.

⁵¹ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 3, 1927.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

The fear of Buell's arrival could no longer be ignored. On the evening of April 2, General Albert Sydney Johnston ordered the army to begin preparing to march from Corinth to Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, the next day. The Confederate forces were prepared to move out in the early morning hours of April 4, but the weather delayed their march until after dawn. Robertson and his battery served in the First Brigade under General Gladden, which was part of the Second Division commanded by General Jones M. Withers in the Second Corps commanded by General Bragg.⁵⁴ Due to the delay of the march and the distance to Pittsburg Landing, the Confederate forces did not get themselves into position and arranged for battle until the evening of April 5, where they bivouacked for the night to engage Grant on the morning of April 6.⁵⁵ The morning of the fight, Robertson's Battery waited with the First Brigade in their assigned position attached to General William J. Hardee's Division on his right.⁵⁶

Before his men reached the battlefield, Robertson received orders from Gladden to move his artillery into the protection of a small valley near a small brook and awaited the order to advance. The war was just shy of reaching its first anniversary, which Robertson had been a part of from the literal beginning, though he had not yet been directly in harm's way. The battle at Pittsburg Landing, which became known as the Battle of Shiloh, was the first time he came into the proximity of gunshots to experience bullets passing nearby firsthand. Though Robertson and the rest of his command only waited in the sheltering cover of the hill for a short time, he vividly recalled that the rifle fire passed over their heads and through the trees above them, cutting the half-grown leaves, causing them to fall in "a continuous shower."⁵⁷ It was likely that the destruction of the leaves overhead made a sharp parallel with Robertson for how easily he too

⁵⁴ OR. vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 382-383.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 532.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 536.

⁵⁷ Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, 4.

could be brought down should he meet the friends of those projectiles soaring across the open battlefield.

The zip of the bullets flying overhead were not the only thing to leave a lasting impression upon the Texan, as Robertson and his command were nestled behind the protective cover of the hillside that morning. Robertson recalled that they did not halt for long in the valley, but while they awaited the order to advance, he witnessed two things that seared the realities of warfare into his mind. In a letter to one of his comrades, he described the events as he remembered them over forty-five years later, which shows how deeply they affected him. Robertson later recalled, “a novel sight, the streams of wounded men passing to the rear in all stages of disability from wounds received in our line of battle, which had passed on to the top of the hill which sheltered our battery.”⁵⁸ A familiar sight emerged before Robertson and his battery as they moved through the valley. The Confederate soldier from New Orleans, who had made such a strong impression on Robertson while they traveled to Corinth, came into view. Robertson noted that “his uniform was still conspicuous, and his splendid mustache still had the same fierce twirl it wore while he was still on the train.”⁵⁹ Though the soldier still bore the same striking appearance as he had several weeks previously, a decided difference in his demeanor struck Robertson and left an equally strong impression.

The “stalwart and soldierly” nature that had first impressed Robertson was gone as the soldier, whose “steps which were long and hasty did not take him towards those Yankees on the hill, [because] he was running to the rear.”⁶⁰ Not only was the soldier moving away from the battle, but Robertson also observed that “no blood bespattered his uniform, and the speed with

⁵⁸ Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

which he moved to the rear made it evident that no bullet had damaged his transportation facilities.”⁶¹ As Robertson processed the sight of the soldier fleeing from danger, his first impression of the man came crashing down as this soldier “demonstrated...the old saying that ‘appearances are deceiving.’”⁶² Shortly afterward, Robertson received the order to advance, and even with the potentially staggering sights they had beheld while awaiting their orders, the men of the battery “went speedily into action.”⁶³

When Robertson and his men emerged from the valley, they observed the Yankee line breaking so swiftly that he did not even have time to bring all of his guns into position before they began to chase the fleeing Yankees. As Robertson neared the front lines, he came into contact with another sight that left him with a strong impression of the harshness of battle. General Gladden had received a severe wound, which later proved fatal, and he was in the process of moving to the rear as Robertson arrived. Gladden was still mounted when Robertson passed the general, “I did not speak to him, but his eyes were blazing...[and] the attentions given by the men around him plainly told that he had been wounded.”⁶⁴ With Gladden removed from the battle by his injury, command of his brigade fell to Colonel Daniel Weisiger (D.W.) Adams of the First Louisiana Infantry.⁶⁵

The pursuit of the Yankees allowed Robertson to learn firsthand the nature of traversing rugged terrain, as his comrades in Florida had also learned a few months previously. Though it is unknown how much of their experience Robertson was familiar with, anything he knew of their plight across the Pensacola landscape likely paled to his experience of trying to move his battery

⁶¹ Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, 4.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ OR. vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 382-383.

that morning at Shiloh. General Wither's report on the battle mentions that "the nature of the ground over which we had to pass made it most difficult for the artillery to keep up with the eager and rapid movements of the infantry."⁶⁶ Though the general acknowledged the challenge the artillery struggled to overcome, he had the utmost confidence in his men, noting that "with such batteries as Robertson's, Girardey's, and Gage's, there could be no failure." The praise heaped upon his batteries is especially noteworthy for Robertson since this was not only his first command but also his first experience in the field with his battery, and judging by Wither's account, it proved to be a successful outing.

In Robertson's recollection of the battle, he does not dwell on the experience of navigating through the battlefield except to say that after they got into position, "at the first discharge from our guns, the Yankee line broke and we lumbered to the front and without orders, we followed the broken Yankee line."⁶⁷ Even without expounding on the difficulties that Robertson faced in moving his battery, there's no doubt that he had more to worry about in the heat of battle than what his fellow soldiers struggled with while sneaking along Pensacola to attack the Federal forces at Ft. Pickens. In moving the battery, Robertson was responsible for maneuvering his cannon and organizing his men and the horses and wagons necessary to accomplish the task, all while keeping his mind on the enemy's location and the battlefield's perils. The fact that Robertson performed his task well indicates that he was well-suited to the command, and it is possible he paid attention to the accounts from Florida and was mindful of the terrain as he moved his battery into position and across the battlefield.

As Robertson's battery pursued the Yankee line, they passed through a quartermaster's camp, which had been hastily abandoned with breakfast for the officers still set out on the table.

⁶⁶ OR. vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 382-383.

⁶⁷ Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, 4.

Robertson recalled, “While I was not used to eating doughnuts for breakfast, I particularly enjoyed a taste of them that morning.”⁶⁸ Despite the opportunity to enjoy the Federal officer’s meal, Robertson’s battery did not dawdle long in the camp and began to move out across a field, during which time one of their men, Frank Pierce, was killed.⁶⁹ In Robertson’s letter to his S.H. Dent, he mentions that Pierce died but does not provide any details or indicate his feelings related to the death, nor does he even mention the death during his interview with Helen Pool. Due to the lack of information provided by Robertson, it is unclear how the death affected him, but it was the first time that he lost one of his men during a battle. The fact that he recalled Pierce’s name almost fifty years later suggests that the event was significant enough to remain with him.

Robertson did not have time to dwell upon Pierce’s death and moved on because shortly after Pierce’s death, a “Yankee battery came out to give [them] battle,” and so Robertson’s attention was demanded elsewhere.⁷⁰ The showdown between the two batteries proved too much for the Federal forces, which Robertson’s men drove away. During the fighting, Robertson’s battery only suffered the loss of a single horse but was able to capture five cannons left behind by the Federal soldiers, which Robertson brought into his battery.⁷¹ Capturing the Federal cannons provides an additional clue suggesting that Robertson was affected by the death of Pierce. In the letter Robertson wrote in 1909, he asked his friend if he could recall the soldier’s name who “went forward first and discovered that the five guns had been abandoned.” Undoubtedly, an event as significant as his first capture of Federal guns held a dear place within Robertson’s memory, but not the soldier who made the discovery, which indicates how much

⁶⁸Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, 4-5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

more significant the death of Pierce was to Robertson. Their victory was sweet, but Robertson and his men were not done for the day, so they continued moving across the field. Having learned a harsh lesson with the loss of Pierce, Robertson ordered two of his men to begin rolling bales of hay while they moved “so as to give some bitter protection against rifle fire” as they moved against the line that was fighting Generals James Ronald Chalmers and John King Jackson.⁷² Robertson’s battery joined with five other batteries and began to bombard the Federal lines. The effect of the cannonade was tremendous, leading Federal soldiers to describe it as “a mighty hurricane sweeping everything before it.”⁷³

The men of Robertson’s battery soon drew close to the camp of an Ohio regiment, which Robertson was able to identify since the tents had the number of the regiment and state painted on their sides, though he could not recall the number in his later years.⁷⁴ While near the camp, the men “went into battery and fixed a few shots towards the river,” but their fire alerted Federal forces to their position.⁷⁵ Among the Federal soldiers, there were rifled cannons, which began to focus heavy fire upon Robertson’s position, killing another of his men, a soldier he referred to as Campbell.⁷⁶ The barrage of cannon fire, the loss of another soldier, and the lack of infantry support anywhere in sight caused Robertson to make the prudent decision to withdraw his men from the area.⁷⁷ Remembering the supplies at the quartermaster’s camp, Robertson brought his men back to that position, where they retired for the night and were able to use some of the supplies to feed their team of horses.⁷⁸

⁷² Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, 5.

⁷³ Wiley Sword, *Shiloh: Bloody April* (Dayton, OH: Morningside, 2001), 326.

⁷⁴ Robertson to S.H. Dent, April 25, 1909, 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

In Robertson's recollection of the battle, capturing the Federal guns stands out as a significant event. Yet, in the official report of Colonel Adams, who took command of the brigade following General Gladden's injury, Robertson's battery endeared themselves beyond that action. Adams describes a desperate situation in which "the enemy were then pouring a most destructive fire upon [them]," so he ordered the brigade forward, but "the fire became so severe that [he] found the whole brigade began to falter and finally to fall back."⁷⁹ Colonel Adams was able to successfully rally the brigade and lead them in taking "possession of the enemy encampment and of General Prentiss' headquarters," to which he directed part of the credit for their success to Robertson.⁸⁰ Adams cited Robertson as having "opened on the enemy with great power and effect and greatly aided in accomplishing the enemy's defeat."⁸¹

Before General Gladden was wounded and Colonel Adams took command, Colonel Zachariah Cantey (Z.C.) Deas of the 22nd Alabama Infantry, commanding the First Brigade in Wither's Division, also noted the effectiveness of Robertson and his battery. Shortly after 7 o'clock that morning, the men under General Gladden began to engage the enemy. Deas recorded that one of the enemy batteries "was playing upon us with great effect, but in a short time, Robertson's battery was brought on our side, which soon silenced theirs."⁸² Robertson's support occurred right after he and his men had been in the shelter of the hills and were brought forth to render their assistance. In Robertson's letter from 1909, he downplayed his role in breaking this attack, noting that they did not get all of their guns into position before the Yankee line broke. The noticeable absence of bravado in Robertson's personal correspondence indicates that he was

⁷⁹ OR. vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 536.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 537.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 538.

either modest or simply saw his actions as unremarkable since he and his men were only performing their duty.

Additionally, as Robertson described his success in capturing the Federal guns, Adams echoed the story and continued to praise Robertson's efforts. In Adams's report, he states that once he ordered Robertson to the line, they were "rapidly placed into position," noting their efficiency of movement.⁸³ Then, Adams praised their effectiveness in the battle, stating that they "returned the enemy's fire with such promptness and great effect that it drove them from their guns and caused them to abandon their battery."⁸⁴ At a later point in the battle, which Robertson did not describe, Adams recalled that the brigade had been ordered to halt and hold their position; during this time, they came under fire from the enemy artillery. Adams immediately relied upon Robertson to return fire, "which he did with great effect."⁸⁵

Robertson's first foray into a direct battle had been a successful experience for his battery. However, his brigade suffered the loss of their commander, General Gladden, and the Confederates also lost General Albert Sydney Johnson during the battle. The following day, April 7, Grant was reinforced by General Buell. The Confederate forces faced a tough fight throughout the morning and early afternoon but eventually fell back to Corinth. On the second morning of the battle, Robertson's battery provided covering fire for the movement of General James Chalmer's infantry as they moved positions.⁸⁶ Later that morning, Robertson's battery supported General Jones M. Withers by sweeping the open field as Withers's forces prepared to advance.⁸⁷ As the day wore on, Robertson joined Harper's battery to attack the Federal lines from the south

⁸³ OR, vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 537.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Sword, *Shiloh*, 385-386.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 390.

and west, but they were eventually forced to retreat as the 5th U.S. Artillery “poured shot and shell into the retreating ranks,” during which Robertson’s battery lost a caisson.⁸⁸ Though the battle was a loss for the Confederate side, Robertson had demonstrated his capabilities and effectiveness. Not only did he find pride in his actions, but his commanding officer, Colonel Adams, and the commander of their division, General Withers, had both noticed his contributions and committed them to their reports with praise and admiration.

After the Battle of Shiloh, General Beauregard took command of the Confederate Army in Mississippi and gathered other Confederate forces to reinforce his position at Corinth. Beauregard received soldiers from New Orleans, South Carolina, and Georgia, which made him “confident of being able to repulse any attack [the Federal forces] may make,” according to the report of deserters who informed the Federal army of Beauregard’s activities.⁸⁹ The weather conditions in late April gave Beauregard the time his forces needed to allow the reinforcements to arrive. The Federal forces were urged to move on the Confederate position. Still, the Federals were delayed by heavy rains, which caused the Tennessee River to flood, destroying bridges and making roads impassable. Union General Henry Wager Halleck lamented the difficulties the weather caused to his ability to supply his soldiers, and with only a few pontoons and no engineer troops, he also noted that the conditions “greatly embarrasses our movement.”⁹⁰ By May 2, the river began to recede, and Halleck believed that he would be able to make his move soon, though he expressed concern that his men would be facing a “terrible battle” in dealing with the Confederates.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Sword, *Shiloh*, 390.

⁸⁹ OR. vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 665.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 664-665.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 665.

More rain further delayed Halleck's forces from approaching Corinth. However, he had already successfully moved his men into position to hold the Confederate troops in place, and the Siege of Corinth began. The Confederates did not want to lose Corinth because of the valuable railyard within the city; therefore, Beauregard was determined to hold his ground. Though minor skirmishes were not uncommon during the siege, the primary fight occurred in the nearby town of Farmington. On May 3, Union General John Pope advanced to Farmington and forced the Confederate soldiers there to retreat, then established his position there to await further orders.⁹² A few days later, on May 9, Confederate Generals Earl Van Dorn and Daniel Ruggles were sent by Beauregard to engage Pope and remove the Federal presence at Farmington by driving them back across Seven Mile Creek and then burning the bridge behind them.⁹³

At the time of the battle, Robertson's battery had been temporarily under the command of General James Heyward Trapier, but they were loaned out to General Ruggles for the attack on Pope's forces.⁹⁴ The entire battle consisted of Pope's forces attempting to hold one position after another until they were driven from cover by artillery fire so that the rest of the Confederates could move in to assault them. This continued throughout the day until they were successfully driven back across the creek as Beauregard had ordered. General Trapier's division began the fight on the left of Ruggles, and Robertson's battery lent the support of their artillery to help force the enemy out from their cover so that Ruggles's infantry could engage them.⁹⁵

In addition to supporting Ruggles, Robertson also recalled how General Trapier had relied upon his guns to assist their division during the battle. At one point, "[s]kirmish fire from the enemy embarrassed the head of General Trapier's division," and so Trapier ordered

⁹² OR, vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 801-802.

⁹³ Ibid., 807-808.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 809.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Robertson to bring his battery to the front to “disperse the skirmishers.”⁹⁶ Robertson approached the front, mounted on horseback, and climbed a small hill to discover that a Federal cavalry unit was preparing to charge into his battery. Thinking swiftly, Robertson gave the order for his men to advance rapidly, making room to allow Trapier “to employ his division behind me,” as Robertson recalled.⁹⁷ As his men got into position, Robertson noticed that the Federal cavalry had drawn their sabers and was “making a brilliant array” as they “began their advance toward us in fine style.”⁹⁸

The battery had three guns at the ready, and so Robertson ordered his men to make “hasty preparations to receive the coming charge,” as they began firing solid shot into the advancing cavalry “until they came close enough for [them] to use grape [shot.]”⁹⁹ Before the cavalry arrived, Robertson’s battery was able to fire once more, unloading two powerful blasts of canister shot at the enemy, “[t]he noise of the final shock was terrific,” remembered Robertson.¹⁰⁰ Realizing that the cavalry would soon be on top of them, Robertson ordered his men to “secret themselves, while the sergeants drew their pistols and awaited their arrival.”¹⁰¹ The apprehension of the next few moments must have been excruciating as Robertson and his men waited for the Federal soldiers to break through the smoke that clouded around them. However, Robertson recalled that “[w]hen the smoke of their last discharge and dust of their oncoming, which was heavy, cleared away, we discovered that the enemy had retired.”¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 4, 1927.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Remarkably, the only thing still approaching Robertson and his men were some of the “riderless horses...running through [the] battery [to take] refuge in a swamp on the right.”¹⁰³

Once again, Robertson’s actions and leadership stood out during battle, and he recalled that he was congratulated on his success during the charge by several Confederate officers, including General Hardee.¹⁰⁴ Captain David Provence of the Arkansas Battery witnessed Robertson’s actions and described them as having “gallantly repulsed” the enemy’s charge.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, Provence noted that he attempted to place his battery to Robertson’s right so they could support them but stated that his actions were “not soon enough to assist it in what it individually accomplished.”¹⁰⁶ When General Ruggle submitted his report on the Battle of Farmington, he not only described how Robertson had supported him during the fight, but he also acknowledged that Robertson and his men “were all distinguished for their gallantry...[and] for their good conduct on the field.”¹⁰⁷ It is likely the result of his actions at Farmington and Shiloh that Robertson earned temporary command of all the artillery in General Bragg’s army to oversee the transport from Mississippi to Chattanooga, which required him to carefully maneuver around General Buell’s army as he crossed the Tennessee River.¹⁰⁸

Following the battle, the Siege of Corinth continued until the end of May. On May 30, General Halleck moved to break the Confederate lines and capture the city but was surprised that Beauregard had abandoned his position. Though he had previously praised the strong defense that Beauregard’s men had created to stand against his forces, Halleck now noted that

¹⁰³ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 4, 1927.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ OR. vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 924.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 810.

¹⁰⁸ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 4, 1927.

“Beauregard evidently distrusts his army or he would have defended so strong a position.”¹⁰⁹

Halleck believed that Beauregard’s soldiers were “generally much discouraged and demoralized,” based upon his observation that “[i]n all their engagements the last few days, their resistance has been weak.”¹¹⁰ Weakness was an accurate way to describe the situation that Beauregard’s men were facing in Corinth, though not in the way that Halleck likely intended.

By May 25, Beauregard realized that his hold on Corinth was precarious due to Halleck’s army receiving “large accessions to his already superior forces” and the added injury that his forces suffered in being reduced by “disease, resulting from bad water and inferior food.”¹¹¹ Being outnumbered and suffering under their poor conditions, Beauregard began to set into motion a daring plan to slip away from Halleck right under his nose. On May 27, Beauregard sent out his orders to his commanding generals so that they could make their men ready to move out in the cover of darkness on May 29 using the rail system.¹¹² To help ensure that their escape was successful, Beauregard also ordered Generals Hardee and Van Dorn to destroy bridges and obstruct roads so that the Federal forces would struggle to pursue them.¹¹³

In his last instructions to his generals, before setting their plan into motion, on May 29, Beauregard made one last attempt to conceal their retreat thoroughly and hopefully give the Union army pause before rushing in to attack. Beauregard ordered the generals to ensure that the army’s usual campfires were maintained so the enemy would not be alerted to the absence of the Confederates. The generals were then instructed on how to begin removing the batteries and major guns under the cover of darkness. Still, perhaps the best part of Beauregard’s plan dealt

¹⁰⁹ OR, vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 668.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 762-763.

¹¹² Ibid., 766-767.

¹¹³ Ibid., 768-769.

with how to conceal the arrival of the trains intended to help carry his forces away into the night. As the trains arrived and sounded their whistles, the men were ordered “to cheer repeatedly as though reinforcements had been received.”¹¹⁴ Incredibly, the plan worked, and Beauregard successfully removed his entire army from Corinth to relocate them to Tupelo, Mississippi.

Beauregard proudly reported that during their evacuation of Corinth, “[n]o artillery of any description was lost, no clothing, and no tents worth removal were left standing,” contrary to what Halleck claimed, though they did lose five hundred small arms that were accidentally left behind by a group of convalescents four miles south of Corinth.¹¹⁵ A local newspaper in Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, where the Battle of Shiloh was fought almost two months before, wrote an article commenting on the success of Beauregard’s escape. The article noted that the retreat had been “conducted in the best of order,” that Halleck had “achieved one of the most barren triumphs of the war,” and that he “must feel deeply mortified by the evacuation.”¹¹⁶

With the escape of the Confederate forces from the Union siege at Corinth came a reorganization of the armies under Beauregard’s command. Robertson and his battery were still part of General Bragg’s command, which was now the Army of the Mississippi, but they were later renamed the Army of Tennessee, though they were now part of the Reserve Corps. General Withers maintained command, though the First Brigade that Robertson’s Battery was attached to was now commanded by General Frank Gardner.¹¹⁷ Bragg’s army, now separated from General Beauregard, began to make their way to Chattanooga, Tennessee, to support the war effort in that area.

¹¹⁴ OR, vol. 10 pt. 1, p. 769-770.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 764.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 771-772.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 787-788.

Robertson's role in the Confederate army began taking shape as he utilized his talents and skills from the United States Military Academy to effectively lead his men and command their actions on the battlefield to support his fellow soldiers. Robertson was living up to the standard expected of soldiers from Texas and had now taken part in two significant events of the Civil War, the attack on Ft. Sumter and the Battle of Shiloh, which was the bloodiest battle of the war to that point. Though Robertson had not partaken in some of the defining events of Texas's history, he was beginning to demonstrate that his military service deserved notice. From his time in Tennessee and Mississippi, Robertson grew into a valuable officer who continued to distinguish himself and earn the attention of his superior officers. The service that Robertson gave, the events, and the influential people he had encountered and associated with by this point are continued examples of why he deserves to be recognized and included in discussions of the generals who served Texas during the conflict.

Chapter 6

The Texas Brigade Joins the War

Felix H. Robertson's involvement with the Confederate Army in Tennessee and Mississippi was an educational experience for the young soldier. Still, they had a different effect on the rest of the Confederacy. The defeat at Shiloh and the subsequent loss of the railroad hub at Corinth were part of a series of setbacks during the spring of 1862, including defeats at Roanoke Island in North Carolina and Forts Henry and Donelson. In addition to these military losses, historian Benjamin Franklin Cooling also notes that the "[s]elf-inflicted destruction of supplies and railroads weakened southern morale," which had already suffered from the recent series of defeats.¹ At this point in the war, J.B. Robertson had yet to distinguish himself through military service in the Confederate Army. However, just as the southern cause seemed to be in dire straits, Robertson and the rest of the Texas Brigade were poised to join the fighting and become a part of "the pivotal event," which allowed Southerners the hope of "shifting the war back northward, even beyond the Potomac frontier perhaps."²

The late spring and summer of 1862 set the Texas Brigade on a trajectory of success, which helped to propel the older Robertson to the rank of general. The events of that period and those that followed during his service as a general in the Confederate Army, as he led the Texas Brigade, are part of why Robertson stands out as a historical figure worthy of being included in the broader focus of Texas's history. This chapter will explore the period of Robertson's service with the Texas Brigade through the Battle of Gettysburg, focusing on his participation as an

¹ Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Counter-Thrust: from the Peninsula to the Antietam* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 2.

² *Ibid.*

officer to identify how he distinguished himself from other leaders of the brigade. Within this chapter, Robertson's personal style of leadership, which reflected his compassion for his soldiers, will continue to be demonstrated as it was developed during the war. Robertson's position as a commander of the Texas Brigade, his connection to crucial events, and the nature of his leadership all identify reasons why Robertson stands apart from other commanders of the Texas Brigade and further support his inclusion and greater recognition in discussions of Texas generals and leaders of the Civil War.

The Texas Brigade had been successful in coming together during the winter of 1861 - 1862 as a band of soldiers bonded by their camaraderie. For a brief time, the brigade was led by Robertson's associate from the Texas legislature, Louis T. Wigfall, until the spring of 1862. In early March, Colonel John Bell Hood received a promotion to brigadier general, which included taking command of the Texas Brigade as Wigfall left for a seat in the Confederate Senate.³ The Texans were familiar with their new commander from when he served in the United States Army on the frontier of Texas as an Indian fighter. Defending the hotly contested frontier of Texas from the attacks of hostile Native Americans in the 1850s was no small task, and Hood fell into it with a sense of duty that served as a precursor to his Civil War leadership. On July 20, 1857, Comanche warriors ambushed 2nd Lieutenant Hood and his men in an area known as Devil's River in present-day Mason County.⁴ Though wounded in the battle, Hood rallied his 17 men against the numerically superior force and was able to drive their attackers back until they quit the fight, "gathering up their dead and wounded and leaving, weeping and moaning over their

³ John Bell Hood and Stephen M. Hood, *The Lost Papers of Confederate General John Bell Hood* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2015), 10.

⁴ Stephen M. Hood, *John Bell Hood: the Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of a Confederate General* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2013), 4.

loss.”⁵ Bravely leading men against larger forces and inspiring them to greatness would be a hallmark of how Hood’s Civil War leadership was remembered by many veterans who served under him, helping to brand the now famous Texas Brigade as his own, despite his reassignment later in the war.

The leadership of the Texas Brigade under General Hood proved to be the final ingredient necessary to solidify the men into a more cohesive unit, ready to be led into battle, which helped to define their status and value in the Confederate Army. Under Hood’s leadership, the Texas Brigade garnered the attention and admiration of the generals they served under, including Robert E. Lee, due to the grit they displayed on the battlefield. Their reputation was not just born out of duty to their cause or loyalty to their state; the Texans also fought with a sense of pride to protect the reputation of Texas as a state that produced a different breed of fighter. Historian Susannah U. Bruce writes that “this pride drove them to fight heroically, sustained them in the harsh conditions of the field, and influenced their faith in their leaders, their comrades, and themselves.”⁶ Hood’s men found him worthy of their faith, demonstrating it just before the start of the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 with the gift of a fine war horse and pledge that they had “found a leader whom we are proud to follow, a commander whom it is a pleasure to obey.”⁷

Understanding the high regard in which the Texas Brigade held their commanders is essential to understanding the importance of the role that J.B. Robertson eventually filled as the longest-serving general of the brigade. Soon after the men presented their gift to General Hood, the Texas Brigade saw their first significant action during the Peninsular Campaign as part of the

⁵ J. B. Hood and S. M. Hood, *The Lost Papers of Confederate General John Bell Hood*, 7-8.

⁶ Susannah U. Bruce, "The fierce pride of the Texas Brigade: duty, honor and a fervent desire to uphold the fighting reputation of the Lone Star state drove Lee's favorite shock troops," *Civil War Times*, (September 2007): 34.; Bruce later wrote under the name Susannah J. Ural.

⁷ Charles E. Brooks, "The Social and Cultural Dynamics of Soldiering in Hood's Texas Brigade," *The Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 3 (2001): 535.

Seven Days Battles at Gaines's Mill. At this time, the Texas Brigade was serving as a part of General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's force, in a division under the command of General William H.C. Whiting. Before the battle, members of the Texas Brigade demonstrated once again that they would not tolerate the leadership of anyone they deemed unfit to lead them. The Fourth Texas Regiment had been saddled with Colonel John Marshall, whom they did not approve of, and to prevent a rebellion, Hood promised to lead them himself when the time came, which satisfied the men and calmed their protests.⁸

Before the battle at Gaines's Mill, the first real action that the Texans saw in the war came at a place known as Eltham's Landing on the Pamunkey River on May 7, 1862. The Confederates had learned that the Federal forces led by General William B. Franklin were going to attempt to disrupt the Confederate supply and artillery lines by completing an amphibious assault near Eltham's Landing.⁹ General Whiting's Division was tasked with intercepting General Franklin and preventing his success. Whiting learned that Franklin's forces included infantry and artillery, which caused him to move his entire division into place on the Pamunkey, through the rain and the mud to prepare to halt General Franklin's plans.¹⁰ The battle was brief, but Robertson and the Fifth Texas Regiment served the rest of the Texas Brigade by pushing back the enemy skirmishers, which they drove steadily ahead of them as they proceeded.¹¹ The battle was the first military test of the Texas Brigade, which they passed and came through more confident in their abilities as a fighting unit. According to a former soldier from the Fourth Texas

⁸ Charles E. Brooks and Joseph T. Glatthaar, "Popular Sovereignty in the Confederate Army: The Case of Colonel John Marshall and the Fourth Texas Infantry Regiment," In *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, edited by Aaron Sheehan-Dean, 199–226, (University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 201.

⁹ Harold B. Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade: Lee's Grenadier Guard* (Fort Worth, TX: Landmark Publishing, 1999), 97.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881-1901), vol. 11, pt. 1, p. 630-631 (hereinafter cited as OR; except as otherwise noted, all references are to Series I)

Infantry and the first historian of the Texas Brigade, Joseph Benjamin (J.B.) Polley, the Texas Brigade “tested its mettle at Eltham’s Landing, had smelled the smoke of battle, and heard the screech of shells and the hissing of bullets, and had shrunk from none of the dangers.”¹²

The success of the Texas Brigade during the events at Eltham’s Landing was not just a product of their imagination or bravado. The commander of the reserve forces, Major General Gustavus W. Smith, reviewed the reports submitted to him from General Whiting and the commanders serving under him. General Smith concluded that “[t]he brunt of the contest was borne by the Texans, and to them is due the largest share of the honors of the day at Eltham.”¹³ The battle may have been a minor engagement compared to others during the war, but the Texas Brigade’s first experience proved to be more than a success for their unit alone. The victory at Eltham’s Landing preserved General Johnston’s flank, saving the Confederate supply and artillery lines from destruction. According to historian Harold Simpson, known for his detailed research on the Civil War and the Texas Brigade, the loss of Johnston’s lines “would have been a crippling blow to Confederate hopes in Virginia at this time.”¹⁴

Approximately three weeks after Eltham’s Landing, the Texas Brigade was tested again, though in a different capacity, during the battle of Seven Pines. Union General George B. McClellan had advanced his forces to the banks of the Chickahominy River and had begun to advance his corps across the river on May 30. That night, a strong thunderstorm arose, pouring down heavy rains that flooded the Chickahominy and swept away several bridges, causing McClellan’s forces to become isolated from one another. General Johnston decided to make good use of the situation and ordered his forces to attack the following morning before McClellan

¹² J.B. Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade, Its Marches, Its Battles, Its Achievements*, (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Press, 2017), 19.

¹³ OR. vol. 11, pt. 1, p. 626-627.

¹⁴ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 103.

could bring his remaining corps across the river.¹⁵ Instead of playing a more prominent role in the battle, the Texas Brigade was held back and “for the better part of two days, [were] exposed to artillery fire and several times to that of musketry aimed at compatriot commands in its front.”¹⁶

As the Confederate forces engaged the Federals, General Johnston held back General Whiting’s Division to send them where he needed support, not just the Texas Brigade. Eventually, Whiting assaulted the Federal right flank, but General Hood was ordered to move “toward Seven Pines to support [General James] Longstreet.”¹⁷ Though Hood attempted to get his men into position on Longstreet’s left, they first had to reach their destination, which required them to pass through the fire of Federal artillery, cross over fields, through the woods, and finally “an immense swamp, the water waist deep in places.”¹⁸ Just as General Hood was gathering his men from the swamp, they received new orders to return to their previous position at Nine Mile Road, where General Smith’s troops needed immediate support.¹⁹ Though Hood immediately acted on his orders, the Texas Brigade did not rejoin the central column until the day’s fighting concluded with the coming of darkness.

The following day, on June 1, General Smith took command of the Confederate forces after Johnston was wounded. Smith had General Whiting lead a diversion to support the attack led by General Longstreet. Though there was a brief exchange of fire between Texas skirmishers and Federal forces, the Texas Brigade remained in the reserve for the rest of the battle.²⁰ Polley states that during the fighting at Seven Pines, General Hood did his best to get the Texas Brigade

¹⁵ John F. Schmutz, “*The Bloody Fifth*” *The 5th Texas Infantry Regiment, Hood’s Texas Brigade, Army of North Virginia, Vol. 1: Secession to the Suffolk Campaign* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2016), 79.

¹⁶ Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 19-20.

¹⁷ Schmutz, “*The Bloody Fifth*,” 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

an opportunity to “meet the foe face to face,” but to no avail.²¹ As Val Giles of the Fourth recalled, the most they were able to do during the battle was to be “shifted from place to place...through water knee-deep, and there was not a dry spot of earth to stand on.”²² Learning to follow orders and wait for commands was an unpleasant lesson for the Texas Brigade, and it came at the cost of eighteen wounded men. Nevertheless, the brigade did as they were told and followed orders, even though they were aching to join the fighting.

Robertson’s actions and leadership from October 1861, when he was named lieutenant colonel of the Fifth Texas, to the Battle of Seven Pines, stood out well enough to earn him a promotion to colonel on June 1, 1862, the same day that the battle concluded.²³ The regiment’s former colonel, James Archer, had been promoted to brigadier general and was given command of Robert Hatton’s Tennessee Brigade, which opened the opportunity for Robertson to become the regiment commander.²⁴ The promotion to colonel was not the only excitement that found its way into Robertson’s life in the summer of 1862. June and August were incredibly eventful for the Texas Brigade as they worked on expelling the Union Army of the Potomac from the area around Richmond at the end of the Peninsula Campaign and the Battle of Second Manassas. Before they rejoined the fray of battle, the Texas Brigade took part in an act of deception designed by General Lee to confuse the strategic planning of Abraham Lincoln. Lee needed to keep Lincoln from sending General Irving McDowell’s corps of 30,000 men to join General McClellan’s forces around Richmond.

²¹ Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 20.

²² Val C. Giles, *Rags and Hope: The Memoirs of Val C. Giles, Four Years With Hood’s Brigade, Fourth Texas Infantry, 1861-1865*, Ed. Mary Lasswell (Coward-McCann Inc.: New York; 1961), 100.

²³ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0304, 87.

²⁴ Harold Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood’s Texas Brigade* (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas; 1964), 25. (footnote)

During the first part of June 1862, General “Stonewall” Jackson was in the Shenandoah Valley, threatening Washington D.C. Lee planned to send two of General Whiting’s brigades, the Texas Brigade and Evander McIvor Law’s Brigade, to Jackson so that Lincoln would hold General McDowell’s corps in anticipation of the reinforcements. The plan to make the deception believable involved having the two brigades leave the Richmond area to the sound of bands playing for them and the grand sight of flags waving as the men made a “loud demonstration concerning their move northward to be sure that Northern spies and sympathizers were aware of the movement.”²⁵ The brigades boarded trains and traveled north, but after they joined Jackson, they were surprised the following day when they received orders to return to Richmond with General Jackson. Lee’s plan had been a closely guarded secret, likely only known to Generals Whiting and Hood. Colonel Harold Simpson believes that even Law was not aware of the plan, and very likely few, if any, of the lower-ranking officers knew.²⁶ The plan was a success, though it necessitated that Whiting’s command travel approximately 400 miles in ten days; the feint was worth it as “the well-conceived plan and accomplished maneuver probably saved Richmond.”²⁷

The Union attempt to capture the Confederate capital at Richmond reached a critical point in late June 1862 when a series of battles, referred to as the Seven Days Battles, and the Confederate victory there became the “deliverance” of the Richmonders.²⁸ The Texas Brigade and General Jackson’s men had just returned to the Richmond area on June 25, drew supplies, and began their march on the morning of June 26 to join General Lee’s plan to defeat the Federal forces and free Richmond from their assault. General McClellan’s main force had retreated to Gaines’s Mill as Confederate General Ambrose Powell (A.P.) Hill pursued them. General Hill’s

²⁵ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 110.

²⁶ *Ibid.* (footnotes)

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁸ Cooling, *Counter-Thrust*, 3.

forces attacked McClellan on the afternoon of June 27, though their initial attempts were unsuccessful. Arriving to support Hill, General Longstreet recognized the “difficulty of attacking over the marshy terrain and delayed until [General] Jackson got in position to attack on Hill’s left.”²⁹ Jackson arrived late due to taking the wrong road earlier in the day but immediately ordered two of his divisions, General Whiting’s and General Charles S. Winder’s, to begin supporting the soldiers led by Generals Hill and Richard S. Ewell, who were already weary from the afternoon’s battle.³⁰ Now that his men were all in position, General Lee desired to use his late arrivals to attempt to break through the Federal defenses at the same point that General Hill had failed earlier that afternoon. Seeing that General Hood was leading a column towards the fighting, Lee rode to him and expressed what needed to be accomplished, detailing the difficulties and failures from earlier in the battle.³¹

Having received his orders and detailed instructions on what was required of his men to support the Confederate effort, General Hood ordered his men forward to engage the enemy. Hood placed the First and Fifth Texas Infantries in the center of his line with the Eighteenth Georgia on their right, Lieutenant Colonel Martin W. Gary’s Hampton’s Legion to their left, and the Fourth Texas held in reserve.³² During the fighting, General Hood made good on his earlier promise to lead the men of the Fourth Texas Infantry. The Texas Brigade began to make a name for themselves at Gaines’s Mill when the “4th Texas Regiment, which, led by Brig. Gen. Hood was the first to break the enemy’s line and enter his works.”³³ According to General Jackson, Hood’s men had crossed over and through a gauntlet of challenging terrain while “exposed to

²⁹ Schmutz, *“The Bloody Fifth,”* 104.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 116.

³³ OR. vol. 11, pt. 2, p. 564.

incessant and deadly fire...[yet] these brave and determined men pressed forward driving the enemy from his well-selected and fortified position.”³⁴

During the fighting at Gaines’s Mill, Robertson had already begun to prove to the brigade that he was an effective and capable leader worthy of their respect. The terrain presented an obtrusive challenge as the Texans charged the Federal soldiers. As the men fought their way through, Robertson and the Fifth Texas became separated due to “both thick brush and mire,” and so, Robertson attempted, “fruitlessly,” to get support from the commanders on his flanks but was unsuccessful.³⁵ The men of the Fifth Texas Regiment made their way through the obstacles that blocked their way across Boatswain’s Creek. Despite not being able to see the other regiments and seeing their comrades fall around them, they advanced rapidly with the Lone Star flag cheering them on.³⁶ As the men reached the other side of the creek, they climbed over a plateau to discover the Federal infantry, which they immediately began to fire upon, causing them to flee “panic-stricken” from their guns, and those who had not been shot, were captured, or fled from the field.³⁷

Writing about how the brigade performed on June 27, during the battle of “Chickahominie,” now better known as Gaines’s Mill, Chaplain Nicholas A. Davis recorded that “fourteen pieces of artillery were taken, and nearly a whole regiment of men were turned over by Col. Robertson, of the 5th Texas, to Brigadier General [Pryor] or staff.”³⁸ General Whiting confirmed the chaplain’s account and noted that the prisoners turned over by Colonel Robertson accounted for “nearly a whole regiment,” which Hood also confirmed, stating that “a regiment

³⁴ OR. vol. 11, pt. 2, p. 556.

³⁵ Schmutz, “*The Bloody Fifth*,” 112

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.; Thomas S. Terrell, ed., *The Boys from Brenham: The Letters of Virginius E. Pettey* (Schreiner University Print Shop: Kerrville, TX, 2006), 174.

³⁸ Nicholas A. Davis, *Chaplain Davis and Hood’s Texas Brigade*, Ed. Donald E. Everett, (Principia Press of Trinity University: San Antonio, Texas, 1962), 85.

was taken prisoner by the Fifth Texas Regiment.”³⁹ While Robertson’s men were capturing the regiment, the Fourth Texas had captured the artillery at the top of Turkey Hill, which provided Robertson and his men the opportunity to join them so they could take a much-needed, though brief, break.⁴⁰ Some of the men chose to lie down and rest, while others admired the captured artillery from the Fourth Texas Regiment; all the while, though, the men remained “under heavy enemy fire.”⁴¹ While allowing his men to rest, Colonel Robertson was struck in the shoulder and fell, leaving Major John C. Upton to lead the Fifth Texas Infantry through the remainder of the battle.⁴²

Robertson received his first injury of the war at Gaines’s Mill but was more fortunate than others who were mortally injured. Though Robertson’s experience that day was cut short, he successfully led his men through the thickest part of the battle and oversaw their gallantry on their field, along with the rest of the Texas Brigade, who all served with distinction that day. As General Jackson recorded the events of Gaines’s Mill in his report, he mentioned that he had ordered the Third Brigade to support General Whiting’s attack but that they “reached there only in time to witness the evidences of a bloody triumph and the guns of the enemy in the possession of the gallant Texas Brigade.”⁴³ In describing the effectiveness of the Texas Brigade in defeating the enemy, General Whiting noted that “the 1st Texas was ordered to go over them or through them, which they did.”⁴⁴ Additionally, Jackson pointed out that the Fifth Texas Infantry, which Colonel Robertson led, had served to “render important service in holding the enemy in check”

³⁹ OR. vol. 11, pt. 2, p. 563, 568.

⁴⁰ Schmutz, “*The Bloody Fifth*,” 114-115.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴² *Ibid.*; Robertson’s injury is also recorded in the reports of Generals Whiting and Hood. OR. vol. 11, pt. 2, p. 564, 569.

⁴³ OR. vol. 11, pt. 2, p. 555.; Jackson’s report refers to Gaines’s Mill by another name, the Battle of Cold Harbor, though that name now refers to the battle later in the war during 1864.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 563.

until General Lawton was able to assume an offensive attack.⁴⁵ The Texas Brigade's service was impressive to both Generals Jackson and Whiting, and their actions also caught the attention of General Lee. Writing about the battle, Lee briefly mentions the Texas Brigade in his report, stating that "the Brave Texans" led a charge at Gaines's Mill.⁴⁶

General Hood, Colonel Robertson, and the rest of the Texas Brigade successfully fulfilled their role as an effective fighting unit. They began to establish the type of action that became the hallmark of their service during the war. The rest of the Seven Days' Battle did not involve the Texas Brigade in any significant action; they were held back in reserve but did have a few small opportunities to exchange fire with the Federal soldiers.⁴⁷ The period between their major battles allowed Robertson to recover from his wound and take stock of his command. Before their next significant engagement, Colonel Robertson also demonstrated his abilities as an effective administrator, in addition to his skills as a military commander. Thanks to his education and experiences as a doctor and then in his various political roles, Robertson had learned to be a meticulous record keeper. In mid-July, Robertson addressed General Hood with a concern related to obtaining blank administrative forms to record information about his soldiers. In the request, Robertson asks Hood about getting him the necessary forms and includes that he had already inquired with the Adjutant General's office in Richmond. Robertson's tenacity is a demonstration of his dedication to properly completing his paperwork to ensure accurate records.⁴⁸

Though this may seem trivial, it is a valuable commentary on the nature of Robertson's leadership qualities. Robertson kept detailed information about the men he served with and who served under him, specifically, the number and names of the casualties from the First, Fourth,

⁴⁵ OR. vol. 11, pt. 2, p. 554.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 490, 493.

⁴⁷ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 128-129.

⁴⁸ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 26-27.

and Fifth Texas regiments beginning with Eltham's Landing. Due to various circumstances, some of Robertson's regimental records are more extensive than others, with his records for the First Texas ending after the Battle of Chickamauga in September 1863, the Fourth Texas ending after Boonsboro Gap in September 1862, and the Fifth Texas lasting through Spotsylvania Court House in May 1864.⁴⁹ In addition to the attention to detail that is important to Robertson, his records also establish the significance of these men to Robertson. The personal regard that Robertson shows to his men by recording them by name so that they would be remembered is another example of his caring nature, a trait he firmly demonstrated throughout his time as a commander in the Texas Brigade.

Robertson's concern for his men was demonstrated through his abilities as a record keeper and his commitment to his men's health and physical care, likely due to the many years he spent practicing his trade as a physician. The day after Robertson submitted his request for the administrative forms, he sent another request to General Hood, this time focusing on his great concern over the matter of the care of his sick men.⁵⁰ There were a few concerns within the letter, but the main point was that Robertson's men were quite literally dying due to not being able to receive proper medical care. The request that Robertson made of Hood was to have his men transferred from a nearby temporary hospital to the care of the brigade's sick camp, where Robertson was confident that they would receive the care they required.⁵¹ Making a fuss and being concerned for his men's health became synonymous with Robertson's brand of leadership. The concern for the well-being of his men was part of the reason that the men eventually began

⁴⁹ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 67.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

to refer to Robertson by the nickname “Aunt Pollie,” along with “his democratic ways and a certain fussiness over trifles,” according to J.B. Polley.⁵²

Along with Robertson’s fierce concern for records and his men's health, he also strongly displayed a sense of concern for their general well-being and how they carried themselves as soldiers. During their period of rest, which lasted for about a month, the Texas Brigade was able to get resupplied with fresh uniforms, shoes, and plenty of food, which also meant that they could return to the routine of roll calls and inspections that Robertson had previously enjoyed.⁵³ During one of their Sunday morning inspections, the Fifth Texas Regiment “took a premium as being the cleanest” of the Texas Brigade, though one of the soldiers admitted that their cleanliness would not have met the standards “of our fair ladies.”⁵⁴ Robertson was not only committed to the way his men looked, but he was also mindful that their leisure time was not spent frivolously. The men of the Fifth Texas Regiment established several gambling tents in their camp within the first two weeks of their respite period, which Robertson attempted to break up. Despite his efforts, “the men merely reconvened at another location.”⁵⁵

Though Robertson was new to commanding a regiment, he was already demonstrating the qualities that helped to make him a successful leader. The nature and character of his command are further examples of why Robertson deserves inclusion among discussions of influential generals from Texas during the Civil War in studies of Texas History. Beyond the strength of his leadership off the battlefield, Robertson soon began to demonstrate that his skills were not limited to administrative duties; he was also an effective military commander.

Robertson soon had another opportunity to display his ability to successfully lead the men of the

⁵² Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 76.

⁵³ Schmutz “*The Bloody Fifth*,” 133.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 133-134.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

Fifth Texas Infantry and prove that his actions at Gaines's Mill were not a fluke as the Texas Brigade joined an engagement at Manassas in late August 1862. This battle became known as Second Manassas or the Second Battle of Bull Run.

In July 1862, General Lee had been preparing to engage his forces against Union General John Pope by having General Jackson move into a position to intercept Pope's movements. By early August, Lee began to move his forces in anticipation of the coming conflict, and orders were sent for several units to begin marching, which included Hood and the Texas Brigade. The men were told to gather three days rations and prepare their supplies to move quickly. They knew this meant that an active campaign was near, primarily because they had heard that General Pope "had begun to advance on Richmond, treading over some of the same ground as McClellan before him."⁵⁶ On August 20, General Lee sent orders for both Generals Jackson and Longstreet to move their men in pursuit of General Pope, who was fleeing north.⁵⁷

Before the Texas Brigade joined the chase for General Pope, they were transferred from General Jackson's command and placed under General James Longstreet. During the pursuit, the Texas Brigade wasted no time impressing their worth on their new commander. Hood was detached along with part of Whiting's division, which Hood was now in temporary command of due to Whiting being on disability leave, to relieve part of General Jackson's command at Freeman's Ford.⁵⁸ As Hood's men reached the Ford on August 22, the enemy launched an attack. However, Longstreet reported that the men of the Texas Brigade "drove [the enemy] back across the river in much confusion and with heavy loss."⁵⁹ Robertson's Fifth Texas Infantry stood out during the conflict, as his former major, now promoted to lieutenant colonel, John Upton, was

⁵⁶ Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth,"* 138-139.

⁵⁷ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 137.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

⁵⁹ OR. vol. 12, pt. 2, p. 563.

celebrated as “the hero of the day” for leading “a charge through the waist deep water, driving the Yanks across the river, through a skirt of timber that bordered it, and about one-half mile beyond.”⁶⁰

A few days later, as his command arrived at Manassas to join Jackson’s forces on August 29, Longstreet relied on Hood’s division to “ascertain Federal strength on his front.”⁶¹ This decision resulted in a harrowing battle in which the Texas Brigade was engaged before they could follow their orders. Even so, the Texas Brigade charged the enemy and began “driving them in confusion in front of them” and pursued them until it became “so very dark that it was impossible to pursue the enemy any farther.”⁶² The Texas Brigade’s advance had been so swift and determined that when night fell, they were inside of the enemy lines and nearly surrounded, prompting them to withdraw back to their original line after midnight.⁶³

Hood’s return to the line caused Union General John Pope to incorrectly assume that the withdrawing Confederate force was the beginning of a retreat and, therefore, sent out victory dispatches to Washington as he prepared to pursue his enemy.⁶⁴ *The New York Herald* referred to Pope’s supposed victory as “the crowning Union victory of the war” in their coverage of the battle on August 31, which they based on the “decided and satisfactory results from the first day, at the close of which the enemy was driven from the field.”⁶⁵ The following day, *The New York Times* ran an account of the battle on the front page, reported by *The Washington Star*, stating that “the tide of success was decidedly with the Union army.”⁶⁶ As much as the citizens of the

⁶⁰ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 137.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶² OR, vol. 12, pt. 2, p. 605.

⁶³ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 144.

⁶⁴ James M. McPherson, *The Oxford History of the United States, Volume VI: Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 531.

⁶⁵ “The Crowning Victory of the War--the Second Great Battle of Bull Run,” *The New York Herald* (1840-1865), Aug 31, 1862.

⁶⁶ “The Second Battle of Bull Run,” *The New York Times*, September 1, 1862.

Union wanted to embrace the truth of these articles, the reality on the battlefield did not reflect the optimism within the misguided reports.

On the morning of August 30, the rebels were not found to be in retreat, and Pope was soon faced with a determined enemy who had not given up their ground in the night, as he had previously assumed. That afternoon, Colonel Robertson, in command of the Fifth Texas Infantry, led an assault on Chinn Ridge, furthering the reputation of the Texas Brigade and his abilities as a military commander. Robertson found himself facing the 5th New York Infantry, whom his regiment had vowed to give no quarter if they ever met in battle after an exchange during the winter of 1861-62.⁶⁷ Union Colonel Gouverneur K. Warren of the New York 5th watched as Robertson's men launched an attack against Union skirmishers led by General Daniel Butterfield, who commanded the 1st and 3rd Brigades in the 1st Division of the 5th Army Corp on August 30.⁶⁸ Warren stated that "advance beyond the brow of the hill was impossible" and that "after making a most desperate and hopeless fight, General Butterfield's troops fell back."⁶⁹ Robertson's men pursued the Union soldiers until they came into contact with the 5th New Yorkers whose "stand was but momentary, [t]hey gave way before the impetuous charge of [his] men and fled."⁷⁰ The Fifth Texas Infantry clashed with the 10th New York Infantry in the same relentless fashion. Colonel John E. Bendix, who commanded the 10th, reported on the event, "I found it impossible to rally my men, as our support was attacked from front and rear, and we retreated rapidly across the field until we got under cover, and then rallied as soon as possible."⁷¹

⁶⁷ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 151.

⁶⁸ OR. vol. 12, pt. 2, p. 259.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 503.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 617.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 505.

As the Fifth Texas routed the Federal soldiers, Robertson observed that his men were heading toward a heavy battery firing on them from beyond a hill. Robertson became cautious because he could not see “any of our forces on my right, and no support [was] visible in my rear,” and so he sought out orders and was told to halt his men.⁷² Though the order was given, the right wing failed to receive it because Robertson’s lieutenant colonel, John C. Upton, had fallen during the battle, and so they “passed over the crest of the hill, and [were] advancing under the murderous fire from two of the enemy’s batteries.”⁷³ Recognizing that it would not be possible for reinforcements to assist his men due to the pounding assault from the batteries and not wanting to risk losing more men by trying to recall them, Robertson decided to charge the battery directly in front of his position. The charge was successful, and once again, Robertson’s men had their enemy “fleeing before [them].”⁷⁴

Following the charge's success, Robertson once again found himself without support. This time, Robertson was greeted with the sight of the enemy drawn up into three lines of battle and “in heavier force than any [they] had encountered on the hill.”⁷⁵ The Federal soldiers saw the Confederates, and Robertson observed that their rear line began to run for the cover of a line of nearby timber, which he realized he would need to “gain this point of timber before him to prevent my right from being turned.”⁷⁶ The Fifth Texas regiment began to race the Federals for the timber, and Robertson’s men gained fifty yards ahead of the enemy and began to fire into them, driving them from the woods.

⁷² OR. vol. 12, pt. 2, p. 617-618.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 618.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

After making three successful charges and covering one and a half miles, Robertson's men were exhausted, so he planned to allow them to recover while they awaited reinforcements. However, another Confederate regiment came up through the woods while they rested. As the regiment passed by Robertson's men, a command of "forward" was given, which the tired men of the Fifth mistook for their orders and began to move, entangling themselves among the other regiment. Mixed in among the other soldiers, Robertson's men helped to drive the enemy from yet another position, during which Robertson was struck down with his second wound of the war. Reflecting on the entanglement of his men with the other regiment, Robertson noted that it was likely the cause of increased casualties among his men and "demonstrated the absolute necessity of having brigade commanders present with brigades at all times during the engagement."⁷⁷ This was an urgent matter for Robertson because the Fifth Texas Infantry lost fifteen men and had another 245 wounded during the battle. Their losses did contribute to the capture of "three stands of colors and two batteries," from which Robertson reported that he was able to send "six guns and a number of prisoners to the rear."⁷⁸ Furthermore, the actions and sacrifice of the Fifth Texas Infantry contributed to the overall success of the Confederate Army and, as Robertson stated, "sustained well the reputation of the Lone Star flag, under which they fought through the battle."⁷⁹

Once Robertson was wounded, the command of the Fifth Texas Regiment passed to Captain King Bryan, who continued to lead the men in the same brave fashion as Robertson. The battle grew fiercer as the Confederates continued to push the Federal forces back. Captain Bryan helped lead a successful assault on a Federal line, breaking through so the Texas Brigade could

⁷⁷ OR. vol. 12, pt. 2, p. 618.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

continue advancing. Shortly after their success, Captain Bryan was also wounded, transferring leadership to Captain Ike Turner, though only briefly, as he was soon injured as well, leaving the Fifth Texas Regiment without any field officers left standing.⁸⁰ The men of the Fifth Texas Regiment who were still fighting then joined General James L. Kemper for the remainder of the battle, where they continued to fight just as fiercely as they had been. Though their efforts had been valiant, General Pope's forces held the Confederates long enough to allow him to slip away.

Robertson's actions during the Seven Days Battles at Gaines's Mill and then at Second Manassas demonstrated that his mind was equally suited to the duties of a military commander, just as he had been to the role of an administrative leader. The actions of Hood's Texas Brigade at Second Manassas were crucial in giving the Confederacy the victory. Ultimately, they "played a major role in the assault that led to Pope's defeat," according to historian Ralph A. Wooster.⁸¹ General Longstreet wrote about their deeds in his report and even included three officers of the Texas Brigade in his list of those who had "prominently distinguished themselves" to include General Hood and Colonels E. M. Law and W. T. Wofford, a distinction earned by only one other brigade.⁸² When Robert E. Lee issued his report on the battles, General Hood and the Texas Brigade were now featured throughout the report to include the brigade's deeds, as well as a detailed account of their accomplishments at Second Manassas.⁸³ The recognition of the Texas Brigade and the regard General Lee now had for them began how the men created a renowned and distinguished reputation for themselves. Robertson helped to forge this reputation during his time leading the Fifth Texas Infantry and was eventually able to add to it as the brigade's commanding general.

⁸⁰ Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth,"* 181-182.

⁸¹ Ralph A. Wooster, *Lone Star Regiments in Gray* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 2002) 20.

⁸² OR. vol. 12, pt. 2, p. 567.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 552-556.

Following the Battle of Second Manassas, there was not an opportunity for the men of the Texas Brigade to rest and recover as they had enjoyed after the Seven Days' Battle. Even though Robertson had been wounded, he returned to his command to lead the Fifth Texas Regiment in General Lee's "plan to keep the Federals off balance and prevent another movement on Richmond."⁸⁴ The Texas Brigade moved out and began to march towards Maryland, as General Lee hoped to bring the state under the influence of the Confederacy. Lee wanted to accomplish this goal by overcoming the Federal garrisons at Harpers Ferry and Martinsburg, so he issued Special Order No. 191, which moved the Texas Brigade under General Longstreet to cross South Mountain to then move toward Boonsboro and Hagerstown.⁸⁵ Over the next several days, the Texas Brigade set out to support Lee's first invasion of the North and endured a strenuous, forced march through the September heat, which proved too much for many of the men. The Texas Brigade reached Boonsboro Gap on September 14, and Colonel Robertson collapsed from exhaustion due to the combination of his unhealed wounds from Gaines's Mill and Second Manassas and having endured the long march to their destination.⁸⁶ While the Texas Brigade engaged the Federal forces at Boonsboro, Colonel Robertson spent the battle in an ambulance and also missed the following engagement at Antietam a few days later as he recovered from his wounds.⁸⁷

The Battle of Antietam was the bloodiest single day of the entire Civil War, and thanks to his injuries, Robertson missed the battle, though his men and the rest of the Texas Brigade shed their blood along with so many others that day. Among the chaos of the day, one of Robertson's men in the Fifth Texas Regiment stood out for a daring act of bravery and compassion for his

⁸⁴ Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth,"* 186.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁶ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 12.

⁸⁷ Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth,"* 196.

fellow soldiers, an action which Robertson would have heartily approved of had he been there and likely did approve of once he learned of the event. Nicholas Pomeroy of Company A in the Fifth Texas Regiment was falling back with the rest of the regiment when he stopped to rescue Lieutenant T.B. Boyd, who had been shot in both legs and was lying injured on the ground. Pomeroy was afraid that the artillery barrage would kill Boyd, and so he risked his own life to go back and carry him to safety while “dodging across the shell-pocked fields and through artillery fire.”⁸⁸ Heroic actions such as Pomeroy’s were not enough to spare General Lee’s soldiers from the slaughter of the day. On September 18, as Lee evaluated his battle losses, he recognized that “the Army of Northern Virginia was too depleted to withstand another Federal assault,” and so he determined that it was best to cross back into Virginia rather than commit to another day of battle.⁸⁹

As the Texas Brigade marched back into Virginia, they eventually made their way to a semi-permanent encampment “in the Valley of the Shenandoah,” near Winchester, where they remained until late October “recuperating, refitting, and reorganizing.”⁹⁰ The time that the Texas Brigade spent at their encampment was essential for the recovery of the injured and battle-weary soldiers. Furthermore, it also helped to illustrate one of the significant problems that they and many soldiers in the Confederate Army faced. Due to several factors, the Confederate government struggled to keep its army supplied with clothing, shoes, weapons, ammunition, and, most importantly, food. General Lee’s invasion of Maryland made the shortages the Confederacy faced “particularly apparent...when the Southern army was a great distance from its supply depots and railheads.”⁹¹ The struggle to supply the soldiers did not improve for the Texas

⁸⁸ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 180.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

Brigade when they returned to Virginia. Considering Robertson's experience in Texas during the Woll Campaign, where he saw first-hand how a shortage of supplies could affect a military unit, his response to the situation is unsurprising.

On October 1, Robertson sent a letter to his old friend, whom he had served with as a representative from Washington County to the Texas Secession Convention, William Simpson Oldham, discussing his concerns. Now that Oldham was serving as a senator from Texas to the Confederate Congress, Robertson hoped he could do something for his fellow Texans. The first concern that Robertson addressed was asking if Oldham could influence a decision to allow the Texas Brigade to be moved further south from the Winchester area if they were meant to go into their winter quarters.⁹² In addition to the Virginia winters being harsher than what the Texans were used to, Robertson was also highly concerned about the condition of the brigade, due in no small part to "the limited and light character of the rations upon which it has had to subsist."⁹³ The trouble with the lack of food had plagued the men for a few weeks, tracing back to their participation in the Maryland Campaign. The food shortage was so dire that on September 16, the night before the Battle of Antietam, many of the soldiers in Hood's Division had been without food for three days. When the Texas Brigade was finally able to get to the rear for the night and eat, the supply wagons had yet to arrive, and they were unable to prepare any rations

⁹² Simpson, ed., *Touched with Valor*, 28-29.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

until near daybreak the morning of the battle, but they “were shelled and ordered into formation,” before they could finish cooking.⁹⁴

Winter may have been several more weeks away, but Robertson and the other officers of the Texas Brigade believed that the climate of the area and the conditions of the roads would mean that neither army would see much success in a winter campaign. Despite their views, the officers of the Texas Brigade were adamant that they expected to continue in any action should the campaign continue, ending their petition by stating that “they are ready at all times to obey orders, and go cheerfully where duty calls them.”⁹⁵ The concerns that Robertson and the other officers expressed went beyond the short supply of rations. The officers also discussed their distress related to an outbreak of typhoid fever in the area and how the weakened condition of the men combined with the winter climate would “make them especially liable to that and other diseases.”⁹⁶ Robertson’s nature as a physician was likely part of his motivation. Still, the concern he expressed in this letter, and again later in the month, is also further evidence of his nature, which earned him the “Aunt Pollie” nickname.

Part of the reason that Robertson and the other officers of the Texas Brigade were so concerned was also due to the shabby condition of the clothing and shoes of most of the men in the brigade. Robertson sent two letters to the governor of Texas, Francis Richard Lubbock, one that described their intense need for more soldiers and the other that echoed this need but also detailed the weakened state of the Fifth Texas. The letter records that Robertson had 272 men but that “nearly 100 who, having recently joined me from hospitals, are weak and feeble, and cannot

⁹⁴ Keith S. Bohannon, “Dirty, Ragged, and Ill-Provided For: Confederate Logistical Problems in the 1862 Maryland Campaign and Their Solutions,” In *The Antietam Campaign*, Ed. by Gary W. Gallagher, 101–42, (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 117.

⁹⁵ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 30-31.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

be calculated on for a march of any extent.”⁹⁷ Robertson estimated that he could not calculate his strength at more than 150 men should the call to action arrive. From the men that he did have, Robertson identified that he had forty-five men who were “barefooted, and two-thirds of them are nearly so [and]...[o]f the 512 absent sick and wounded, very few will probably join us this winter, and many will have to be discharged.”⁹⁸ Lastly, Robertson also included that their “supply of clothing and blankets is very limited.”⁹⁹ The figures that Robertson sent home to Texas were not exaggerated. Robert Hall Chilton, one of General Lee’s adjutant generals, confirmed Robertson’s report in early November when he inspected the Texas Brigade. The inspection was completed on November 7 and identified that within the Fifth Texas, “two-thirds of [the] regiment [were] badly clothed and shod” and that there were indeed “45 barefooted.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the condition of the rest of the brigade was no better, and even worse, as there were a total of 395 more men without shoes, and each regiment was noted as having clothing and shoes in poor condition.¹⁰¹

Before Robertson could successfully gain supplies for his men, the brigade received orders to break camp and move out. After being camped for five weeks, the men moved out on October 29 and settled near Cedar Run, where they stayed until mid-November. During this transition, an exciting event occurred for Robertson. On November 1, Robertson was promoted to brigadier general, though he did not learn of and accept the promotion until November 10.¹⁰² Four days before learning about his promotion, Robertson had received official command of the Texas Brigade, which included a handwritten note of congratulations on his promotion from

⁹⁷ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 34.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰⁰ OR vol. 19, pt. 2, p. 718-719.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* At this time, Hampton’s Legion was still attached to the Texas Brigade and thus counted among their numbers.

¹⁰² Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 35-36.

General Hood.¹⁰³ Almost one month before, on October 10, Hood had been promoted to major general, which Robertson had recommended in his letter to William S. Oldham, requesting that Oldham pass along Robertson's words of praise for Hood's leadership of the Texas Brigade as consideration for a promotion.¹⁰⁴ In his commentary regarding Robertson's letter, Colonel Simpson writes that Hood received his promotion mainly on the recommendation of General "Stonewall" Jackson but concedes that "Robertson's request may have had some influence."¹⁰⁵ Another historian of the Texas Brigade, John F. Schmutz, who has focused more specifically on the Fifth Texas Regiment, also mentions the strength of Jackson's recommendation. However, in addition to noting Robertson's praise of Hood and the flattering case he made on Hood's behalf, Schmutz adds that Arthur H. Edey, acting as an agent of the Fifth Texas Regiment, posted a broadside in Richmond on behalf of the brigade which listed Hood's accomplishments and qualifications.¹⁰⁶ Since Edey signed the broadside and noted that he was an agent of the Fifth Texas, it is likely that Robertson knew about the poster and approved of it, thus helping to make another case for Hood's promotion. No matter what influence Robertson may have had, it is fitting that the man he so highly praised would continue to act as a leader to Robertson and the rest of the Texas Brigade. However, with their promotions, each man was now commanding the brigade in a different capacity.

Along with the promotions of Hood and Robertson, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was reorganized in November. With the new army structure, the Eighteenth Georgia Infantry and Hampton's Legion were transferred out of the Texas Brigade as the army attempted to organize the brigades by their state affiliations. Though the Third Arkansas Infantry was not from Texas,

¹⁰³ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* (footnote)

¹⁰⁶ Schmutz, "*The Bloody Fifth*," 233.

they were “at least a neighbor of Texas, and were attached to the Texas Brigade where they stayed until Appomattox and eventually began to refer to themselves as the ‘Third Texas.’”¹⁰⁷

The Texas Brigade had received new leadership and a new unit. Unfortunately, they still lacked recruits and fresh supplies to bring them back to their former strength. Gaining more recruits was beyond their ability to control, beyond Robertson’s appeal to Governor Lubbock, but the brigade could do something about their supplies.

It was not uncommon for Confederate soldiers to receive supplies from their home states and communities, which helped to supplement what the government could not provide. In the case of the Texas Brigade, they were so far removed from Texas that the distance and “lack of adequate transportation facilities...discouraged the mailing of boxes and packages to the boys in the East.”¹⁰⁸ One of the brigade's greatest concerns was their lack of clothing and footwear. At the beginning of November, the prospect of an impending engagement near Fredericksburg and the approaching winter brought this issue to the forefront. Chaplain Davis was able to write to the *Richmond Whig* regarding their plight, which prompted the citizens of Virginia to come forward and send money for supplies, along with various articles of clothing and shoes to help support the brigade.¹⁰⁹ The brigade greatly appreciated the generosity of the Virginians, but it was only a temporary solution to a much larger problem. The supply issues that the Confederacy faced and the distance between the Texas Brigade and the citizens of Texas who could have helped to support them were constant issues for the rest of the war and the contributing factor for why “the Texans, as a whole, were the poorest clad and shod of Lee’s veterans.”¹¹⁰ The issues regarding the lack of supplies and how it affected the Texas Brigade weighed upon Robertson

¹⁰⁷ Schmutz, “*The Bloody Fifth*,” 232.

¹⁰⁸ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 184-185.

¹⁰⁹ Davis, *Chaplain Davis and Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 178-179.

¹¹⁰ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 185.

throughout his tenure as the brigade commander and was eventually the cause of Robertson's most significant conflict with his superior officers.

The Federal forces did not remain idle during the reorganization of the Texas Brigade and the Army of Northern Virginia. President Lincoln had lost his faith in General McClellan following Antietam and his continued inability to thwart General Lee, so Lincoln appointed Major General Ambrose Burnside to lead the Army of the Potomac. Though Burnside was reluctant to accept the command, he immediately began to make plans to move on Richmond and succeed, whereas McClellan had failed by tricking Lee into believing he intended to attack from the area around Warrenton when his actual goal was Fredericksburg.¹¹¹ The actions of General Burnside in November set into motion the events that led to the first significant engagement in which Robertson led the Texas Brigade against Federal forces, the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862. The Texas Brigade remained part of Hood's Division, which was part of the command of General Longstreet during the battle. Burnside's ruse worked, and Lee ordered his men to move out in preparation for stopping the advance of the Federal forces, though once Lee discovered that he had been tricked, he rapidly ordered his army to change course, which taxed the men with a "circuitous route...that extracted an even more protracted dose of suffering from the men."¹¹²

As each general attempted to outmaneuver the other, both Burnside and Lee eventually settled into locations on opposite sides of the Rappahannock River, and since Lee was "[e]nsconced in his powerful defensive position, [he] was more than willing to just wait" for Burnside to make the first move.¹¹³ While the Texas Brigade waited in their camp, Robertson did

¹¹¹ Schmutz, *The Bloody Fifth*, 232, 236.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 237.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 238.

not allow the men to waste their time in idle pursuits but returned to his former practice of keeping his men fit for duty by spending their time “drilling, building breastworks, and performing picket duty along the Rappahannock.”¹¹⁴ While Lee awaited Burnside’s move, the Federal forces were awaiting the arrival of their bridging equipment. Once it arrived, they prepared to cross the river and engage Lee’s army, which occurred on December 13. Anticipating heavy fighting, Lee placed Robertson and the Texas Brigade at a position of prominence at the center of the Confederate line, which was “the only sector of Lee’s defenses that Burnside did not attack.”¹¹⁵ For three days, Burnside attempted “fruitless attacks” against Lee’s lines but never succeeded in breaking them, and so he gave up the battle and retreated across the Rappahannock on the night of December 15 after “[b]oth armies held their lines” throughout the day.¹¹⁶

In Hood’s official battle report, he speaks highly of Law’s Brigade, led by General Evander McIvor (E. M.) Law, but it does not mention the efforts of the Texas Brigade at all.¹¹⁷ Hood’s Division did not see significant action in this battle due to “an unexpected and hasty retreat of the enemy,” according to General James Longstreet.¹¹⁸ Therefore, Robertson and the Texas Brigade were not a substantial part of the conflict, as revealed by the casualty report from Hood’s Division. Of the four brigades that made up Hood’s Division, Robertson and the Texas Brigade reported the fewest casualties of the conflict with only five compared to Law’s Brigade, which reported 218; Toombs’s Brigade had fifteen, and Anderson’s Brigade had fourteen.¹¹⁹ According to J.B. Polley, the Texas Brigade was held in reserve throughout the battle, which

¹¹⁴ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 195.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 196-197.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹¹⁷ OR vol. 21, pt. 1, p. 621-622.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 571.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 623.

helps to explain their lack of participation in the action.¹²⁰ Polley's assessment was correct, as revealed by John Schmutz, who noted that the men of the Texas Brigade were used to relieve Confederate lines but missed out on being sent into the areas of direct conflict, though Robertson did send Private William Fletcher out to assess the Federal position on the night of December 13.¹²¹

Following the battle of Fredericksburg, the Texas Brigade did not see action until the spring of 1863. It did not participate in another critical engagement until the Army of Northern Virginia invaded the North during the summer of 1863. Once General Burnside pulled his troops back and settled in for the winter, Lee's army and the Texas Brigade could enter their winter quarters. A few days after establishing their camp, General Hood invited Robertson to share an oyster stew with him for Christmas dinner.¹²² For most of the season, the Texas Brigade could attend to the duties of camp life with no fighting to disrupt them; the only enemies to contend with were the climate and supply issues, which had been an ongoing problem. The winter of 1861-1862 was bitterly cold, and though the Texans had experienced a Virginia winter the year before, their lack of supplies made this winter more challenging to endure. The rations available to the men were still scarce, and the severity of the season and military activity surrounding Fredericksburg left very little to be foraged. To try and keep scurvy away, the soldiers found wild onions and sassafras buds to consume, though there was also an issue providing their horses with grass and grain, which contributed to the death of numerous animals.¹²³

¹²⁰ J.B. Polley, "Historical Reminiscences," *The Daily Express* (San Antonio, Texas) Vol. 45, No. 226, Ed. 1, August 14, 1910.

¹²¹ Schmutz, "*The Bloody Fifth*," 249-250.

¹²² Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 41.

¹²³ Schmutz, "*The Bloody Fifth*," 266.

Despite the brigade's struggles and the monotony of camp life, there were notable moments during their winter stay near Fredericksburg. One such moment involved the brigade gathering a collection to donate funds to the people of Fredericksburg, who had been so generous in giving to them in their time of need. General Burnside's attack had done considerable damage to the town and many homes, so the funds were collected from each regiment, along with General Robertson and his staff, to give to the people of the city as a relief fund.¹²⁴ When they were not busy fundraising, there were no required drills for most of the Texas Brigade, so the men grew restless. In the absence of regulated duties, the men began to make a sport out of all the snow covering the ground, leading to "the great snowball battles" that first started at the company level but eventually spread to the entire division.¹²⁵ The battles continued to grow until a sweeping engagement on January 6, 1863, which resulted in "many serious accidents" that caused General Longstreet to regretfully "interfere with the amusement of the gallant soldiers" and issue an order prohibiting snowball battles.¹²⁶ Surprisingly, General Robertson seemed not to mind the escapades his men had been engaging in, as he took no action to stop them from enjoying themselves before it grew out of hand. Doubtlessly, Robertson approved of halting any action that would potentially cause his men harm since their health was always a great concern to him.¹²⁷

General Robertson may have been silent about the snowball battles waged by the men in his brigade, but he did not stay silent regarding his concern for their health that winter. On

¹²⁴ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 41.

¹²⁵ Giles, *Rags and Hope*, 167-168.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 168-170.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*; Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 75.; Neither Val Giles nor J.B. Polley mention Robertson's views on the snowball battles, though Polley adds that the January 6th battle grew so loud that the Federal soldiers took alarm and made ready for an attack. John Schmutz, who also documented the battles in great detail, does not include any mention of Robertson, though he does describe the roughness that resulted in "bruises and lacerations." Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth,"* 258-260.

January 13, Chaplain Davis wrote to Robertson regarding his concerns about the Richmond hospital, which housed the Texas Brigade's injured men. Davis's complaint seems to be related to having men from the Texas Brigade stationed as attendants at the hospital. Robertson responded to Davis's concerns on January 15, noting that he had been struggling to get men detailed to Richmond so they could report on the hospital. Based on his conversations with men who had been to the hospital, there were no complaints that Robertson could find. Even still, Robertson took the matter seriously and greatly desired to investigate the matter and get their men stationed there to assist with the care of their soldiers.¹²⁸ One month later, Robertson further addressed a concern related to the hospitalization of his men to General Lee. The state of Texas had provided funds to have a hospital created and supplied to care for its sick and wounded soldiers. However, Robertson reported that the men sent to the Texas hospital in Richmond were scattered among several other hospitals instead. Robertson's letter requested that Lee look into the matter and attempt to consolidate the numerous wounded Texas soldiers in the hospital to utilize the funds intended for their care correctly and to make it easier for their relatives east of the Mississippi to visit them.¹²⁹

About the time that Robertson was addressing his concerns about the hospital, General Lee was occupied with his growing concern that Union General Joseph Hooker was maneuvering his army for another attempt at taking Richmond. From mid-February through mid-March, the Texas Brigade braced themselves against the bitter cold of terrible weather conditions as they moved from location to location, based upon the orders they received. On March 20, after a period of prolonged and cold marches, the Texas Brigade marched back through Richmond, where "the brigade virtually disintegrated" as the men began to file into saloons on "both sides of

¹²⁸ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 42-44.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Broad Street.”¹³⁰ According to J.B. Polley, when General Robertson turned and saw the vastly depleted ranks still following him, he exclaimed, “[w]here the blankety-blank is the Texas Brigade?”¹³¹ Though Robertson was preparing to send men to go after the rest of the brigade and bring them back, General Hood intervened and encouraged Robertson to “let ’em go; they deserve a little indulgence.”¹³² Polley indicates that Hood “knew Texas and Arkansas tastes and temperaments” and was willing to allow them to “be occasionally indulged.”¹³³ Though Hood may have been willing to allow the men a little respite, Robertson was the type of commander who preferred to complete his orders first. Throughout his service in the Texas Brigade and the time that Robertson had spent commanding it, he had demonstrated his high expectations for order. Based upon his inaction to stop the snowball battles, Robertson was not opposed to allowing the men to indulge themselves either. However, in this instance, the men had not been dismissed from their duty and were under orders to return to camp, which Robertson intended to follow. During the snowball battles, there were no direct orders, so it was acceptable for them to engage in a bit of sport. Had the men gone drinking on their own time while not under orders, Robertson would likely have responded differently to their actions.

When the Texas Brigade left their winter camp to move out on the march again, their lack of supplies continued to press upon them the difficulties of their situation. The lack of clothing and shoes was a pressing concern as the men prepared to leave camp. Sergeant David Henry Hamilton from Company M in the First Texas Infantry described the miserable conditions of his clothing in his war memoirs. Hamilton recalled taking the old shirt that he had worn for six consecutive months, which had previously been set aside because it was “worn to tatters, [but]

¹³⁰ Schmutz, “*The Bloody Fifth*,” 266.

¹³¹ Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 76.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

looked like a new shirt by the side of the one I was wearing. The one was rags, to be sure, but the other was only strings.”¹³⁴ In addition to the condition of his shirt, Hamilton described his pants as being full of “numerous rents and holes” that he fixed “with an assortment of strings, of all kinds and colors,” noting that “rags to patch with were aristocratic luxuries entirely beyond the reach of the Confederate soldiers in Longstreet’s Corps.”¹³⁵ In discussing the condition of his shoes, Hamilton states that they were “worn out” to the point that the “pieces had to be tied together on [his] feet.”¹³⁶ As discussed previously, shoes were scarce among the men in Longstreet’s Corps. To address that problem, the men got rawhide to cut and make moccasins from, which they referred to as “Longstreet Moccasins,” but Hamilton could not even attempt this type of replacement because “no rawhide was to be had to make moccasins.”¹³⁷ Despite these conditions throughout the Texas Brigade, the men marched onward. Still, the frustration of being unable to provide for and adequately care for his men weighed on General Robertson, and the difficulties his men faced were not forgotten.

Thankfully, the weather improved as the Texas Brigade accompanied Longstreet’s pursuit of the Federal forces. After brief skirmishes along the Blackwater River in early April, the Federal soldiers fell back to the city of Suffolk. The Texas Brigade marched to Suffolk on April 10, which held “two Federal divisions of over 25,000 men,” after inspecting the defenses, Longstreet determined that a direct assault would be an exercise in futility.¹³⁸ Though there were a few skirmishes and exploratory attacks, there was no major battle at Suffolk, but there was constant sniper fire along with artillery fire from Federal gunboats on the river.¹³⁹ There was not

¹³⁴ David H. Hamilton, *History of Company M First Texas Volunteer Infantry Hood’s Brigade* (W.M. Morrison: Waco, TX; 1962), 39-40.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹³⁸ Schmutz, “*The Bloody Fifth*,” 268.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 272.

a large number of casualties during the time spent at Suffolk, but one of the men who was killed struck a particularly sour blow to General Robertson.

About a month before, Robertson had written to Governor Lubbock to ask for his help in forming a battalion of Texas sharpshooters, which was to be led by Major Ike N.M. Turner. Robertson stated that the battalion was of the utmost necessity as they were embarking on a campaign to “decide the fate of our capital.”¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Robertson also reminded the governor that their efforts to replace their ranks with volunteers from home, after the losses from the summer campaigns of 1862, had failed, but this order could fill three companies, so he hoped that the governor would see it carried out “with as little delay as possible.”¹⁴¹ The action around Suffolk may have spared the Confederate army from any critical losses, but when a sniper’s ball struck down Major Turner, so was Robertson’s hope of establishing the sharpshooter battalion. The Texas Brigade was sorely in need of new soldiers, and although they had sent some of their men home on leave with the hope that they would be able to gather new volunteers for the cause, the men returned from Texas with only a single volunteer.¹⁴² The Texas Brigade was only able to replace their numbers by depending on soldiers transferred in or receiving members of the brigade back after they had recovered from their injuries at the hospital, and as a result, their numbers continued to fall throughout the rest of the war.¹⁴³

The primary objective for Longstreet in maneuvering to Suffolk had been to gather supplies for the army, and once the Texas Brigade helped to successfully eliminate the Federal batteries that threatened them the most, he ordered his men to begin foraging expeditions

¹⁴⁰ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 46-47.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 223.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

throughout the area.¹⁴⁴ The Texas Brigade spent the rest of April, until May 3, gathering and filling foraging wagons for Longstreet's Corps. Much of the brigade's time over the next few weeks was spent foraging as they moved into new territory closer to Richmond. The brigade received much renown for their ability to procure sustenance for themselves, especially regarding marauding adventures to gather local chickens.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, General Lee was preparing his army for another invasion of the North, which the Texas Brigade received orders to join on June 3, 1863.¹⁴⁶

The Texas Brigade made their way to the Shenandoah Valley, the gateway to the North for Lee's army. Almost two weeks after they began their march, the Texas Brigade reached a place called Snicker's Gap, where they were stationed for three days to guard the gap, which was at the mouth of the valley, while other soldiers passed through. Once the brigade had crossed over the Potomac and into Maryland, they "were in good spirits" and ready for whatever action they could find in the North.¹⁴⁷ The men of Hood's Division came to a stop for lunch after crossing into Maryland, and Hood called for the distribution of whiskey that had recently been captured from a Federal store to the men at a "ration of one gill per man."¹⁴⁸ Though Hood had intended to reward the men with a bit of indulgence of liquor after all their marching, the ensuing incident illustrated exactly why Robertson had been right to be concerned about his men drinking while carrying out orders. A soldier in the Fifth Texas recalled that "inside half an hour, there were more drunk men...than I think I ever saw in my life."¹⁴⁹ As well-intentioned as Hood may have been, his order to limit the imbibing was ignored, with some men receiving whiskey by the

¹⁴⁴ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 231.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 241-242.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 244-245.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 250-251.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.; Simpson explains that a gill is equal to one-quarter of a pint in his footnote.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

cupful, which resulted in fighting among the men in addition to a large number of drunken soldiers.¹⁵⁰ The men were forced to sober up quickly and were back on the march until they reached Pennsylvania that night. The march of the Texas Brigade was a feat no other division managed during the war. They “had breakfast in Virginia, lunch in the state of Maryland, supper in Pennsylvania and slept that night in the state of intoxication, four states in twenty-four hours.”¹⁵¹ Over the next few days, the brigade spent their days foraging in Pennsylvania and enjoying the rewards of a land that had yet to be touched by the war. On June 30, the merriment at the expense of the Pennsylvania countryside drew to a close when the Texas Brigade received orders to begin marching to the east toward a town called Gettysburg.

During the pursuit of the Federal army that led to the engagement at Suffolk, General Hooker was in command of the Federals, and he maintained his command until the Army of Northern Virginia drew near Gettysburg. Hooker had been attempting to amass his forces against the movement of General Lee’s army but had been unable to get all of the soldiers he wanted due to disagreements amongst the various commanders of the Union armies. The disagreements came to a head when Hooker demanded that General Henry Halleck commit his soldiers to Hooker or else Hooker would resign. Halleck refused, with the support of Abraham Lincoln, who telegraphed Halleck to “accept his resignation,” and then Lincoln ordered General George Meade to replace Hooker on June 28.¹⁵² While Meade may have been a reluctant commander, thrown into the responsibility of repulsing the invasion of the Confederate Army, he committed himself to the cause that had been dropped into his lap.

¹⁵⁰ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 252.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁵² Allen C. Guelzo, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2013), 84-85.

In July 1863, General Robertson led the Texas Brigade during one of the most highly contested battles of the war, the battle of Gettysburg. For the invasion of the North to be successful, General Lee needed a strategically advantageous position that would be easy to defend and hold. Gettysburg was a prime location for Lee for several reasons: it was the first location that he could reach after crossing South Mountain, ten roads radiated out from the city, and there were “undulating waves of ridgelines [that] created a series of defensible lines for infantry to seize and hold against any attacker coming from the west.”¹⁵³ The fighting began near Gettysburg on July 1, 1863, starting with a few skirmishes and large movements of troops attempting to gain positions and hold off the advancing Confederates. Lee’s strategy to defeat the Federal forces involved clinching “one part of an enemy’s army...while gathering and landing an overwhelming blow on the enemy’s flank.”¹⁵⁴ This strategy had been effective before for Lee, and most recently at Chancellorsville, though General “Stonewall” Jackson had carried the maneuver's success there. Now that Jackson was dead, Lee was left to rely on General Longstreet, who had initially demonstrated the strategy's effectiveness during the fighting at Second Manassas. The strategy had proven to be successful in the past. However, Lee could not employ it on the first day of the battle, as Longstreet’s Corps was still en route to Gettysburg throughout the day, with Hood’s Division not even arriving until the second day.

The arrival of the Texas Brigade to Gettysburg did not afford the men any cause for celebration. They had endured a long, overnight march, arriving near Cashtown at two o’clock in the morning and, after a two-hour rest, were on the road again towards Gettysburg, where they got a brief rest before marching to their battle position on Lee’s left.¹⁵⁵ The brigade had hoped to

¹⁵³ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 123.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁵⁵ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 264-265.

settle in to prepare a meal while they awaited the commissary wagons but were interrupted by a call to move into position.¹⁵⁶ Initially, General Lee had hoped to position General Longstreet's men, which included Hood's Division and the Texas Brigade, perpendicular to Emmitsburg Road based on a report that the Federals had not occupied a strategically important hill known as Little Round Top.¹⁵⁷ Longstreet convinced Lee to allow him to wait for more of his corps to arrive before committing them to battle. Once Law's Brigade arrived just before noon, Longstreet's forces began to move, with the Texas Brigade leading the way and clearing the path for the men to follow more easily. General Hood sent Texas scouts to ascertain the Federal position, and upon learning how they were exposed, he sent a courier to Longstreet requesting that he be allowed to adjust his attack to move around their flank and attack from the rear, but Longstreet denied him three times.¹⁵⁸ Hood got his men into battle positions with the Texas Brigade on the left and Law's Brigade on the right of his front line.

The original plan had been to try and surprise the Federals. To accomplish this, the Texas Brigade led the way to a skirt of woods where the men were "careful...to avoid detection, but the glint of sunlight on their bayonets and gun barrels [gave] their position away."¹⁵⁹ Once General Meade was informed of the Confederate movements, he directed reinforcements to all three positions in front of Hood's Division: Little Round Top, Rocky Ridge, and Devil's Den. The Confederates opened the battle with "an artillery barrage against the Federal positions in front of the Round Tops," which was answered by the Federal batteries immediately.¹⁶⁰ Still in the cover of the woods, the Texas Brigade was not completely safe from the assault of the Federal guns as

¹⁵⁶ Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 82-83.

¹⁵⁷ Susannah J. Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade: The Soldiers and Families of the Confederacy's Most Celebrated Unit* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 151.

¹⁵⁸ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 267.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 269.

“missiles started smashing through the timber.”¹⁶¹ To keep the men safe for as long as possible before they received the order to advance, General Robertson ordered the men to lie down on the ground to allow the shot to pass over, creating severe tension until Hood’s orders of “Forward! Steady, forward,” signaled the men that it was time to engage the enemy.¹⁶²

The Texas Brigade responded to the order and began to move forward. Robertson called out to his men, “We’re going in there, men,” and he led them across the Emmitsburg Pike towards Plum Run and the Round Tops.¹⁶³ According to Robertson’s report of the battle, the Texas Brigade had only arrived a few minutes before the order to advance was given, which did not allow him time to study the battlefield before they began their operation.¹⁶⁴ The Confederate line was about to cross through an area known as Devil’s Den, which presented the men with several obstacles to slow their progress as they attempted to gain their objective. The objective of the Texas Brigade and the rest of Hood’s Division were the Round Tops, but between the Emmitsburg Pike and their destination lay a creek named Plum Run, “rocky ridges, massive outcroppings of granite, houses, stone walls, and rail fences. Heavy brush, trees, and boulders covered both Round Tops, the saddle between them, and the general area to their front.”¹⁶⁵ As the brigade advanced toward their goal, they came under the fire of two Federal batteries and sharpshooters; though men were attacked on all sides, the Texas Brigade continued their progress. Undeterred by the Federal assault or the obstacles in their path, Robertson led the “fast-moving, yelling command...[o]ver a crumbling rock wall, across a plowed field, and through a ribbon of water.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 269.

¹⁶² Ural, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 153.

¹⁶³ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 271-272.

¹⁶⁴ OR. vol. 27, pt. 2, p. 404.

¹⁶⁵ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 272.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 273.

General Robertson had his orders stating that he was to keep the right side of his column close to General Law's left while allowing the soldiers on his left to move along Emmitsburg Road. Yet, Robertson's astute observation of the unfolding scene revealed the need for a different course of action. The Texas Brigade was to be part of the general force of the attack, yet Robertson realized that Little Round Top "was held by the enemy in heavy force with artillery to the right of General Law's center [that] was the key to the enemy's left."¹⁶⁷ Therefore, Robertson made a battlefield decision to neglect the road in favor of closing in on General Law's left to advance with them in an attempt to take the position. The recognition of how vital Little Round Top was to the hope of Confederate success speaks to Robertson's military command abilities. The reason the hilltop was so heavily defended was born from the Federal commander's realization that the area had been left unsecured. So, a panicked cry was sent out to the defenders to secure the area and stop the Confederates from being able to roll down the defender's line.

Responding to the call to defend Little Round Top was the Twentieth Maine Infantry led by Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain, who was getting ready to lead his men into the fray in another area of the battle when they received the orders to move "double-quick" to gain the "rugged mountain spur."¹⁶⁸ Chamberlain received his orders from Colonel Strong Vincent, the commander of the 3rd Brigade whom the Twentieth Maine Infantry served under. As the soldiers arrived atop the hill, Vincent impressed upon Chamberlain the importance of holding their position. Colonel Vincent instructed Chamberlain that he should expect a "desperate attack" to try and take the position but that Chamberlain was to "hold that ground at all hazards."¹⁶⁹ The resolve of the Federal forces was firm. As Robertson and the Texas Brigade rose to meet the

¹⁶⁷ OR. vol. 27, pt. 2, p. 404.

¹⁶⁸ OR. vol. 27, pt. 1, p. 623.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

challenge, Robertson realized that the heavy forces amassed against them were seriously threatening their lines. To address his concerns, Robertson sent word to General Hood that they were not being supported by General Lafayette McLaws's forces on their left. Robertson needed reinforcements due to the lack of assistance, which enabled the enemy to bring fresh troops to fight against him. However, no help would come from Hood, who had already been injured and carried from the field by the time Robertson's courier arrived.¹⁷⁰

Echoing the frustrations of General Robertson is the report of Lieutenant Colonel Phillip A. Work of the First Texas Infantry, who noted that his men and those of the Third Arkansas Infantry could not advance without support or they would leave their left flank exposed to attack.¹⁷¹ Unaware that help was not imminent, the men of the Texas Brigade held their ground and fought on in a valiant effort to uphold their reputation and win the day. Robertson reported that as his men drove the enemy back and were driven back by the enemy for over an hour, they "maintained one of the hottest contests, against five or six times their number, that [he had] witnessed."¹⁷² This observation strongly indicates the ferocity of battle, especially coming from a veteran of the numerous contests Robertson had witnessed. The remainder of Robertson's report reveals the continued struggle his brigade battled against and details the officers wounded during the battle attempting to stop Chamberlain from carrying out his duty.

Chamberlain's report of the battle depicts an equally grim tale in which he reveals how closely the men of Hood's Division came to defeating his Federal soldiers. The report supports the determination of the Southerners, even stating that at one point, "[i]t did not seem possible to withstand another shock like this," describing the tenacity of the Confederates in trying to take

¹⁷⁰ OR, vol. 27, pt. 2, p. 405.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 408.

¹⁷² Ibid., 405.

the hill.¹⁷³ Despite the efforts that the Texas Brigade made, along with Hood's Division, Longstreet's Corps, and the rest of the Confederate soldiers gathered at Gettysburg, Meade's Federal forces were able to turn back the assault. The victory was enough to revive the withering Northern morale, just as much as it was "decisive enough to make people look back and understand that the Confederacy would never be able to mount a serious invasion again."¹⁷⁴ Though the battle resulted in a loss, the Texans gave the cause no less effort than their previous engagements. Even when members of the Fourth and Fifth Texas Infantry were caught up among General Law's men, they fought bravely alongside their fellow soldiers in arms. Part of the reason for this confusion was the loss of so many of the senior officers within Hood's Division to battle casualties, which included Robertson and "three of his four regimental commanders."¹⁷⁵

Robertson described Gettysburg as the "hardest fought battle of the war I have been engaged, all, both officers and men...fully sustained the high character they have heretofore made."¹⁷⁶ Gettysburg tried all of Lee's soldiers and, as one Texas soldier recalled, it was "the first time in the history of the war the Texans began to waiver."¹⁷⁷ Considering the overwhelming circumstances of the Gettysburg engagement, the fact that the Texans showed signs of wavering is not surprising. Against fierce odds, they retained their ability to function as an effective fighting force and served as a credit to the brigade and their leadership. General Robertson deserves no small amount of credit for the brigade's success. Robertson's leadership of the Texas Brigade through one of the most challenging battles of the Civil War, his ability to continue

¹⁷³ OR. vol. 27, pt. 1, p. 624.

¹⁷⁴ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 465.

¹⁷⁵ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 275.

¹⁷⁶ OR. vol. 27, pt. 2, p. 406.

¹⁷⁷ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 271.

inspiring the men to follow his leadership, and his commitment to their well-being deserve recognition.

The qualities that Robertson demonstrated during this early period of his leadership exemplify why his name should be held similarly to General Hood's when discussing the leadership of the Texas Brigade. The trials that the Texas Brigade faced at Gettysburg solidified Robertson's ability to successfully lead the brigade, even though the contest did not result in their victory, which was not the fault of the Texans. Following the defeat and end of the Northern invasion, Robertson recovered and continued to lead the brigade throughout the remainder of 1863 and into the first months of 1864. The period for Robertson was marked with continued trials on the battlefield and in the care of his brigade. Despite these obstacles, Robertson approached each challenge with a strong sense of duty, determination, and compassion for his men, which had been the hallmark of his service in the Confederate Army. As the Texas Brigade left Pennsylvania with the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia, they returned to Southern territory to recover. The next serious engagement that Robertson and the Texas Brigade encountered was just a few weeks away and took them to part of the Confederacy where they had yet to fight, on the border of Tennessee and Georgia, at a place called Chickamauga.

Chapter 7

The Stones River Controversy

During the later part of the spring of 1862, throughout the summer, J.B. Robertson had his first battle experience during the Civil War. Robertson's time on the battlefield during those months was a defining period that helped elevate him to the rank of general and solidified the importance of the Texas Brigade's service, which elevated the relevance and significance of Robertson's service. Felix Robertson had already seen the battlefield on more than one occasion when his father first exchanged fire with the Federal soldiers. Similarly to his father's service, the younger Robertson followed orders well and stood out for his actions, for which he received the recognition of his superior officers.

Moving into this chapter, more of Felix H. Robertson's character will be examined and demonstrated. Robertson participated in significant and famous battles during the Civil War, and he rose to the rank of general. Though these facts add to Robertson's story and provide additional credibility to his life, his true importance to historical study is found within his connection to a major Civil War controversy. To better understand Robertson's nature, his role, and possible participation in the massacre that occurred at Saltville, Virginia, it is essential to examine an earlier controversy in which he was entangled. This chapter will identify and analyze Robertson's involvement in the conflict that erupted between generals Braxton Bragg and John Breckinridge following the Battle of Stones River. Establishing Robertson's participation in the scandal will provide insights that connect to his involvement in the events at Saltville. Both of these controversial events further exemplify the necessity of including Robertson in Civil War historical studies.

Unlike his father, Felix Robertson's wartime experience during the summer of 1862 lacked intense battles and dangerous encounters with Federal bullets. By comparison, Felix's wartime experience from the summer of 1862 through the following summer was relaxing, as the younger Robertson only fought in a single major engagement. During that period, Felix Robertson continued to command an artillery battery and was part of General Braxton Bragg's command. Robertson participated in the Kentucky Campaign and the Battle of Stone's River but otherwise had a quiet year. The experiences of father and son may have differed, but neither of the men knew that their service to the Confederacy had set them on a path leading them to a reunion in September 1863.

After the Battle of Shiloh and the loss of Corinth, Mississippi, to Federal forces, General P.G.T. Beauregard pulled the army to the area around Tupelo, and General Bragg was given command of the Department of Mississippi. Before Bragg could commit his army to a serious movement against the Federal forces, he first needed to satisfy the needs of his men, which required him to attempt "to improve the health of his army."¹ The soldiers who had been in Corinth struggled with illness due to the conditions of the city, and a large part of Bragg's army was not physically fit to fight. Getting the army away from Corinth and into healthier environments gave the soldiers the relief they needed. This change of environment, along with good hygiene and a good supply of food, allowed Bragg's men to recover enough to begin focusing on other equally pressing concerns.² Now that General Bragg was responsible for the entire department, he took his role to heart and started working on transforming the men into a professional army. Bragg instituted a regimen of drill and discipline to transform the men "who

¹ Thomas M. Grace, "From Corinth to Perryville: Military Movements and the Fight to Save the Confederate Nation in 1862," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 114, no. 1 (2016): 8.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

were no better than a mob.”³ Many of the units in the western part of the Confederacy lacked officers who trained at military academies, which may account for their struggle to fight cohesively at Shiloh, but Bragg’s “fondness for instruction...addressed, even if it did not surmount, such shortcomings.”⁴

As his men's health and training progressed, Bragg began to assess their situation, prompted by the pressure he received from Richmond to act, as the Confederate government was displeased with the loss of Corinth. General Don Carlos Buell’s Federal forces held Corinth, and additional Federal troops were present in the east and west. Though Bragg was in charge of the Department of Mississippi, he hesitated at the command that had “so unexpectedly devolved” on him.⁵ The situation became more frustrating for Bragg when he received word that Chattanooga, Tennessee, was also under threat, as reported by General Kirby Smith, the commander of the Department of East Tennessee.⁶ Bragg felt the burden of command and wrote to General Samuel Cooper, the Adjutant and Inspector General of the Confederate Army, to express his concerns. The illness inflicted by the environment at Corinth was behind the soldiers, but now Bragg’s primary concerns centered on supplies for his army, transportation due to their inability to use the railroad for a forward movement, and replacing the commanders lost during Shiloh.⁷ Bragg set about reorganizing his brigades to address the concerns over his commanders. During the reorganization, Bragg replaced any officer deemed incompetent. Since Robertson not only survived the culling but was also given added responsibility, the evidence suggests that General Bragg saw admirable qualities in the young officer. However, it is worth pointing out that there

³ Grace, “From Corinth to Perryville,” 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881-1901), vol. 17 pt. 2, p. 627 (hereinafter cited as OR; except as otherwise noted, all references are to Series I)

⁶ Grace, “From Corinth to Perryville,” 7.

⁷ OR. vol. 17 pt. 2, p. 628.

was also a connection between the general and captain, as both men had attended West Point. While Robertson had performed admirably, Bragg's respect for the military academy could have also contributed to Robertson's retention. Bragg had demonstrated a fondness for some of the officers who had come from West Point, though the shared bond was not enough to spare General Leonidas Polk from the displeasure of Bragg, who was unsuccessful in replacing him.⁸

After considering his options, Bragg decided on a course of action that allowed him to begin moving toward Chattanooga to support General Smith while avoiding Buell's principal defenses "and move his army out of the open Union jaws in northern Mississippi."⁹ Without the railroads for transport, Bragg's army had to move with only enough horses and wagons for the baggage of the troops and with a heavy concern for their supplies as the area between them and the Tennessee River was "entirely destitute of any supplies."¹⁰ During the move to Chattanooga, Robertson was placed in temporary command of Bragg's artillery and tasked with overseeing its safe journey.¹¹ Even though Robertson was only a captain, Bragg's lack of officers, combined with Robertson's effective service to this point, made him a quality candidate for this service. The journey to Tennessee was uneventful, and once Robertson reached Chattanooga, Bragg assigned his artillery out to various divisions according to Robertson, and he accompanied his division into Kentucky for a brief period before returning to Tennessee without engaging in any fighting.¹²

While stationed in Tennessee, Bragg's men habitually searched the area for valuable supplies to support them. Robertson recalled that the officers were not strict in attempting to hold

⁸ Grace, "From Corinth to Perryville," 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ OR, vol. 17 pt. 2, p. 628.

¹¹ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 4, 1927.

¹² Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 5, 1927.

their battle lines, as the men spread out across the countryside, searching for supplies to plunder for themselves “to keep the northerners from getting them.”¹³ According to Robertson’s second wife, he never lost the keen eye to spot a “heavily stocked farm,” which he would often comment on, saying, “Couldn’t we forage here?”¹⁴ There was plenty of time for Robertson and the other Confederate soldiers to explore the area in search of supplies since there was no military action to engage their attention. Throughout the summer of 1862, Robertson and his men enjoyed the bounty the area supplied them, with one meal particularly standing out to him.

The noteworthy meal occurred when Robertson was stationed at a location that offered them the opportunity to defend the Cumberland Gap from federal forces who never arrived. While waiting for their enemy, Robertson and the other soldiers stayed at the ready well beyond their usual time to eat. When they finally retired from their post to fix a meal, one of the soldiers seemed to be wandering away, so Robertson ordered one of his lieutenants named Burton to follow the suspicious-looking soldier that he only described as “a little Irishman.”¹⁵ To Robertson’s surprise, Burton returned with four ears of corn from the Irish soldier who had been feeding them to his horses but wanted to do something for “the miserable hunger of his superior officers.”¹⁶ The food that they prepared consisted of pickled pork that they fried, along with the shelled corn, which Robertson described as “the most delicious meal” he had ever tasted.¹⁷ In reflecting on the experience, Robertson also claimed that none of the Confederate soldiers had to “endure...intense suffering...as far as rations were concerned,” which was an idealistic memory

¹³ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 5, 1927.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

far removed from the realities of the war, though he did also recall that food became “terribly scarce” during the later years of the war.¹⁸

The Kentucky Campaign did not materialize grand victories for the Confederates or Federal forces. However, Bragg’s army chased Buell for several weeks, during which Bragg also hoped to bring the support of Kentucky to the Confederate cause. The most significant victory that Bragg achieved was in late August at Munfordville, though it did little to inspire the Kentuckians to join the Southern cause.¹⁹ Additionally, Bragg struggled with getting his fellow generals to unite their armies and follow his lead. General Kirby Smith, whom Bragg had come to support initially, refused to combine his army with Bragg’s to try to defeat Buell. Altogether, the campaign produced little to be desired, as most of Bragg’s army was exhausted from struggling to find water, due in part to Federal soldiers having “fouled otherwise pure sources” and the periods of prolonged marching they had to endure.²⁰ When Bragg finally faced Buell, it was not from the strong position he had hoped for, as many branches of his army had been spread out across Kentucky, and Smith’s soldiers were not present either. At the Battle of Perryville, Bragg was once again victorious. However, it was not a grand or decisive victory and did not move the Kentucky allegiances further than Munfordville. Due to his limited progress, the condition and health of his soldiers, and their difficulties with water and food, Bragg decided to withdraw from Kentucky and move back into Tennessee.²¹

The events of the Kentucky Campaign were equally unimpressive to Robertson, who only described his experiences with food as he reflected on the period. Aside from the

¹⁸ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 5, 1927.

¹⁹ Grace, “From Corinth to Perryville,” 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33, 37-38.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38

memorable pork and corn meal that made such a strong impression on Robertson, the only additional memory he shared from the period was related to a horse he had. As he recalled this time of the war, Robertson mentioned “Old Major,” a sorrel-colored horse that he had for about two years of the war, who he described as “unbelievably docile...and obedient.”²² The captain of artillery and his horse made for an effective team, as Old Major would turn without having to be commanded once they reached the end of Robertson’s Battery whenever he rode its length to inspect it.²³ Once Old Major reached the point where he was no longer effective, Robertson retired him to a wheat field in Tennessee. The affection that Robertson had for his horse after so many years is touching, but he withheld such affectionate remembrances from fellow soldiers or even the “hired boy, Isaac,” whom Robertson hired early in the war and had with him until September 1864.²⁴

Having been raised in Texas, which, as a nation, a state, and later through secession, had committed itself to the institution of slavery, Robertson neglecting to give special attention to Isaac would not be out of the ordinary. However, when Robertson did discuss Isaac, he acknowledged that Isaac was skilled at cooking, playing poker, and plundering and also noted that he was “generally useful.”²⁵ Despite Isaac’s admitted usefulness, during Robertson’s interview with Helen Pool, he made it clear that he believed “that most negroes were lazy and cowardly,” but that on one specific occasion, Isaac “proved himself otherwise.”²⁶ During a skirmish that Robertson was involved in, as part of the Battle of Chattanooga fought at Missionary Ridge, Isaac risked himself to help Robertson. During the fighting, Robertson’s horse

²² Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 5, 1927.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

was shot out from under him, and when Isaac heard the news, he took one of the spare horses and rode it to the lines where Robertson was “right in the thick of battle” to deliver the horse to him.²⁷ Though Robertson admits that Isaac “didn’t ask much of me afterward that he didn’t get,” he continues to withhold the same level of dignity that he had held for Old Major.²⁸ The disregard was evident in the way that Robertson described the horse and then Isaac so many years later during his interview, when he referred to Isaac as “that nigger,” thus demeaning him for posterity.²⁹

During the Kentucky Campaign, Robertson did not experience any fighting and almost managed to see 1862 end without fighting in another serious engagement. After General Bragg left Kentucky and moved his army back to Tennessee, Robertson and his battery eventually made their way to Murfreesboro by December. While in the city, a new Union general had taken command of General Buell’s forces and made his way to the area to try and defeat Bragg in a battle that closed out 1862 and provided a violent beginning to 1863. Before the two armies clashed, President Jefferson Davis visited the Confederate soldiers at Murfreesboro, who were now formally reclassified as the Department of Tennessee. During the president’s visit, Robertson participated in the parade that passed by Davis as he reviewed the soldiers. As Robertson described the parade, he recalled that Davis was “a man of rather slight figure...with military bearing, who carried himself very erect. He was not vigorously handsome, but rather impressive looking.”³⁰ Though Robertson had seen President Davis closely at least twice before,

²⁷ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 5, 1927.

once while he attended West Point and again during Davis's inaugural parade, he viewed the president in a new light now that he was fighting for Davis's cause.

Generals Bragg and Buell had made a fine mess of chasing and avoiding one another around Kentucky, and both men had left their countries wanting regarding their command ability and service. President Lincoln replaced Buell with General William Rosecrans, and Bragg's commanders demonstrated their lack of faith in him by asking President Davis to remove him from command. In October 1862, President Davis called Bragg to Richmond to defend his Kentucky actions and subsequent retreat back into Tennessee. Bragg met each point of concern from President Davis with a thoughtfully spun reason for his actions. The bulk of Bragg's defense centered on the impressive quantity of supplies his army had been able to carry out of Kentucky and the idea that his movement into Middle Tennessee provided the Confederate Army with the opportunity to hold territory that was not yet in the hands of the Federals.³¹ For four days, Bragg convincingly sold his story to Davis, "who was ready to be convinced," notes historian Earl J. Hess, due to wanting to believe "that something had been gained from the campaign" that had failed to bring his home state under the flag of the Confederacy.³²

President Davis may have been willing to accept Bragg's view of the Kentucky campaign, but public opinion, political views, and the opinions of other Confederate commanders were not swayed. The early success of the campaign by General Kirby Smith and Bragg "created expectations of ultimate success" that, regardless of how unrealistic, left many people bitter and upset with General Bragg for his decision to withdraw from Kentucky.³³ Throughout November and December 1862, there was a fierce public debate over the actions of

³¹ Earl J. Hess, *Braxton Bragg: The Most Hated Man of the Confederacy* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 74-75.

³² *Ibid.*, 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

Bragg in Kentucky and his decision to leave the state behind. Bragg had the support of President Davis, whose confidence held enough sway to bring many over to Bragg's side. The public concerns regarding their confidence in Bragg boiled over as the Army of Tennessee finally clashed with the Federal forces led by General Rosecrans at Stones River, Tennessee. The aftermath of the battle launched a flurry of accusations between Generals Bragg and Breckinridge, which the young Captain Robertson became involved in, landing him in his first military scandal.

By December 1862, General Rosecrans had brought his army into Tennessee to occupy Nashville, and Bragg had been preparing to meet the threat while shoring up the issues in his army. On December 26, Rosecrans moved his army from Nashville towards Bragg's forces at Murfreesboro. As Bragg prepared to meet the Federals, he placed his army into position on either side of Stones River, with General Jones M. Withers's Division in the front on the west side, to which Robertson's Battery was attached.³⁴ On December 30, a few skirmishes broke out between the armies, though the battle did not begin until the next day. During one of the skirmishes on the afternoon of the 30th, Federal forces attempted to capture Robertson's Battery, which was likely a harrowing experience for Robertson. Fortunately, the quick action of the Twenty-sixth and Twenty-ninth Alabama regiments helped Robertson's battery to stop the Federals, who "were handsomely repulsed and severely punished by a well-directed and rapid fire from the battery," according to General Withers's report.³⁵

When briefly discussing the Battle of Stones River, Robertson did not mention the noteworthy defense of his battery but instead commented that he had helped support the capture

³⁴ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 96.

³⁵ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 754.

of thirty pieces of artillery during the first day of the battle.³⁶ Looking into the reports from the battle, General Bragg records that thirty-one pieces of artillery were captured on December 31, but he does not attribute them to any commander, division, or brigade.³⁷ The artillery, three batteries in total, was captured by General Withers's forces, which he attributed to the actions of the soldiers serving under General James Patton Anderson and Colonel Arthur M. Manigault, with the support of General Alexander Stewart.³⁸ In General Anderson's account of the events, he also does not mention or indicate that Robertson's Battery played a role in their successful capture of the enemy batteries.³⁹ It is not unreasonable to believe that Robertson assisted in the capture of the batteries with artillery support since his battery was part of Withers's Division, but Robertson's claim that his battery "rendered distinguished service in assisting to capture thirty pieces of artillery" seems to be inflated.⁴⁰ Additionally, had Robertson's service truly merited a distinguished level of praise, it is more likely that he would have recorded the event in his reports of the battle, which he wrote two separate reports on several weeks apart, but he did not describe the events of the battle's first day in either report.⁴¹

Robertson's memory of his service aside, Bragg's army did perform admirably during the first day of the battle. As the armies approached one another and moved into position on December 30, General Rosecrans did not press an attack, which allowed Bragg to spend the evening and night repositioning his soldiers and gave himself "an opportunity to seize the tactical initiative."⁴² Bragg's preparations were effective, and when the attack began on December 31, he

³⁶ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.

³⁷ OR, vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 662.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 755-756.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 763-764.

⁴⁰ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.

⁴¹ OR, vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 758-762.

⁴² Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 96.

noted that “[t]he enemy was taken completely by surprise.”⁴³ His description was justified by the fact that their “hot and inviting breakfast...was found on the fire unserved, and was left while we pushed on to the enjoyment of a more inviting feast, that of captured artillery, fleeing battalions, and hosts of craven prisoners begging for the lives they had forfeited by their acts of brutality and atrocity.”⁴⁴ The day was an overall success for the Confederates who “won an impressive tactical victory,” damaging Rosecrans’s logistical support and reporting “[a]s many as 10,000 Federal troops [having been] killed, wounded, or captured.”⁴⁵

The following day, the first day of 1863, in the wake of the Confederate success, it was reasonable for General Bragg to believe that the Federal forces would withdraw from the area. However, General Rosecrans made no such moves, and Bragg did not press an attack on the Federal lines. Some light skirmishing occurred throughout the day, but neither side made any significant moves toward the other until the next day, January 2, when Rosecrans “quietly made a move that alarmed Bragg.”⁴⁶ The Federal forces moved across the river and began to occupy a position that allowed them to push into Murfreesboro, forcing Bragg to take action to prevent their advance. Bragg issued orders to various parts of his command to begin taking action. Part of those orders included moving the soldiers commanded by General Breckenridge. When Breckenridge received the orders, he questioned the wisdom of Bragg’s plan, believing that the move left his soldiers “unsupported and [would] place his men close to the main Federal position.”⁴⁷ General Breckinridge had conducted surveillance and was further armed with information collected by other commanders that General Rosecrans had organized his forces

⁴³ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 664.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 98.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

heavily on the bluff that was opposite Breckinridge's line of attack, which gave Rosecrans higher ground.⁴⁸ Despite the reported intelligence, Bragg insisted on his plan, and General Breckenridge was left to follow his orders, regardless of the misgivings he held, and the "result was one of the most controversial episodes of Bragg's career," which Captain Robertson became intertwined in as well.⁴⁹

Around 4:00 pm, Breckinridge's men pushed forward with their assault, following Bragg's orders. Despite Breckinridge's concerns, his men performed well initially, taking the Federal territory as their line crumbled from the assault, but then they acted beyond Bragg's orders and followed the Federal soldiers back across Stones River and into a counterattack led by the Federal reinforcements.⁵⁰ During the counterattack, as General Breckinridge tried to hold the Federal forces back, his soldiers were eventually overrun. Breckinridge lost some artillery pieces as the Federal soldiers forced his men to fall back. Before the attack began, Captain Robertson's orders were to support Breckinridge and Semple's Battery, commanded by Captain Henry C. Semple.

In Robertson's initial report of the battle, he describes the situation in which his battery and Semple's were supposed to each take position on two high points, to the left and right of Breckinridge's infantry once they had advanced. Semple's Battery took a hill to the right, and Robertson was to have taken a position on the left, but he reported that the infantry had been "unable to clear the crest of the hill," so he altered the plan and sent his battery to the right where the fire was "very heavy."⁵¹ The ground to the right was "unfavorable," according to Robertson,

⁴⁸ William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 341.

⁴⁹ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 99.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁵¹ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 759.

which limited his ability to support Semple, and so he was only able to order up a section to fill a gap in their line.⁵² As the fighting intensified, Breckinridge began to look for Robertson in the position he had been ordered to hold. Since he could not find him, Breckinridge dispatched staff officers to locate the missing captain.

Additionally, Breckinridge sent word to Semple to bring his artillery forward, as per the plan, but Semple claimed that “he had received no orders at all from Robertson regarding his part in the attack.”⁵³ When Breckinridge wrote about this action, he noted that Robertson inaccurately supposed that the left had not been cleared and that the enemy had been driven across the river.⁵⁴ William C. Davis, a prolific Civil War historian and biographer of Breckinridge’s, wrote about the decision, noting that Robertson then dared to alter “a plan made by a major general, his superior,” under this false belief.⁵⁵

Though it is unclear from the reports exactly why Robertson made such a seemingly significant error, his mistake and subsequent decision to relocate his battery proved valuable. In his report, Breckinridge considered Robertson’s decision retrospectively and noted that he regarded “it as fortunate that the battery was not brought forward. It would have been a vain contest.”⁵⁶ Even though Davis is harsh in his criticism of Robertson’s actions during the fighting, he does acknowledge that “Robertson’s presence at the appointed place would not have saved the attack.”⁵⁷ The hill that Robertson should have occupied was in full range of the enemy artillery, and Breckinridge noted that the Federals “had enough to sweep the whole position from the front, the left, and the right, and to render it wholly untenable by our force present of artillery

⁵² OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 759.

⁵³ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 345.

⁵⁴ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 786.

⁵⁵ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 345.

⁵⁶ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 786.

⁵⁷ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 345.

and infantry.”⁵⁸ The assessment offered by Breckinridge was echoed in Davis’s assessment of the situation as he identified that “Breckinridge had taken the hill, but he could not hold it.”⁵⁹

As Breckinridge’s force crossed the river, the Federals pushed them back. Robertson observed the situation and made another prudent battlefield decision. Rather than continuing to move his battery, he stopped the remainder in the field “to check the enemy’s advance.”⁶⁰ The retreat of Breckinridge’s army confused the lines and created problems for Semple’s Battery as they tried to fall back amidst the onslaught of Federal guns and artillery fire. Robertson was able to get his guns back to a safer location, but Semple lost three guns on the battlefield. According to Robertson’s report, Semple’s Battery was “entirely credible” in their fighting, but that confusion of the retreat, along with “the infantry supports [having] given way entirely,” were the reasons for Semple’s loss.⁶¹ As his men brought the batteries back to a line of woods from where they had begun their attack, Robertson stated that they were able to get the gun into place quickly and then offer “a rapid-fire [that] checked the enemy’s advance.”⁶² Once again, Breckinridge confirms that Robertson made the right choices that evening. As the command of Breckinridge’s forces fell back, he noted that they were able to reform behind Robertson’s Battery in the woods.⁶³ Therefore, Robertson must have performed his duty and checked the enemy’s advance as he had intended.

In the wake of Breckinridge’s failure, General Bragg was afraid of how far his line would be repulsed and sent General Anderson to support Breckinridge, but Anderson sent Bragg a report stating that Breckinridge had not properly reformed his division and therefore he could not

⁵⁸ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 786.

⁵⁹ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 345.

⁶⁰ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 759.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 787.

find a line to assist.⁶⁴ The news disturbed Bragg and, as Earl Hess notes, the confirmation of Anderson's report from his assistant adjutant general resulted in planting one of the seeds for the rift that developed between Bragg and Breckinridge.⁶⁵ After the confirmation about Breckinridge, Bragg received more troubling news, which stated that General Rosecrans was operating with an estimated force of 70,000 soldiers, rather than the 60,000 Bragg had initially believed, and the report further noted that more Federal troops were on their way to support the attack.⁶⁶

Following that report, just after midnight, early on January 3, Bragg received a report from Generals Benjamin Cheatham and Jones Withers and endorsed by General Polk, encouraging him to retreat from Murfreesboro.⁶⁷ When Bragg sent word to Polk, rejecting his position on the retreat, Polk was upset at being dismissed so quickly, which he then relayed to General William J. Hardee, stating, "I think the decision of the general unwise, and, am compelled to add, in a high degree."⁶⁸ The condition of the Confederate forces did not improve in the daylight of January 3. As a result, Bragg eventually reevaluated his decision and ordered a retreat to begin that night. Still, the damage to his reputation had already been done, and his commanders once again questioned if he was fit to lead the Army of Tennessee.

In Robertson's reflection on the Battle of Stones River, it is interesting that he only noted assisting in an action, which he may have supported but was not as evident of a contribution as the one he did achieve. Robertson was in no small way responsible for helping to cover Breckinridge's retreat and limiting the severity of his losses in that poor situation. Even William

⁶⁴ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 100.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 95, 100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

Davis gives Robertson credit for helping Breckinridge's force to make it off the battlefield, though his acknowledgment is not without the sting of disapproval, "The whole command retired to the wood from which it began the advance, assisted, at last, by covering fire from Robertson's guns."⁶⁹ The most reasonable explanation for his forgetfulness, or more likely, his blatant omission, is directly connected to him having chosen the side of General Bragg in the controversy that rose between the two generals following the battle. Since Bragg eventually fell out of favor in the Confederate view, and Robertson had been visibly vocal in his support of Bragg, Robertson was likely attempting to avoid associating himself with anything that could present a negative light to his service for the sake of the interview that he knew was being published. As Robertson described Stones River, he only mentions the capturing of the artillery, the defeat of their forces, and that the retreat that followed "was filled with many lessons...for an observant officer."⁷⁰ Following that, Robertson offers his thoughts on soldiers only questioning their generals in private and quipped, "When the generals don't give us victory, they must give us retreats."⁷¹ Aside from this brief commentary on the event, Robertson completely omits his involvement in the controversy between the two generals that occurred afterward and was well-known throughout the commanders of the Confederacy.

General Bragg was not ignorant of the negative publicity he had received in the wake of his retreat from Kentucky in 1862 and did not welcome the negativity about his decision to retreat from Murfreesboro on January 3, 1863. Just as President Davis had supported Bragg after Kentucky, the president continued to support Bragg's decision, as did other members of the Confederate Congress. However, the newspapers were reporting that Bragg had withdrawn from

⁶⁹ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 346.

⁷⁰ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

the fight against the advice of his generals.⁷² The opinion of the public did not concern Bragg quite as much as the claim that his generals had not advised the retreat on January 3, so Bragg sent letters to Generals Polk, Cheatham, Patrick Cleburne, Hardee, and Breckinridge to address the matter. In the letter, he reminded the generals that he had initially resisted their call for a retreat and only consented after receiving word about the Federal reinforcements. Then, Bragg called upon his generals for their support, stating, “Unanimous as you were in council in verbally advising a retrograde movement, I cannot doubt that you will cheerfully attest the same in writing.”⁷³

Following this letter, Bragg sent a second letter asking for his generals to provide their thoughts on General Kirby Smith's presumed attempt to replace Bragg. Misunderstanding Bragg's intentions, his generals believed that he was inquiring about their confidence in his leadership, which helped launch the controversy between Bragg and his commanders.⁷⁴ Generals Hardee, Cleburne, and Breckinridge all concurred that Bragg had lost their confidence in his ability to continue his command, which led Bragg to conclude that there was a conspiracy against him within his command and “it was equally clear, to him at least, that Breckinridge was at its center.”⁷⁵ As a result of his paranoia, Bragg set out to fight against the conspiracy he believed was mounting against him. To Bragg, the most immediate way to address the problem was to control the narrative of the events at Stones River on January 2. Before receiving the battle reports of his commanders, Bragg wrote his own and submitted it to Richmond early.

⁷² Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 115.

⁷³ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 699.

⁷⁴ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 116.

⁷⁵ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 349-350.

Bragg spun the narrative of his report “to show that the failure at Murfreesboro was not his fault” and orchestrated the events to “pass the blame for [the] failure to Breckinridge.”⁷⁶

Over the next few months, Bragg battled against the opinions regarding his leadership and questions about his ability to head the Department of Tennessee. Throughout the ensuing, politically charged battle over Bragg’s command, Robertson remained “a staunch supporter of Bragg.”⁷⁷ Part of the political battle entangling Bragg involved discrediting the actions of General Breckinridge during the Battle of Stones River. Bragg was able to convince Robertson to reconsider his original report on the battle and submit a second, more detailed report in February 1863, focusing on Robertson’s interactions with Breckinridge.⁷⁸ By accepting Bragg’s proposal, “the handsome and ambitious young Captain Robertson” demonstrated that he was, according to historian William Davis, “one...of the army’s most corruptible officers.”⁷⁹ According to Robertson, the battle events depict Breckinridge in a hostile and almost incompetent manner. Considering Breckinridge in this light seems to indicate why Robertson felt he could alter the orders of his commanding major general, who had ordered him to lead his batteries into a dangerous situation.

The situation on the battlefield was, like many others, chaotic and constantly changing, which required the commanders to follow their orders to the best of their abilities and be ready to alter them once they received orders from their superiors. Robertson failed to do so, regardless of the conflict between Bragg and Breckinridge, and Bragg’s suggestion that he alter his report on the battle allowed Robertson the opportunity to justify his actions by also blaming Breckinridge. Furthermore, Robertson likely knew his actions had been questionable, considering that

⁷⁶ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 350-351.

⁷⁷ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 117.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁹ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 342.

Breckinridge had received several statements from “[General] Polk and his staff officers written before the feud with Bragg broke out...[that] had all been critical of Robertson’s conduct on January 2.”⁸⁰ The exact details of the statements Breckinridge received are unknown because he kept them private and had planned to use them as part of his defense before the Confederate Senate, which was never transmitted to them.⁸¹ By altering his report, Robertson could also portray his actions favorably and, like Bragg, get ahead of the negativity cast on him.

The second report that Robertson wrote about Stones River on February 18 expounded upon the battle details on January 2 and questioned Breckinridge's decisions during the afternoon attack. Robertson begins his report by stating that his battery was directed to find an adequate spot “from which the enemy’s line might be enfiladed with artillery,” though the location he discovered was in the possession of enemy soldiers.⁸² After reporting on the position, Robertson states that he received orders from General Bragg to join Breckinridge in preparing to take the position, though in his original report on January 12, Robertson said he had received his orders to join Breckinridge from General Polk.⁸³ The difference in where Robertson received his orders is an important distinction, considering that the main reason Robertson was rewriting this report was at the behest of General Bragg, who deliberately attempted to “saddle Breckinridge with responsibility for the defeat” at Stones River.⁸⁴

In the first report, Robertson excluded any mention that he had interacted with or even spoken to General Breckinridge until the aftermath of the battle. However, in the February 18 report, he included a very different account. Once Robertson’s Battery was in position, he had

⁸⁰ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 359.; Davis also notes that Breckinridge chose not to include the information in his report.

⁸¹ Ibid. This statement is based on Davis’s research, though it is possible the information could have survived in Breckinridge’s papers and be stored away in an archive.

⁸² OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 759.

⁸³ Ibid., 758-759.

⁸⁴ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 129.

time to contemplate his orders as they awaited the arrival of an absent brigade. Therefore, Robertson took the opportunity to discuss the attack with Breckinridge and discovered that “his ideas of the attack and my own differed materially.”⁸⁵ According to Robertson, Breckinridge wanted to use the artillery combined with his infantry to take the hill where Robertson was to locate his battery. However, the orders Robertson claims he received from Bragg stated that he would let the infantry take the hill and then move his battery to the position. Once they disagreed over the method of taking the hill, Robertson said, “General Breckinridge then desired me to form my batteries in the space between his two lines of infantry and advance,” which Robertson declined because of “the danger both of confusion and loss from such an arrangement.”⁸⁶ Once again, Breckinridge attempted to get Robertson to join the assault with the infantry, and Robertson referred to the orders from General Bragg a second time as the reason for his refusal. Robertson then took on the role of a seasoned veteran in the report as he describes trying to plead with Breckinridge to change his ill-fated plan of attack. “I spoke to General Breckinridge and earnestly protested against crowding a field so contracted as the one in which we were to operate with small guns, stating that, in case of a repulse, we would inevitably lose some if they were carried on the field. General Breckinridge, thinking differently, however, formed his batteries and advanced them simultaneously with his infantry and immediately behind it.”⁸⁷ Though Robertson attempted to sway the general with his sound reasoning, his words fell on deaf ears, and Breckinridge moved forward with his plan of advancing his batteries along with his infantry.

The depth of the exchange between Robertson and Breckinridge is far more than a passing comment and would have been worth mentioning in the original report. Though

⁸⁵ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 759.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 760.

Robertson may not have wanted to blame Breckinridge so directly in his report, it seems likely that he would have at least mentioned discussing the plan with the general. At the least, Robertson would probably have mentioned that Breckinridge gave him orders to act as he did, especially considering Robertson's later claim that his original orders had come directly from Bragg. The detailed account in the second report and the utter lack of details in the first report create a cloud of suspicion over the claims' validity and Robertson's integrity.

Following Robertson's claims related to Breckinridge's stubborn commitment to a flawed plan, Robertson then makes another bold claim against the general. Robertson's Battery had joined Breckinridge to help support his artillery, which Robertson notes was formed behind the second line, and Robertson's Battery was behind them. The Confederates began reconnaissance to learn more about the enemy so that the final arrangements could be made for the attack. However, Robertson claims that two pieces of Breckinridge's artillery moved positions and began to open fire on enemy skirmishers. Robertson then boldly asserts that this drew the enemy's attention to the location of the intended assault and was the reason "that we found the enemy's batteries had been located so as to cover completely all the ground over which we would be compelled to pass, and which operated to such an alarming extent on our lines."⁸⁸ By making this claim, Robertson established a convincing case to blame Breckinridge for the impending confusion and retreat.

Soon afterward, the battle began, and Robertson once again mentioned that he did not follow the original plan for the battle, which was to occupy the hill once the Confederates cleared it. Still, the version of events within the second report dramatically differs from the account in his original report. As Breckinridge's forces advanced across the field, Robertson

⁸⁸ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 760.

mentions that the artillery under Breckinridge's command halted under fire from the enemy. His following observation could easily be seen as another barb cast towards Breckinridge's command of his forces during the fight. Once the Federals forced the battery to halt, Robertson said that two pieces of artillery overturned but that "the others had begun firing obliquely to the right, but for a time I thought they were firing into their own men."⁸⁹ The suggestion that the battery was firing in such an undisciplined manner, especially into their fellow soldiers, would directly reflect on their commander for not managing his men more efficiently.

Immediately after describing the deficiency of Breckinridge's artillery, Robertson then launches an unveiled accusation about the ability of the soldiers to clear the position for his battery. In the original report from January 12, Robertson states that he was unable to take position because of Breckinridge's men "not being able to clear the crest of the hill."⁹⁰ However, in the second report, he states that he saw "unmistakable evidences of a retrograde movement," so he "sent word to General Bragg that [he] was satisfied the infantry would be unable to hold their position."⁹¹ Since Robertson could not bring his artillery to the hill, the failure of the infantry caused him to change his position so that he could "bring the guns of Robertson's Battery to bear on the enemy."⁹² Following this explanation for altering his orders, Robertson further explains the gallant actions of his and Semple's Battery in protecting the infantry as they fell back. While describing the prudent actions he took to move his artillery to the tree line to provide a position for the infantry to reform, Robertson also clearly indicates that the loss of their

⁸⁹ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 760.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 759.

⁹¹ Ibid., 760.

⁹² Ibid.

guns and heavy casualties during the fighting were the direct result of all the infantry support having “disappeared.”⁹³

The final dig that Robertson took against Breckinridge had to do with the general being absent while his soldiers were in disarray from the confusion and retreat on the battlefield. Once again, Robertson celebrated the actions he took to get his guns firing as quickly as he could pull them back and into position, and then for taking the initiative to reform another and more secure line “along another skirt of timber.”⁹⁴ From the new position, Robertson began to find some of Breckinridge’s troops but notes that he was “unable to find General Breckinridge for some time” and decided to “regulate the artillery according to [his] own ideas.”⁹⁵ Once he located Breckinridge and discussed his ideas, the general approved his actions and ordered him to proceed. At this point, Robertson notes that the desire to flee had spread from Breckinridge’s infantry and started to infect his men, causing him “to cock [his] revolver and level it in order to bring men to a realizing sense of their duty.”⁹⁶ To punctuate his criticism of how Breckinridge’s command had failed at Stones River, Robertson made one last observation of the chaos that surrounded him in the aftermath of the fighting, “There was no organization that I could see or hear of until after the enemy had been checked, save in the artillery. I have never seen troops so completely broken in my military experience. I tried myself and saw many others try to rally them, but they seemed actuated only by a desire for safety and beyond the reach of other sentiments.”⁹⁷

⁹³ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 760.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 761.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 760.

Naturally, Robertson also made sure to be clear that despite Breckinridge's failures, Robertson's leadership during the fight was, in no small way, the reason the battle had not resulted in a complete loss for the Confederacy. Breckinridge's soldiers had not only failed to push back the Federals but also ran from the field, which opened an opportunity for an advance from the Federal forces. Therefore, Robertson observed, "I am clearly of the opinion that if there had been no artillery on that field, the enemy would have gone into Murfreesborough easily that evening."⁹⁸ The report that Robertson wrote on February 18 echoes some of the information from his original report. It also clearly identified multiple concerns related to Breckinridge, his battle plan, and the actions of his soldiers, all the while portraying Robertson as a model of command. Robertson's second report closely aligns with aspects of Breckinridge's report on the battle from January 1863. Since General Bragg convinced Robertson to write the new report and would have had Breckinridge's report at his disposal, it is not impossible to conclude that Bragg used Breckinridge's report to add the ring of truth to Robertson's claims.

Rightfully, Breckinridge sought justice to exonerate himself from the damaging reports written by Bragg and Robertson. Though he demanded a court of inquiry to investigate the matter, Breckinridge never received justice beyond having his letter requesting the investigation published in the newspapers.⁹⁹ By altering his report for Bragg, Robertson seemed to earn the general's admiration, which Bragg demonstrated by sending him to Richmond in March to deliver two Union flags captured during Stones River.¹⁰⁰ Though he had become a solid ally of General Bragg, Robertson had unwisely brought upon himself the ire of a well-respected and well-connected general within the ranks of the Confederate command. Before the outbreak of the

⁹⁸ OR. vol. 20 pt. 1, p. 760.

⁹⁹ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 131.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

war, Breckinridge served as vice president under James Buchanan and had an unsuccessful campaign for the presidency in 1860, representing the Southern Democrats. He was not a man that Robertson should have dismissed so easily. Breckinridge was sent to support the Confederate efforts to defend Vicksburg, Mississippi, and left Bragg's command for a few months. Still, Breckinridge did not forget the slight against his reputation. Though Robertson possibly felt a close allegiance to General Bragg after he demonstrated his faith in the young captain following the Battle of Shiloh, by altering his report, Robertson ultimately made a decision that reflected his character very poorly.

Following the updated report, Bragg was in dire need of support in the Confederate Congress, and so he relied upon Robertson to meet with several senators to "lobby on [his] behalf."¹⁰¹ According to his biographer, Bragg tended to favor his lower-ranking officers, especially those who had been quiet after the controversy of Stones River.¹⁰² Undoubtedly, Robertson had been the opposite of quiet, going as far as being vocally opposed to Breckinridge on Bragg's behalf. Therefore, it seems natural that when Bragg desired to increase his support within his "substantial lobby in Richmond," he selected "among others, the accommodating Robertson."¹⁰³ Robertson's reason for supporting Bragg is unclear since he purposely dodged the events of the Bragg controversy during his interview. However, Robertson most likely saw an opportunity to advance his military career by attaching himself to Bragg, believing that Bragg would emerge victorious and remember Robertson's support. Unfortunately for Robertson, when he decided to side against Breckinridge, he was unknowingly setting himself apart and embarking on his journey to becoming a pariah within the ranks of the Confederate Army.

¹⁰¹ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 134.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁰³ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 355.

Chapter 8

Reunited at Chickamauga

Jerome B. Robertson and Felix H. Robertson had begun establishing themselves within their commands in the Confederate Army. At the end of the summer of 1863, the father and son had already participated in several key events of the Civil War, including the beginning of the war at Fort Sumter and then the pivotal turning point at Gettysburg. Their experiences during the war greatly differed, with J.B. Robertson seeing more direct battle actions as part of the Army of North Virginia and suffering wounds during battle three times. Felix Robertson got to experience battles, but not as intensely as those his father saw. However, he did get a taste of the politics of military service. Both men were recognized by their commanders, though Felix Robertson developed notoriety with negative connotations. J.B. Robertson was recognized as a capable commander leading his men through his example and commitment to upholding their hard-won reputation. Though each man's path had differed primarily due to the area of the war they fought, the paths of the Robertsons crossed as the summer drew to a close.

By providing an examination of the two Robertsons as they participated in the events around the Battle of Chickamauga, this chapter will continue to develop their leadership during the war. Though the Robertsons were brought together briefly, Chickamauga was the only time they had the opportunity to serve together, which provides an opportunity to evaluate their leadership in tandem. The Battle of Chickamauga allowed Felix Robertson to briefly serve with the Texas Brigade and reconnect with men from his hometown which helps to provide more insight to how he was perceived by others. This chapter's attention to further exploring the service and leadership of both Robertsons adds to a well-rounded discussion of the two men and further develops the reasons why they are deserving of inclusion in Civil War and Texas history.

During January 1863, following the Battle of Stones River, the Army of Tennessee commanded by General Braxton Bragg had been forced back to Tullahoma, Tennessee by Union General William Rosecrans. Bragg anticipated an attack from Rosecrans at any time and prepared his defenses, though Rosecrans went into winter quarters and held back from attacking. Amidst the controversy between Generals Bragg and John Breckinridge, the Army of Tennessee remained at Tullahoma until June 26, 1863. On June 24, Rosecrans moved his army to attack Bragg's flank at Hoover's Gap, which Bragg tried to recover from but could not recapture the pass, so he began evacuating his troops after two unsuccessful days.¹ Through the summer of 1863, Bragg's army retreated from Rosecrans as they made their way to the Tennessee-Georgia border, where Bragg planned to make his stand against his pursuer. As the Army of Tennessee made its way to Chickamauga Creek, Felix H. Robertson received a promotion to major and was given command of four batteries of artillery.²

The Confederates, near Chattanooga, Tennessee, prioritized protecting the city and the railway. In September, General James Longstreet wanted to support Bragg and help him turn back the Federal forces. As a result, he ordered General John Bell Hood's division to northeast Georgia. Once Bragg received word that Hood's Division was arriving in Ringgold, Georgia, by rail, he sent Major Robertson with his artillery to "form a junction with [Hood's] army and come back with him" because Hood had "been forced to leave his artillery behind."³ Due to the pressing danger that Bragg felt from Rosecrans's proximity, he could not spare any of his cavalry units to protect Robertson's artillery and sent him to meet General Hood, saying, "[Y]ou'll have

¹ Scott L. Mingus Sr. and Joseph L. Owen, *Unceasing Fury: Texans at the Battle of Chickamauga, September 18-20, 1863* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2022), 30.

² Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.

³ *Ibid.*

to look out for yourself.”⁴ Robertson was selected to meet Hood because he was in command of Bragg’s Reserve Artillery and could, therefore, be spared to shore up Hood’s command, which he stayed attached to throughout the battle.⁵

Recovering from their participation in the Battle of Gettysburg, many of the soldiers in Hood’s Division rejoined their units to participate in the upcoming fighting at Chickamauga. Those returning included General Hood and General J.B. Robertson, who returned to his Texas Brigade. After Gettysburg, the Texas Brigade eventually relocated to an area south of Fredericksburg, Virginia, in early August and remained until receiving orders to accompany the rest of Hood’s Division and began to move out on September 3.⁶ During this period of downtime, General Robertson kept the soldiers busy with frequent military reviews, but he also regularly had dinner with his close friend from Washington, Captain Tacitus Clay of the Fifth Texas Infantry, who indicated that Robertson “dispenses everything, as he so well knows how to, in a generous and bountiful manner.”⁷ The roughly 800-mile journey of Hood’s Division from Virginia to the area of Georgia near Chickamauga took about eleven days to complete once the men boarded trains. Their lengthy trip again highlights the significant logistical issues the Confederacy faced in transporting their army or supplies. Authors Scott Mingus Sr. and Joseph Owen wrote about the difficulties faced by the Texans of Hood’s Division in traveling to Georgia, describing the ordeal that traveling across the Confederacy entailed. “The trip involved coordinating sixteen different railroads,” which utilized different rail gauges across multiple

⁴ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.

⁵ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881-1901), vol. 30 pt. 2, p. 19 (hereinafter cited as OR; except as otherwise noted, all references are to Series I)

⁶ Mingus and Owen, *Unceasing Fury*, 40.

⁷ John F. Schmutz, “The Bloody Fifth” *The 5th Texas Infantry Regiment, Hood’s Texas Brigade, Army of North Virginia, Vol. 2: Gettysburg to Appomattox* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2017), 74-75.

routes that did not all intersect, which required periodic marches between the depot and added the “time-consuming reloading of the railcars.”⁸

On September 18, Major Robertson was en route to meet Hood’s soldiers and bring them back to Bragg, but he was also the subject of confusion that morning. Initially, Major Robertson should have taken the batteries in his command to report to General Leonidas Polk. However, Polk did not receive notification that Robertson had received alternate orders directly from General Bragg and sent a message noting Robertson’s absence. Polk had planned for Robertson to accompany him and join General Cheatham’s column and wanted to verify Robertson’s orders with command headquarters.⁹ Once Polk inquired about the major’s whereabouts, Robertson was already on his way to meet General Hood’s incoming soldiers. Robertson was careful to avoid the Federal soldiers in the area and sent sergeants and skirmishers ahead of his force to act as scouts. Thanks to this prudent action, Robertson was able to avoid a fight at Reed’s Bridge, “which was held by Yankees,...because his force was not strong enough to attack them,” and he was worried that he only had a limited time to meet up with Hood.¹⁰ The men moved on, and Robertson avoided further issues until they reached a hill where he could see numerous soldiers ahead. The presence of unknown men led Robertson to call a halt until he could determine “whether they were white folks or Yankees.”¹¹

Before taking action, Robertson consulted with Captain Charles Lumsden of Lumsden’s Alabama Battery. Robertson passed along the orders Bragg had given him because he wanted Lumsden prepared to act in case the unknown soldiers fired on him, in which case Lumsden

⁸ Mingus and Owen, *Unceasing Fury*, 39.

⁹ OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 46.; In a report from Bragg’s Assistant Adjutant General, it was reported to Polk that Robertson’s Reserve had been “out of its line of march,” so Bragg “made other disposition of it.” *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.; During the interview, Felix Robertson mistakenly referred to Reed’s Bridge as Berry’s Bridge.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

would “know for himself that they were enemies.”¹² Despite the personal flaws that Robertson had demonstrated by unprofessionally attempting to discredit General Breckinridge, he bravely risked himself rather than his men as he made his way toward the unknown soldiers. As he drew near, Robertson caught sight of a man running across the road, back to his post, alerting the Texan that he was being watched. Robertson likely grew anxious as he approached the soldiers until he was about thirty-five yards away and heard the familiar voice of his father call out, “Why, it’s Felix,” and then saw a group of boys from Washington County run out to greet him.¹³ As exciting as it was to reunite with friends and his father, none of the soldiers had the luxury of time to spend catching up with one another. Major Robertson quickly coordinated with his father, joining his batteries with the Texas Brigade, and prepared to march back to General Bragg. However, now that he had a considerably larger force, Major Robertson first worked with the Texas Brigade to return to visit the Federal soldiers at Reed’s Bridge.

With their defeat at Gettysburg weighing on their conscience, the Texas Brigade was eager to prove themselves again and taste victory after suffering the disappointment of retreating from Pennsylvania. Before the bulk of the fighting began on September 19, 1863, General Robertson and the Texas Brigade participated in more minor actions, such as acting as a rear guard for General Bushrod Johnson’s Provisional Division during his movement on the 18th.¹⁴ One of the minor actions included routing the Federal soldiers from their position guarding the crossing at Reed’s Bridge. Before they approached the position, General Hood arrived, fresh off

¹² Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.

¹³ *Ibid.*; Mingus and Owen, *Unceasing Fury*, 58. In the interview Felix Robertson gave to Helen Pool, he does not identify who called out to him, or even mention seeing his father at Chickamauga, but when he described the event a few years earlier in 1925 at a Confederate Veteran’s Reunion, he did identify his father as having called out to him. Though there were several soldiers who knew Felix, it does seem most likely that his father would recognize him more easily and be more likely to call out to him before the other soldiers.

¹⁴ David A. Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2014), 265.

a train, to consult with General Johnson and take command of the forces. To the men of the Texas Brigade, Hood held a position of almost legendary reverence over them, with which not even General Robertson could compete. Upon Hood's arrival, the Texas Brigade greeted him with great enthusiasm, and he wasted no time ordering units into position to take the bridge and get his soldiers across Chickamauga Creek.

Hood sent parties of infantry to flank the Federal position and ordered Major Robertson to bring his artillery forward and unlimber his guns to prepare for battle. The Federal guns opened fire on the Confederates, and Major Robertson received the order to respond. Sadly, the exchange resulted in a shell fragment killing an unnamed woman observing the fight from Jacob and Sallie Reed's house nearby.¹⁵ General Johnson ordered men forward to deal with the lines of Federal skirmishers to help secure the area for their passage. Seeing the strength and determination of the Confederate numbers, the Federal resistance "quickly gave way," and the Confederates were able to cross the bridge to continue on their way.¹⁶ Hood's forces likely did make for an imposing sight, but the Federals also withdrew because Colonel Robert Minty, commanding at Reed's Bridge, learned that Confederates had outflanked other Federal units in the area at Alexander's Bridge, which also led him to withdraw.¹⁷

The Confederates proceeded with General Hood commanding the Provisional Division, and Major Robertson's batteries and the Texas Brigade accompanied them. They continued their march along the road until they stopped for the night near the Vineyard's House, though they were not in an ideal location and were in for an unpleasant night. According to General Johnson, "The whole Yankee army was in our front (mainly at Lee and Gordon's Mills), on our right flank

¹⁵ Mingus and Owen, *Unceasing Fury*, 63.

¹⁶ Harold B. Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade: Lee's Grenadier Guard* (Fort Worth, TX: Landmark Publishing, 1999), 309.

¹⁷ Mingus and Owen, *Unceasing Fury*, 63.

and rear, while our army was still on the east side of the Chickamauga.”¹⁸ The tension and danger that night came from a Federal force of 14,000 soldiers led by General Thomas L. Crittenden, located just a few hundred yards away. There was no real hope for any support in case of an attack as the only other Confederate forces that had crossed the Chickamauga were a few small cavalry and infantry units.¹⁹ The Provisional Division formed three defensive positions to their front and on both flanks, then Johnson noted that “One-third of our forces was required to remain awake during the night, and the rest slept upon their arms.”²⁰

The battle began in earnest the following day on September 19, though the Texas Brigade spent the first part of their day anxiously awaiting to be called into battle. The terrain around Chickamauga Creek was not an ideal location to easily maneuver an army for battle. All around the battleground were “thick woods, dense undergrowth, and marshy ground cover[ing] the area. A few hills, small cultivated fields, and smaller clearings with cabins and outbuildings dotted the landscape.”²¹ When the call came for the Texas Brigade to join the fight, it was to engage the Federal forces in a counterattack movement as General John Gregg’s men were forced back by Colonel Hans Christian Heg.²² The courageous action of the Texas Brigade helped to save Gregg, who later took his turn commanding the Texas Brigade after J.B. Robertson.²³ These forces were engaged in the area known as Viniard Field, surrounded by a heavily wooded area that created confusion for both sides as they fought for an advantage, gained and lost ground, and traded it back and forth.

¹⁸ OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 453.

¹⁹ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 310.

²⁰ OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 453.

²¹ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 314.

²² Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign*, 453.

²³ Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 196.

Considering the confusion present on both sides of the conflict, General Robertson made multiple command decisions to alter his direction based on the changes in his enemy's position and the landscape. Once again, Robertson found his brigade on the left of General Evander M. Law, who commanded the respect of the Texas Brigade as Hood's junior officer. As they entered the field, Robertson discovered that a small force had appeared on his left, leading him to detach the Third Arkansas to meet the threat. As the brigade continued to march, Robertson suddenly discovered a much larger enemy force to his left as they crested the hill. The Federal troops opened heavy fire on him, prompting him again to adjust his men and ultimately separate from Law.²⁴ The adjustment also separated Robertson from the Fourth and Fifth Texas Infantries and exposed him on his right. However, he was determined to hold the ground until reinforcements arrived.

The Texas Brigade was under heavy fire, but they rose to the challenge and offered fierce combat to their enemy as Colonel John Alexander Martin, commander of the 3rd Brigade, 8th Kansas Infantry, noted, "Robertson seemed to bring 'overwhelming numbers' into action against him" even though "the numbers were probably about even."²⁵ Colonel Martin's description of the battle depicts an admirable determination of Robertson's forces, "[t]he enemy was constantly reinforced...pouring a destructive fire down our line," and in describing the effort of his men trying to press for an advantage he said, "[a]gain and again they formed and advanced, only to be driven back...[a]lmost half of the brigade was killed or wounded."²⁶

The fighting that the Texas Brigade saw on and around Viniard Field was undoubtedly brutal, even coming down to hand-to-hand combat, though it was worth it as members of the

²⁴ OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 510-511.

²⁵ Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign*, 454.; OR. vol. 30, pt. 1, p. 529.

²⁶ OR. vol. 30, pt. 1, p. 529.

brigade in the Fourth and Fifth Texas Infantries were successful in routing the Federals under Heg's command.²⁷ Though the battle was going in their favor, Robertson recognized that his brigade was distressed and needed a reprieve after their long struggle. The opportunity finally came, according to Captain R.J. Harding of the 1st Texas Infantry, as the brigade advanced to an unnamed road and came under the "heavy fire of grape and canister from a battery about 200 yards in advance" which convinced Robertson that they were vulnerable to a flanking maneuver.²⁸ To protect his men, Robertson ordered them "behind the crest of the hill," though their movement encouraged the Federals to advance and attempt to take the hill.²⁹ The Texas Brigade responded with a charge to capture the hill, which cost Robertson three regimental commanders who were wounded taking the hill.

When Robertson could finally reflect on the battle and record his experiences in his official report a few days later, on October 4, one detail of the struggle troubled him. Once the Texas Brigade captured the hill, General Robertson immediately sent "a courier for reinforcements, and a staff officer for a battery" because he knew that his force was too weak to hold the hill on their own.³⁰ The reinforcements led by General Henry L. Benning quickly arrived and assisted in keeping the position until they were withdrawn that night. General Benning performed with "his usual gallantry," but what troubled Robertson was that he could not secure a battery to support the effort of his men.³¹ Robertson sent three messengers who were unsuccessful in getting a battery to come to their aid. Frustrated with the lack of response, General Robertson rode out to get a battery. The general was just as unsuccessful as his

²⁷ Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign*, 480.

²⁸ OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 513.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 511.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

messengers; though he noted he did find a battery, he could not get the “officer in command...to bring his battery up.”³² Which battery and what officer refused Robertson are unknown because he did not identify either one in his report. However, Robertson did note that due to the way the Federals had been “massed in heavy columns,” he believed if he “could have gotten a battery in position [they] could have inflicted heavy loss on the enemy.” Interestingly, though General Longstreet’s report confirms that Major Robertson’s batteries were assigned to General Hood during the battle, Major Robertson was not available to come to the aid of his fellow Texans.³³ It is unknown exactly where the major and his batteries were as they are not explicitly referenced in any of the reports relating to the action on September 20.

During the battle, the men of the Texas Brigade performed admirably under difficult circumstances, and the second day of fighting did not offer any reprieve to the weary soldiers. Beyond the terrain's confusion on the battlefield, the men were also weary from the day before. The brigade, along with the rest of Hood’s command, sprang into action about eleven o’clock that morning, though they had been “drawn up in line of battle” since daylight.³⁴ As the Texas Brigade moved to engage the enemy, they were assailed by Union fire and artillery for most of a mile until they encountered a solid Federal infantry unit supported by artillery on their right, which they quickly turned to address. Even though the brigade endured heavy fire from the infantry unit and artillery, General Robertson led his men through the underbrush and up the hill, attacking as they went with “accurate and heavy fire [that] drove the enemy from the hill.”³⁵ Colonel Van H. Manning, commander of the Third Arkansas Infantry, reported that “the distance

³² OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 511.

³³ Ibid., 288.; General Bushrod Johnson also confirms that Major Robertson was detached from his command to join Hood’s command. Ibid., 453.

³⁴ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 322.

³⁵ Ibid. 323.

and speed with which we were required to move before engaging the enemy, together with the annoyance and confusion consequent upon our moving so close in rear of other troops, threw us into battle under serious disadvantages.”³⁶

Though General Robertson had led his brigade efficiently, they had outpaced the rest of Hood’s soldiers, which left them stranded on the hill with no support and in a precarious position. Just as he had done the day before, Robertson sent messengers to other generals requesting that they “advance with [him]” once he realized his brigade had outpaced the others, “but they failed to do so,” and he moved to take the hill on his own.³⁷ Once they had driven the Federals from the position, the Texas Brigade only held the hill a few moments before “a fire was opened on both [their] right and left flanks,” which Robertson believed came from Confederate positions, the same he had asked to advance with him.³⁸ Captain Harding also reported about the problematic second day as the men not only had to contend with a fierce enemy but also fell victim to “a very destructive fire” from some of the other Confederate regiments.³⁹ The crossfire was highly destructive to the Texas Brigade's position and caused Robertson to fall back to reform due to the confusion that the fire from three sides caused to his line.

While General Robertson was pulling his men back to reform their position, General Hood was with the rest of his forces and witnessed the event, thinking that the Texas Brigade was pulling back, and so he rode to rally his former command.⁴⁰ Robertson brought his men to the shelter of an area of timber, where he noticed General Hood approaching, so he rode to meet

³⁶ OR, vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 513.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 511.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 512.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 513-514.

⁴⁰ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 325.

him and get orders. What happened next marked a turning point in the command of the Texas Brigade. Robertson stated that he approached Hood, and “just as I was on the point of addressing him, he was wounded and carried from the field.”⁴¹ The injury came from a Minie ball that “struck Hood in the upper part of his right thigh, splintering the bone,” and eventually caused his leg to be amputated.⁴² The Minie ball not only marked the end of Hood commanding troops at Chickamauga, but it also ended his time commanding the Texas Brigade in any capacity, and the brigade spent the rest of the war without seeing their former general again. Hood’s injury at Chickamauga also ended the direct engagement of the Texas Brigade in the battle. Robertson still lacked the support he needed to continue his advance, so he formed a line in the protection of the timber until he was ordered by General Law to “form on the left of the division and throw up temporary works” in the front of their position.⁴³ For the next two days after the battle, Robertson’s command stayed on the battlefield “burying its dead and combing through the impedimenta that the Yankees discarded in their hasty retreat from the field.”⁴⁴

As the men of the Texas Brigade carved out a place on the battlefield throughout Chickamauga, they paid a high toll for the ground they gained. Robertson’s report expresses genuine sorrow at the loss of “some of my best officers.”⁴⁵ Throughout all they suffered, the Texas Brigade managed to maintain their composure and performed well on the battlefield. The success of the unit was undoubtedly due to the effort of the individual men, as well as their “aggressive regimental leadership,” which “allowed Robertson’s four regiments to engage and defeat more than twice their number.”⁴⁶ The successful nature of the Texas Brigade was not

⁴¹ OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 512.

⁴² Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 325.

⁴³ OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 512.

⁴⁴ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 330.

⁴⁵ OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 512.

⁴⁶ Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign*, 483.

based purely on luck but on the commitment to excellence and performance under pressure, which was the hallmark of the Texas Brigade, which Robertson had continued to foster and grow under his leadership. Due to his role in the leadership of the Texas Brigade, which is now one of the most well-known Confederate brigades and the most famous infantry unit from Texas, General Robertson earned recognition that has generally gone uncelebrated. Many works include Robertson's leadership, but too often, the majority of the praise and focus is given to General Hood, even when he was not leading the Texas Brigade directly.

Though Robertson's major battlefield engagements as the commander of the Texas Brigade were not as numerous as Hood's at Seven Pines, Gaines' Mill, and Second Manassas, Robertson carried the torch admirably. Famed Texas Brigade historian Harold B. Simpson described Robertson as "an aggressive and fearless leader admired and respected by his men" who, "in keeping with the ancient war cry of the Robertson Clan, [was] "Fierce When Roused."⁴⁷ Historian David A. Powell, who is a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and an authority on the Chickamauga campaign, described Robertson as "a competent commander of significant experience."⁴⁸ Dr. Steven Woodworth, a professor and Civil War historian, stated that the Texas Brigade was where Hood had "first achieved glory" and under the command of Robertson "had lost none of their pride."⁴⁹ Joseph Polley, who was not only the historian of the Texas Brigade but also served in the Fourth Texas Infantry, recalled that Robertson was "brave and capable."⁵⁰ Robertson's leadership also received praise from General Hood himself in regard to the assault

⁴⁷ Harold B. Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood's Texas Brigade* (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas; 1964), 1-2.

⁴⁸ Powell, *The Chickamauga Campaign*, 452.

⁴⁹ Steven E. Woodworth and Grady McWhiney, *A Deep Steady Thunder: The Battle of Chickamauga* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 1998), 49.

⁵⁰ Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 119.

on Little Round Top which Hood counted Robertson among the generals who “nobly led their brave men to this unsuccessful assault.”⁵¹

The Texas Brigade and J.B. Robertson stood out noticeably during the engagement at Chickamauga. However, Major Felix Robertson played more of a supporting role during the engagement. The battle reports do not mention Major Robertson’s name and battery except where previously discussed. The only additional information about their activity comes from a brief report Major Robertson submitted to his commander, included in General Longstreet’s report. In the report, Robertson listed four batteries under his command, Barrett’s, Havis’s, Lumsden’s, and Massenburg’s, which totaled fourteen guns, though Barrett’s battery did not engage during the battle. With the three batteries he did command, there were ten guns that Robertson could utilize for the struggle. Those ten guns managed to fire 151 rounds throughout the battle, during which there were eight casualties, seven horses killed, and four wounded.⁵² By comparison, General Walker’s Division only had two batteries in Palmer’s Battalion of Artillery, totaling ten guns, which managed to fire 237 rounds and had nine casualties: three horses killed and three wounded. Based on those differences, Robertson did not participate in the fighting to the same degree as Palmer’s Battalion. During his interview with Helen Pool, Robertson also glosses over the Battle of Chickamauga. Besides discussing his journey to meet the Texas Brigade and then joining them in taking Reed’s Bridge, Robertson does not mention participating in the action on either day of the battle. The only further mention he made of the fight was to

⁵¹ John Bell Hood, *Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States and Confederate States Armies* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN; 1959), 59.

⁵² OR. vol. 30, pt. 2, p. 292.

state that it “was one of the bloodiest and fiercest of the war” and to describe General Hood conducting himself while bearing his injury from Gettysburg.⁵³

The Battle of Chickamauga was a success for the Confederate forces led by General Bragg, and amidst his defeat, Union General Rosecrans was able to escape to Chattanooga with “two of his three corps leaders...[and] thousands of their troops.”⁵⁴ Several generals contributed to the success of the battle, but General Longstreet recalled that Bragg claimed the victory for himself even though he had been “disengaged from the flow of events.”⁵⁵ Yet, having been commanding the entire battle, Bragg had a better perspective of the situation. Longstreet had failed to notify Bragg of his victory over the Federals in his section, and Polk suffered heavy losses. Earl J. Hess, a biographer of General Bragg, observed that all of Bragg’s subordinates “were willful, unreliable, [and] could not be counted on to obey orders or to cooperate with their commander.”⁵⁶ Ultimately, Bragg’s leadership continued to be a point of contention among the Confederate commanders as they left Chickamauga in pursuit of the Federal forces at Chattanooga. Longstreet and others believed that Bragg should bring the army around to attack Rosecrans and drive him out of Chattanooga or move back to Kentucky. Still, Bragg preferred to bring his army to Missionary Ridge, where they laid siege on Chattanooga. Bragg’s decision to besiege Chattanooga kept Major Robertson and the Texas Brigade in the same vicinity for a little longer.

As Bragg’s forces exited Georgia, General Robertson and the Texas Brigade discovered they had a new commander since General Hood’s injury required a lengthy recovery. The Texas

⁵³ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.

⁵⁴ Earl J. Hess, *Braxton Bragg: The Most Hated Man of the Confederacy* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 166.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

Brigade believed that General Evander Law would command the division in Hood's absence since he had led them at Gettysburg after Hood's injury and again at Chickamauga when Hood was assigned to command the corps. However, General Micah Jenkins, assigned to the division just before Chickamauga, arrived in the area after the battle. Since he held seniority over Law, Jenkins assumed command of the division. Beyond the displeasure that the men felt in losing their preferred commander, Jenkins's rise to leadership marked the beginning of a season of internal conflict for the Texas Brigade, which eventually brought General Robertson to the end of his tenure as the brigade's commander.⁵⁷

Bragg established a strong presence around Chattanooga, which included Hood's Division as part of his left flank on the river. The Texas Brigade spent over a month in their position, establishing impressive breastworks and a series of trenches while they also repeated their behavior at Fredericksburg by establishing a truce with the Federal pickets that included friendly exchanges of conversation, gifts, and card games.⁵⁸ As the Texas Brigade attempted to pass the time, the siege had the desired effect, though the Federal forces were struggling with supplies, and so were the Confederates. Early in the siege, Union officials replaced General Rosecrans with General Ulysses S. Grant, who eventually opened a supply line for the city. In late October, General Bragg ordered Longstreet to mount an attack at Wauhatchie Station, where he learned that a wagon train was resupplying the Federals.⁵⁹

The resulting Battle of Wauhatchie on October 28-29 was a miserable display and did not gain the Confederates anything for their efforts. The lack of success during the conflict was "the result of petty jealousies, a confused battle plan, and failed vertical communications" due to

⁵⁷ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 331-332.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 334-335.

⁵⁹ Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth" Vol. 2*, 117.

Jenkins wanting to demonstrate his abilities as a commander and issuing conflicting orders with Law to the brigades of Hood's Division.⁶⁰ General Robertson's report on the events is straightforward and describes a series of following the orders directed by Law to support his actions.⁶¹ Law and Robertson's Brigades were part of the support units in the engagement, where Colonel John Bratton was in charge of the direct assault, which was to be supported by General Lafayette McLaws. General Jenkins ordered the attack to begin before McLaws arrived to support Bratton. Though the Confederate attack was initially successful, the Federal forces soon received reinforcements, tipping the balance of the battle, which resulted in Jenkins ordering Bratton to fall back.⁶²

The failure of this excursion created a rift between the commanders of Hood's Division. Longstreet favored Jenkins and blamed Laws for abandoning his position, which necessitated withdrawing Bratton for the safety of his unit.⁶³ According to Law, he did not abandon his position but held it so that Bratton could withdraw, and Law did not leave his position until he "received information that Colonel Bratton had been withdrawn."⁶⁴ Similarly, General Robertson also notes that he did not withdraw his unit until he received orders from Law to bring the First Texas Regiment out, which was the last of his units remaining.⁶⁵ Possibly because Jenkins was upset that his chance to impress his superior officers had not gone as he had hoped, he blamed his rival Law and Robertson, who supported Law. Robertson took offense to the insinuation from Jenkins that he and his brigade had "abandoned its position" and issued a terse response stating he had only come out "under orders."⁶⁶ Jeffrey D. Wert, a biographer of General Longstreet,

⁶⁰ Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth" Vol. 2*, 121.

⁶¹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 234-235.

⁶² Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth" Vol. 2*, 119-120.

⁶³ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 218.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 227-228.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁶⁶ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 48-49.

substantiated Robertson's claim by noting that "a courier from Jenkins arrived with orders to retire."⁶⁷ Prior to this event, General Robertson maintained an unblemished service record and demonstrated courage in the most desperate situations. Jenkins's report regarding Wauhatchie was the first incident in which a commanding officer claimed Robertson's leadership was less than satisfactory. However, Wauhatchie's unpleasantness was only the beginning of a difficult situation between Jenkins, Law, Robertson, and Longstreet.

While the events at Wauhatchie unfolded, General Bragg maintained his headquarters on top of Missionary Ridge, though all around him were the signs of a struggling army. The siege was not only effective in causing the Federal forces to feel the pressure of a lack of supplies, but it was also taking its toll on the Confederate forces. Bragg's commanders privately complained about their situation and noted that "the defensive policy pursued by Bragg seemed futile to everyone except Bragg."⁶⁸ By deciding to remain in the area and not bypass Chattanooga in favor of another location, Bragg was attempting to be pragmatic. In Bragg's logic, leaving the area would allow the Federal forces access to Northern Georgia and amounted to a more significant loss to the Confederate cause. Bragg stated that leaving the area "abandoned to the enemy our entire line of communication and laid open to him our depots of supplies,...our battlefield, with thousands of our wounded and his own, and all the trophies and supplies we had won."⁶⁹ Based on this belief, Bragg chose to wait at Missionary Ridge while General Grant replaced General Rosecrans, and still, Bragg waited while Grant gathered his forces to attack near the end of November.

⁶⁷ Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: the Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier: a Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 336.

⁶⁸ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 198.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

The attack began on November 23, and by the end of the next day, Missionary Ridge was the only part of Bragg's position that had yet to be compromised by the Federal assault. As the Federal forces took a position to prepare for the assault, Bragg and his generals conferred with one another and agreed the best course of action was to stay and fight rather than attempt a retreat. The generals believed that the natural high ground gave their smaller forces an advantage over the Federals. The logic of defending from the higher ground would have been a sound conclusion, except that in the several weeks that the Confederates had been at Missionary Ridge, they had not utilized the time to fortify the natural advantages afforded by their position. The Confederates spread their forces into three lines at three intervals on the ridge, at different elevations, rather than consolidating their forces for added strength. Additionally, they had only recently constructed fieldworks, and many of those were not sited adequately, nor did they make good use of the terrain to their advantage. Even Bragg's biographer, Earl Hess, identifies that "Bragg bears the ultimate responsibility for all these problems" since it was his job as the commander of the Confederate forces to ensure their success by securing their position.⁷⁰

Felix Robertson was at Missionary Ridge with Bragg's other forces throughout this time and witnessed the Federal assault on their position. At this time, Robertson's Battery had been transferred under the command of General Joseph Wheeler and was still functioning as the reserve artillery for Bragg's command.⁷¹ When describing the events, Robertson referred to the battle as a "tragedy of the Confederacy," which weighed heavily on him since he was the officer who delivered the news to Bragg that the Confederate lines had been broken by the Federals.⁷² The battle had already begun as Robertson went to inspect some of the artillery in his command

⁷⁰ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 201.

⁷¹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 2, p. 663.

⁷² Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 6, 1927.

when he saw “Yankees sweeping over the crest of the mountain,” and then galloped back at full speed to warn Bragg of the situation.⁷³

The Confederate lines crumbled in the face of the ferocity of the Federal assault, which opened “wide gaps that the Federals were able to exploit.”⁷⁴ According to Robertson, the Confederate forces were “utterly demoralized,” which explained the “four-minute” rapid advance of the Federals to reach the position “where Bragg himself stood.”⁷⁵ The scene was “a heartbreaking exhibition” as Bragg and other officers “resorted to vain encouragement and pleas” towards the soldiers who were abandoning their posts “almost in the face of the [general and his] staff.”⁷⁶ Bragg’s attempt to turn the rout of his men was in vain as “The Army of Tennessee fled the top of Missionary Ridge in something close to a panic.”⁷⁷

While most of Bragg’s men fled, General Patrick Cleburne’s division remained intact and established a line to cover Bragg’s retreat. Major Robertson joined the line and assisted in holding off the Federal advance. During Robertson’s participation in supporting the line, the incident he described in which his servant Isaac performed admirably occurred.⁷⁸ The official reports do not include whether Robertson was part of covering Bragg’s retreat. However, there is mention that Robertson’s Battery suffered eleven casualties during the action of Missionary Ridge.⁷⁹ Along with Robertson’s descriptive account of being assisted by Isaac, it seems likely that he did support Cleburne because it is unlikely that Robertson would manufacture such an

⁷³ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

⁷⁴ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 201.

⁷⁵ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 202.

⁷⁸ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

⁷⁹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 2, p. 684

affectionate story regarding Isaac had it been untrue. Regardless of Robertson's role, the Federals defeated Bragg's forces, "Chattanooga was lost forever [to the Confederates], and the victory at Chickamauga wasted."⁸⁰

In the wake of defeat, the Army of Tennessee was momentarily without a commander since Bragg requested relief from command to allow him a brief rest. Jefferson Davis briefly struggled to decide on Bragg's replacement but finally selected General Joseph E. Johnston to take command.⁸¹ The wounded army made its way to Dalton, Georgia, where Johnston had the men spend their winter despite a call to action from both President Davis and Secretary of War James Seddon. The Confederate officials impressed upon Johnston the importance of resuming an attack on the enemy forces to stem the negativity surrounding their recent defeat. However, Johnston recognized the needs of his men and the damage that the demoralizing defeat at Missionary Ridge had done. Instead of forcing the Army of Tennessee into hasty action, Johnston ensured that their "winter was mainly employed in improving the discipline and equipment of the army and bringing back absentees to the ranks."⁸²

While the Army of Tennessee was recuperating in Northern Georgia, Major Robertson gained promotion to lieutenant colonel of artillery, reporting to General Johnston.⁸³ By May, when the tensions between the Federal and Confederate forces broke into open hostilities again at the onset of the Atlanta Campaign, Lieutenant Colonel Robertson was now part of General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry corps as the commander of the artillery.⁸⁴ At this point, General Sherman had gathered Federal forces together and commenced his march toward Atlanta, with

⁸⁰ Hess, *Braxton Bragg*, 202.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁸² OR. vol. 38, pt. 3, p. 612.

⁸³ The National Archives, *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*, Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214. 3.

⁸⁴ OR. vol. 38, pt. 3, p. 642-643.

Johnston's Army of Tennessee in his path. Though Johnston had spent time increasing the army's morale and restoring their numbers, he was reluctant to attack. He slowly retreated towards Atlanta, shying away from attacking Sherman's forces. Johnston's actions indicate the overall issues regarding his leadership, as he was known to have "wasted opportunities, was inert, or at best failed to use his power."⁸⁵ Robertson was not shy in describing his disapproval of Johnston's actions, stating that "Numerous...opportunities were neglected by Johnston to attack Sherman during that march to Atlanta, and the retreat was drawn out all summer."⁸⁶ Though he believed that Johnston had "missed a fine opportunity," Robertson acknowledged that he did not think Johnston was a coward but was overly concerned with losing his men. The hesitation Robertson described did not bode well for Johnston, and the Confederate officials grew tired of his retreat, so they removed him from his command and replaced him with General Hood on July 18, 1864.⁸⁷

From May 6, throughout the rest of the month, Wheeler's Cavalry Corps was engaged with Federal forces as General Johnston committed his army to their retrograde maneuver. General Wheeler's June 1 report details the period's events and his command's effort to harass the advance of Sherman's forces and protect the Confederate lines. Wheeler engaged the Federal forces led by General John M. Schofield near Tunnel Hill, Georgia, on May 7 after attempting to slow their advance the day before by obstructing roads and passes. As the fighting began, Wheeler's dismounted cavalry faced a line of heavy skirmishers who managed to push them back behind the obstructions and breastworks they had built. At this point, Wheeler states that his

⁸⁵ Archer Jones, "Tennessee and Mississippi, Joe Johnston's Strategic Problem," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1959): 134.

⁸⁶ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

⁸⁷ OR. vol. 38, pt. 3, p. 661.; Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

“artillery was brought to bear upon their line, driving them back from several positions.”⁸⁸ While Lieutenant Colonel Robertson’s artillery support successfully drove back the Federal assault, relieving the rest of Wheeler’s command, the Confederates could not hold the town and abandoned it later that day.

Over the next several days, Wheeler’s Cavalry Corps continued to engage the Federals, which marked another noteworthy experience for Robertson. During the fighting at Chickamauga, Robertson served with one of the most well-known infantry units of the Confederacy, the Texas Brigade. Now that he was a part of Wheeler’s Cavalry Corps, Robertson also had the opportunity to serve with another one of the most well-known Confederate units, Terry’s Texas Rangers, the Eighth Texas Cavalry Regiment.⁸⁹ In addition to Robertson’s other experiences during the war, his service with two famous units, especially the two most highly regarded units from Texas, brings flavor to his Civil War service and adds to the reasons he deserves inclusion in studies of Confederate officers from Texas. Robertson’s artillery continued to support Wheeler during the multiple small engagements that occurred throughout the rest of May 1864. Wheeler’s Cavalry Corps successfully frustrated the Federal forces by capturing, in Wheeler’s words, “over 500 prisoners and five stands of colors...no less than 500 animals, and successfully engag[ing] superior forces of both the enemy's infantry and cavalry, inflicting upon them heavy losses.”⁹⁰ The forces led by Wheeler may have had cause to celebrate some success during May. Still, along with the rest of General Johnston’s army, they were driven back toward Atlanta, where Johnston’s lack of productive action caused his removal.

⁸⁸ OR. vol. 38, pt. 3, p. 944.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 949.

With the change in commanders for the Army of Tennessee, Lieutenant Colonel Robertson remained under General Wheeler, commanding the artillery for his cavalry corps.⁹¹ Though the younger Robertson did not serve as closely with Hood as his father did, he was now officially under Hood's command, just as his father had been for most of the war. As General Hood began to take measures to prevent General Sherman's conquest of Georgia, Felix Robertson received exciting news. On July 26, Lieutenant Colonel Robertson was promoted once more to brigadier general, achieving the same rank as his father.⁹² Other than Robert E. Lee and his sons George Washington Custis Lee, and William Henry Fitzhugh Lee, there were no other father and son generals to serve in the Confederacy. Furthermore, Felix Robertson's promotion further stands out as he was the only native-born Texan to achieve the rank of general in the Confederacy. This is another example of how both the Robertson men deserve more attention and greater inclusion when discussing Texans serving in the Civil War, especially topics relating to Texas generals of the Confederacy.

Robertson's promotion to the rank of general is a somewhat debatable topic, depending on the point of view of the situation. The rank was never officially confirmed by the Confederate Senate. However, Robertson acted as a general and commanded soldiers in battle. Additionally, various reports refer to Robertson as a general. The following chapter will explore, in greater detail, more information related to the controversy of Robertson's rejected nomination to the rank of general. By the time of Robertson's promotion, he had demonstrated his ability to be an effective artillery commander. Outside of the political bickering that Robertson became entangled between Generals Bragg and Breckinridge, his battlefield service had received praise

⁹¹ OR. vol. 38, pt. 3, p. 668.

⁹² The National Archives, *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*, Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214. 4.

from his superior officers, even Breckinridge. General Wheeler delivered additional evidence supporting the quality of Robertson's leadership as he extended the praise and thanks of General Johnston towards Wheeler's Cavalry Corps in a report on June 18, 1864, which Robertson supported as the commander of their artillery.

Wheeler wrote, "For two months, you have been constantly under the fire of and engaging a powerful foe. In every movement of our army, you have been between it and the enemy, hurling back his exulting advance and holding him in check until our entire army had quietly prepared to receive and repulse his gigantic assaults. Every attempt to turn our flanks or strike our communications has been baffled by your promptness, activity, and valor. You have labored both night and day without a murmur; you have built fortifications and held long lines of works when attacked by the enemy's infantry, even [against] ten times your numbers."⁹³ The report did not single out Robertson, but he led the artillery whose support contributed to the success of the rest of the cavalry corp. Had Robertson's leadership been ineffective during this period, he likely would not have received the promotion to general.

As General Hood took command of the situation in Georgia, the Federal forces under Sherman pressured the Confederate troops severely. Hood began to form a response to protect Atlanta, which included an aggressive offensive campaign that General Johnston had been reluctant to pursue. Robertson recalled Hood's leadership fondly, describing him as "a very fine commanding officer" who served "with distinction" despite the severe injury he had received at Chickamauga, which resulted in the amputation of his leg.⁹⁴ Part of Hood's plan to defeat the Federals included sending a diversionary force around Sherman's army and into Tennessee in the

⁹³ OR. vol. 38, pt. 3, p. 950.

⁹⁴ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

hope that it would draw away some of Sherman's forces to deal with the new threat. To execute this plan, Hood selected General Wheeler, who took along General Robertson into Tennessee.

As General Wheeler moved toward Tennessee, he was first tasked with harassing Sherman to bait his attention, as he had conducted his forces in May. During the last several days of July, Wheeler's soldiers and Robertson attacked the Federal lines that Sherman desired to support his Georgia invasion. The Confederates successfully ended the advance of three divisions, Generals Gerrard, McCook, and Stoneman, whose defeat, according to Wheeler, "destroyed the flower of General Sherman's vast cavalry organization."⁹⁵ Between the three divisions, their numbers equaled 9,400 cavalry soldiers, which Wheeler's smaller force of about 3,800 men defeated. Additionally, Wheeler reported that the brigade commanders revealed their plans to him, which included bringing their forces together near Macon to destroy the railroad and then move to Andersonville to free the prisoners of war held there.⁹⁶

The second blow struck against Sherman's forces occurred around Dalton, Resaca, and Tunnel Hill. Wheeler's men destroyed railway lines to ensure the Federals could not use them and then captured 1,020 cattle and several wagons.⁹⁷ The intention of the attack had been to not only upset the ability of the Federals to supply themselves but also to bring part of Sherman's forces away from Atlanta. The attack failed in its objective because, as Robertson noted, "Sherman...paid little attention to this maneuver. He had already conceived his march to the sea."⁹⁸ As Sherman planned to rain destruction on the Confederacy, he first had to capture

⁹⁵ OR. vol. 38, pt. 3, p. 957.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 951.

⁹⁸ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 8, 1927.

Atlanta. While he was busy there, Wheeler's Cavalry Corps continued into Tennessee to upset the Federal forces and disrupt their plans.

Wheeler's forces again began to assault the Federals wherever they found them as they journeyed to Tennessee. As the army neared Knoxville, General John Stuart "Cerro Gordo" Williams, who had gained attention during the Mexican-American War, requested that he be allowed to take two additional brigades and half of the artillery to capture the garrison at Strawberry Plains and destroy the bridge there.⁹⁹ Wheeler granted the request, which included sending General Robertson because Williams had urged the matter and promised to rejoin their forces that night. Wheeler later complained that not only had Williams failed to meet his objectives, but that he had also caused Wheeler "the embarrassment of making numerous delays" while waiting to bring all of his forces together "to carry out the principal part of the expedition."¹⁰⁰ Though Wheeler did not comment on why Williams's force had been unsuccessful, Robertson recalled the events in his interview. When Williams arrived at Strawberry Plains, they discovered that the town was "fully garrisoned," and after studying the situation and firing on it in a "desultory fashion," Williams decided to leave it and rejoin Wheeler.¹⁰¹

As Williams and his forces made their way toward General Wheeler, a fierce storm caused the waters in the Tennessee River Valley to rise and cut off the direct path to Wheeler, forcing Williams to take a slower mountainous path instead. The path increased the delay further, and Robertson noted that they were about two days behind the march of General Wheeler. Once Williams failed to meet Wheeler at Calf-killer Creek, the Confederates increased their pace and

⁹⁹ OR. vol. 38, pt. 3, p. 959.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 8, 1927.

continued to try and catch up with Wheeler's army. Their path took them dangerously close to Murfreesboro, which they discovered was also heavily garrisoned and could not be attacked, forcing them to try and march around the city. As careful as Williams's soldiers had been in trying not to alert the Federals and avoid conflict, they were unsuccessful. Robertson described his discovery, "At dawn the next morning, [he] was startled to see a force of Yankee soldiers, the Second Kentucky Cavalry, hotly pursuing them from the Federal garrison."¹⁰²

Robertson vividly recalled the encounter in precise detail, which was lacking in other events he discussed during the interview with Helen Pool. Suddenly, the Federal cavalry was racing toward them, kicking up dust from the pounding of their horses as they thundered down the road. Robertson saw the oncoming wave and alerted the rest of their forces, calling Captain Pugh to note their position, as he had command of the only artillery Williams had with them. Robertson then called to Major Davant of the Fifth Georgia Regiment to join him in a charge against the Federals as he began loading his six-shooter.¹⁰³ As Robertson and Davant's men began ready their charge, Captain Pugh fired a roaring blast from his cannon, and though his excitement caused him to miss the Federals, he managed to strike a tree, breaking off a large limb that fell in front of the Federals, disconcerting their charge. Immediately, Robertson made use of the disruption to attack, and with the ringing of the cannon blast still in his ears, he opened fire with his pistol, his first shot hitting a Federal soldier in the chin and neck. Following his success, Robertson described how he managed to effectively use "his unerring pistol, mortally wound[ing] the Yankee commanding officer," who was then unsaddled by Major Davant.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 8, 1927.

¹⁰³ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 11, 1927.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Amazingly, Robertson notes that of his six shots, he only wasted one as he fired at another mounted soldier who managed to evade the shot, but as he was “bending low on the other side of his horse and galloping by, Robertson laid his pistol over the man's saddle pommel and fired.”¹⁰⁵ The last two bullets from Robertson’s gun found their Federal targets during the short-lived but heated exchange. Along with Davant and his men, Robertson led a successful charge, turning the Federal cavalry and causing them to flee back to the city.

After the morning’s excitement, the Confederates likely paused to savor their victory until their mood was suddenly soured by the shouts from their ranks that the fallen soldiers wore the gray of the Confederacy!¹⁰⁶ Robertson’s mind raced, wondering “[w]hether there had been some mistake, or whether the enemy had attempted to gain an advantage by wearing the gray.”¹⁰⁷ He then went to find out for himself and inspect the fallen soldiers. Robertson was relieved to discover that the soldiers were indeed wearing Union blue and that the “peculiar brown dust of the road...had created the illusion.”¹⁰⁸ Upon this realization, Robertson then took the opportunity to examine the soldiers he had shot and remarked that “I was well satisfied with my marksmanship.”¹⁰⁹ News of the fight was delivered to General Williams, who ordered the soldiers to quicken their march, and no further fighting resulted from their presence in the area.

The clarity with which Robertson recalled the details of this minor encounter stands out as unusual compared to how he described other events. What is specifically interesting about this account is that he could recall the placement of the bullets that struck the Federal soldiers but glossed over other events. Additionally, as Robertson described the shot that hit the Federal

¹⁰⁵ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 11, 1927.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

commander, he said that he retrieved the body and found that the bullet “had gone in about where the suspenders crossed in the back,” which is an odd way to describe a bullet wound that should have entered from the front.¹¹⁰ Based upon Robertson’s account, it sounds as though the bullet entered from the back, which would indicate that Robertson shot this soldier from behind and begs the question of whether or not this commander was in the act of retreating when he was shot or had he just turned to give orders as Robertson attacked? A fair reason to doubt Robertson’s account is found through his omission of another significant event during his war experience, which occurred shortly after his encounter with the Federal cavalry outside of Murfreesboro.

The Civil War experiences of J.B. and Felix H. Robertson demonstrated that each man held the qualities to become a general as they rose through the ranks. The service of each Robertson revealed more about their character, and their actions identified the success of their leadership. J.B. Robertson proved that he could maintain calm during battle and read the battlefield to make decisions in the interest of his soldiers. Both of these were admirable qualities for a general. However, the positive traits Felix Robertson had demonstrated before achieving the rank of general seemed to fade and be replaced by less desirable qualities, which were revealed when he accompanied General Williams through Tennessee. While their character and leadership styles may have differed, both General Robertsons continued to prove that their story should be acknowledged and included in discussions of Texas history and Texas generals in the Civil War.

¹¹⁰ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 11, 1927.

Chapter 9

Court Martial and Massacre

Before the outbreak of the Civil War, J.B. and Felix Robertson were on separate paths. J.B. Robertson lived a life of service as a physician through his military service and his political positions. Felix Robertson's life was just beginning, and he was following a path that could have also focused on serving others through a career in the United States Military had the Southern states not seceded, and he had graduated from West Point. During J.B. Robertson's time in the Confederate Army, he continued to demonstrate his devotion to service by prioritizing the care of his men and their preparation for battle. Initially, Felix Robertson demonstrated the exuberance of youth and desired recognition for meritorious service to the Confederacy. However, as he grew closer to General Braxton Bragg, the younger Robertson proved that he also yearned to rise to position, power, and influence by aligning himself with Bragg's plan to discredit General John Breckinridge.

During the various battles that each of the Robertsons participated in before the fall of 1863, their military paths also significantly differed. Though J.B. Robertson had been a part of the Army of Northern Virginia serving in the eastern campaigns of the war, and Felix Robertson had been a part of western campaigns, their paths merged at Chickamauga. Following the pivotal defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Chickamauga represented a final hope for the Confederacy. Though the two Robertsons did not realize it, the battle was also the final gasp of hope for father or son to serve gloriously. In the aftermath of Chickamauga, as the ability to maintain control of the war slipped away from the Confederacy, so did the Robertsons's ability to stay in favor with their commanders. J.B. Robertson began to feel the sting of politicized bickering when General Micah Jenkins sought to blame him for the failure of the attack at Wauhatchie and planted seeds

with General James Longstreet, further discrediting Robertson. However, Felix Robertson's downfall was of his own making and occurred several months after his father's ill-fated battle with the machinations of Jenkins and Longstreet.

This chapter's focus will analyze the major scandals that occurred near the end of both Robertsons's service in the Confederate Army. J.B. Robertson's scandal resulted from his commitment to his soldiers, which has been previously demonstrated, and will be examined further in this chapter. While the resulting court martial is an integral part of Robertson's story, it should not define his military experience and serves to demonstrate why the lack of more focused inclusion of Robertson in historical studies should be rectified. Alternatively, Felix Robertson's scandal warrants further studied to identify the full scope of culpability and likely should be a defining aspect of the younger Robertson's military experience. Still, much like their paths once again diverged after Chickamauga, the reasons to remember the Robertson men also diverged and set father and son apart for their deeds and actions as generals in the Confederacy. Though often overlooked, the Robertsons deserve recognition for their service to Texas and the Confederacy, for better or for worse.

In the aftermath of the failed action at Wauhatchie, General Bragg blamed General Longstreet, labeling him as ineffective, and sought to transfer him out of his command. However, President Davis suggested a better use of Longstreet and his division rather than transferring Longstreet. Since Bragg was feeling strained from trying to maintain the siege around Chattanooga while the Federals attempted to relieve their comrades, Longstreet's Corps was sent further east into Tennessee to place pressure on the Federal forces and try to draw them away from Chattanooga.¹ While these discussions occurred, J.B. Robertson was dealing with a severe

¹ John F. Schmutz, *"The Bloody Fifth" The 5th Texas Infantry Regiment, Hood's Texas Brigade, Army of North Virginia, Vol. 2: Gettysburg to Appomattox* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2017), 122-123.

problem and was also accused of being ineffective. Generals Jenkins and Longstreet intended to hold Robertson accountable for their perception of his failure at Wauhatchie.

The battle occurred on October 28, and almost immediately, Jenkins and Longstreet prepared to make Robertson their scapegoat. On November 1, Longstreet filed a report with Bragg's Assistant Adjutant General, Colonel George William Brent, calling for Robertson's removal from command "pending the proceedings of the board now examining his case."² Longstreet went on to state that Robertson had "been complained of so frequently for want of conduct in time of battle that I apprehend that the abandonment by his brigade of its position of the night of the 28th may have been due to his want of hearty co-operation."³ The claim made by Longstreet was unfounded and only referred to Robertson's actions at Chickamauga, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, were not questionable as insinuated by Longstreet. Instead, after Hood's injury at Chickamauga, Robertson had been open about his displeasure with Jenkins being chosen over General Evander McIver Law to lead Hood's Division.

The accusations against Robertson are surprising upon further reflection of the positive record that Robertson had previously established with his brigade and in the division. In response to the charges, Robertson simply offered that his brigade had not abandoned their position but "came out under orders, the object for which it went in having, according to my understanding, been accomplished."⁴ According to Harold B. Simpson, there was part of Robertson's command that did panic during the engagement, which is "the only instance [that] the brigade or a segment

² U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881-1901), vol. 31 pt. 1, p. 466-467 (hereinafter cited as OR; except as otherwise noted, all references are to Series I)

³ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 466-467.

⁴ Harold Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood's Texas Brigade* (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas, 1964), 48-49.

of the brigade was routed during the war,” though he does not provide any indication that Robertson intentionally abandoned their position.⁵

The situation at Wauhatchie provided Jenkins and Longstreet with an opportunity to eliminate the opposition to Jenkins and shift blame away from either of them for the failing action during that battle. The next day, November 2, Special Orders No. 284 were issued by Colonel Brent, relieving Robertson from duty during the proceedings of his case.⁶ The frustration that Robertson felt likely mirrored those felt by General Breckinridge when General Bragg and Felix Robertson skewed events to blame him for the failure of Murfreesboro. Similarly to Breckinridge, J.B. Robertson had also not acted in a way that warranted his situation. Though faced with having to defend his actions, it seemed fate had decided that the father would pay for the son's sins. Fortunately for Robertson, six days later, he was restored to duty when the proceedings of the examining board were suspended in Special Orders No. 290.⁷ The Texas Brigade received orders to march east to Knoxville on November 5, 1863. The orders were timely, and though they temporarily spared J.B. Robertson from facing the erroneous charges, Jenkins and Longstreet waited patiently to press the issue again.

The Texas Brigade, along with the rest of Hood's Division under the command of General Jenkins, was being sent out into Tennessee to rendezvous with General Wheeler's cavalry at Sweetwater. The beginning of the East Tennessee Campaign did not bode well for the men and acted as a prelude to the poor conditions ahead. The Texas Brigade was supplied with rations to prepare food for ten days but could not cook their food properly since the cooking supplies had already been sent out. Then, once they set out, the Texas Brigade was supposed to

⁵ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 48. (Footnotes)

⁶ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 467.

⁷ Ibid.

board a train at Missionary Ridge, but there was no train waiting. Without a train to carry the weary members of the brigade, they had to march on to Tyner's Station. What made this delay particularly miserable was the bitterly cold sleet storm that plagued their march, which they endured throughout the night. Though the Texans had tried to make up for their delay by marching all night, no trains were waiting at Tyner's Station either. Robertson allowed the men to rest and recover, hoping that the trains would soon arrive, but after three days of waiting, he finally gave up and ordered the men back on the march to Cleveland, where they finally found train cars.⁸

The Texas Brigade likely recalled their experience traveling to Northern Georgia before the Battle of Chickamauga as they marched across Tennessee attempting to locate a train. Just as their previous journey revealed the Confederacy's poor system of railroads, the rail journey during the East Tennessee Campaign confirmed and amplified the issues. The train engines were unable to pull the hulkingly heavy train cars over hills, so instead of a restful and swift journey, each time the train came to a hill, the men had to hop off the train. Once they had unloaded, they were forced to "trudge up the muddy road and then catch the train again on the downgrade."⁹ Traveling in this manner, the men would have found it difficult to be lulled into any state of comfort by the rhythmic clacking of the rails as they traversed the countryside, making them tired and weary from their journey. In addition to the poor transportation, the Texas Brigade and others in the division struggled with their rations. The men discarded their rations along the route north because they were often inedible. One of the soldiers of the First Texas Regiment described the flour they were issued as "wheat, straw and boards ground together" and speculated that it

⁸ Harold B. Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade: Lee's Grenadier Guard* (Fort Worth, TX: Landmark Publishing, 1999), 346-347.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

“should have been given to horses rather than to men.”¹⁰ Robertson’s displeasure with these poor conditions and the burden of traveling through the rough weather likely brought his concern for his men to the forefront of his mind throughout the period.

While the rest of the division became part of the siege at Knoxville, where General Ambrose Burnside commanded the Federal forces, General Longstreet ordered Robertson and the Texas Brigade to support the cause by protecting the area around Loudon during mid-November. After a few days, Longstreet called Robertson to join his lines at Knoxville, where the Texans saw a little action during the conflict beginning November 23. The Texas Brigade opened the attack against the Federal lines and was able to push back the enemy after a stubborn resistance until they finally “gave way in some disorder.”¹¹ The Federals fell back to a defensive position, and for the rest of the siege, the Texas Brigade exchanged sniper fire with their enemies. J.B. Polley described the skill of the Federal soldiers, stating that the Texas Brigade had “found foemen as daring, as courageous and as accurate of aim as themselves...to be seen was to be shot at, and many a poor fellow fell dead or wounded at the moment he felt himself most safe.”¹² Throughout the siege, in addition to the danger posed by the Federal bullets and artillery, food and clothing supplies continued to be an issue. The uniforms that the Texas Brigade wore were “mostly threadbare,” and there was still a profound lack of footwear to the point that “[m]any of the boys in the ranks were barefooted.”¹³

Despite the harsh conditions, the Texas Brigade continued to support the war effort to its fullest. Longstreet had planned to continue the siege and wanted to find a way to break through

¹⁰ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 347.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹² J.B. Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade, Its Marches, Its Battles, Its Achievements* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Press, 2017), 117.

¹³ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 353.

the Federal lines to force a victory. However, he decided to withdraw from the area once Longstreet learned that Federal reinforcements were en route to relieve General Burnside. On December 2, Longstreet's forces began to leave the area, though he needed to ensure their safe withdrawal. The Texas Brigade and General Evander Law's Brigade and artillery support covered the retreating Confederate forces and acted as a guard for the trains. While Longstreet's forces moved away from Knoxville and began to head toward Virginia, Longstreet received word of a Federal force at Bean's Station, and he decided to attempt to surprise and capture their forces.¹⁴

From December 4 through December 8, Robertson's Texas Brigade and Law's Brigade marched approximately sixty miles toward Rogersville while guarding Longstreet's baggage and ordnance trains.¹⁵ Longstreet's forces arrived the following day. On December 10, Longstreet received word from President Davis that granted him full authority over the troops in his command, the Department of East Tennessee. Longstreet utilized his newfound authority to immediately countermand an order from General Bragg to return a cavalry brigade commanded by General William T. Martin so that he could retain their service.¹⁶ Davis's decision to increase Longstreet's authority was a pivotal turning point in the way that Longstreet commanded his army and a decision that had vital consequences for Generals Robertson, Law, and Lafayette McLaws. General Robertson had gotten a small taste of military-political infighting several weeks before after Wauhatchie. However, with Longstreet's newfound authority, Robertson was about to learn first-hand that political fighting in the military could be just as vicious as facing the enemy in battle.

¹⁴ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 463.

¹⁵ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 359.

¹⁶ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 463.

The Federal forces at Knoxville received orders to follow Longstreet and drive him from eastern Tennessee, and though they made an effort to fulfill their mission, they were ultimately unsuccessful. One such instance occurred when General John Grubb (J.G.) Parke mounted an attempt to remove Longstreet from the area near Bean's Station. Once Longstreet learned of the presence of the Federal soldiers in his vicinity, he formulated a plan to engage and defeat the enemy. Longstreet's infantry soldiers, which included Robertson's, Law's, and McLaw's Brigades, were to march down to Bean's Station from Rogersville, while Martin's four brigades of cavalry attacked opposite Bean's Station, and General William E. Jones led another two cavalry brigades to prevent a Federal escape through Bean's Station Gap.¹⁷ During the engagement, Robertson's Texas Brigade did not see any significant action but was eventually called upon to support the cavalry and came under some artillery fire throughout the conflict.¹⁸

Longstreet reported that on December 13, the infantry arrived and surprised the Federal forces completely. General Jones also arrived in good time and captured several enemy wagons but had not understood the information regarding the movement of Longstreet's other forces, withdrew from the fight, leaving the infantry and artillery on their own to drive the enemy back on December 14. Longstreet noted that General Bushrod Johnson met strong resistance as the enemy fell back to the buildings of Bean's Station, where General Joseph B. Kershaw of McLaw's Division arrived to offer support. According to Longstreet, Kershaw "executed his orders literally and promptly," but it was not enough to "catch the enemy's cavalry."¹⁹ The Confederate forces had to stop their advance as the night became too dark to proceed, so the

¹⁷ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 463.

¹⁸ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 361.

¹⁹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 463.

Federals used the opportunity to move to a strong position strengthened by “rail defenses and some reinforcements” three miles away.²⁰

The following morning, General McLaws received orders to send a brigade to capture a part of the Federal force stranded in a gap, but McLaws sent word to Longstreet that “his troops had had no bread rations for two days.”²¹ Longstreet reinforced the orders and added that McLaws should “hurry his rations up and have them issued and cooked at once.”²² Meanwhile, Robertson’s and Law’s Brigades had been guarding Longstreet’s trains, and Law was ordered to join General Jenkins on December 13 but did not arrive. Once again, on the evening of December 14, Law was ordered to join Jenkins the following day. Even still, Law did not arrive until after three o’clock that afternoon, and by that time, the Federal forces had been reinforced with infantry units. According to Longstreet, if Law marched at his appointed time of six o’clock that morning, then it took him almost eleven hours to march as many miles, which was too slow by Longstreet’s estimate. That evening, Longstreet ordered McLaws to support Jenkins in case the enemy advanced. Once again, McLaws reported that his men still had no rations, but he sent a brigade despite their condition.

The Federals made no move to attack the Confederate lines on the night of December 15. The following morning, the Confederates found that the Federals were beginning to retreat. Longstreet ordered General Martin’s cavalry, with Hood’s Division commanded by Jenkins, to pursue and capture the Federals. However, when Longstreet arrived at the front of the lines, Law complained to him about his men’s hardships, and McLaws reported again that his men had yet to receive any food. Longstreet believed that “there seemed so strong a desire for rest rather than

²⁰ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 463.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 464.

²² *Ibid.*

to destroy the enemy, that I was obliged to abandon the pursuit, although the enemy was greatly demoralized and in some confusion.”²³ Longstreet was frustrated by his commanders' lack of desire to pursue the enemy and stated that “This was the second time during the campaign when the enemy was completely in our power, and we allowed him to escape us.”²⁴ Though Longstreet desired to blame Law and McLaws for the enemy’s escape, he also mentioned in his report that he sent Martin’s cavalry to pursue them but that General Francis Armstrong reported the enemy’s retreat was “so rapid that he could not bring him to a stand.”²⁵ How Longstreet expected infantry units to be able to pursue and halt an enemy that could evade the pursuit of cavalry forces is unknown.

Following the escape of Parke’s Federal forces, Longstreet’s forces captured some of the supplies that Parke left behind as he retreated. For the first time in several weeks, the Confederates had access to coffee and sugar, which were precious commodities during the war.²⁶ Once Longstreet realized that General Parke was not making any further attempts to advance on the Confederate position, he ordered his forces to move into winter quarters at Morristown. Throughout the winter encampment, Robertson’s Texas Brigade saw little action. However, they were called upon several times to leave the comfort of their winter quarters and plod out into the snow with their shabby uniforms and lack of shoes. The winter weather was harsh and unpleasant, and the conditions the soldiers endured with “provisions, clothing, and shoes either worn out or in short supply” did not improve their experience. Unlike the previous winter, there were no generous citizens in the vicinity to help supply the Confederates with anything to ease

²³ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 464.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 361.

the difficulties of the winter. It was during this winter encampment that Longstreet had encouraged the men to make shoes, which the soldiers referred to as “Longstreet’s moccasins.”²⁷

The brutal winter conditions were not the only trials the Texas Brigade faced through the winter encampment. Longstreet used the time to prune the commanders from his department that did not wholly support him, which meant that he could remove the opposition to General Jenkins’s command of Hood’s Division. Generals McLaws, Law, and Robertson were each attacked by Longstreet, with the support of Jenkins, and all three generals were removed from their commands. Part of the affair resembled General Bragg and Felix Robertson’s attempt to discredit General Breckinridge after Murfreesboro. Longstreet wrote his original report, which included the events at Bean’s Station, on January 1, 1864, but then wrote a brief addendum on January 19.

In this additional report, Longstreet described an event on the southern side of the Holston River near Bean’s Station involving the three generals he sought to remove. Longstreet stated that Law and Robertson received orders to make a diversionary attack while McLaws assaulted an unnamed fort that the Federals held. McLaws succeeded in “turning the enemy’s position and got possession of his trenches at the point of his attack.”²⁸ The diversionary movement of Robertson and Law successfully prevented the enemy’s reserves from reinforcing the fort that McLaws had attacked. Though the report initially seems to commend the three generals for their successful cooperation, Longstreet harshly criticizes their actions after his initial statements. Longstreet noted that the Federal forces in the fort numbered about 150 men,

²⁷ David H. Hamilton, *History of Company M First Texas Volunteer Infantry Hood’s Brigade* (W.M. Morrison: Waco, TX; 1962), 41.

²⁸ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 466.

and though their reinforcements had been prevented from reaching the fort, “our troops did not enter, and the enemy recovered courage and again opened fire.”²⁹

While the report sounds disparaging of Robertson’s, Law’s, and McLaw’s decision to allow the Federals to maintain their position in a fort held by such a small number, Longstreet’s addendum suffers from substantial inconsistencies with his original report. First, Longstreet does not explicitly mention when this supposed action from the three generals occurred. Secondly, Longstreet does not provide a name for the fort, which is problematic since no mention of such a fort appears in his original report. Thirdly, the fact that Longstreet included Robertson in the alleged action directly contradicts his original report, which indicates that Robertson’s forces were left behind to continue guarding Longstreet’s train. Finally, Longstreet’s inclusion of Robertson in this action is also in direct conflict with General Jenkins’s complaint against Robertson, which stated that Robertson had refused to move from his position during the events at Bean’s Station.³⁰ Additionally, Longstreet could not be referring to an event that occurred outside of the action around Bean’s Station, as there was no further action after that engagement before General Law resigned his position on December 19, and Longstreet recorded that he had removed McLaws from his command around the same time.³¹

Robertson’s service had been worthy of praise throughout the war; however, his manner and extreme concern for his men were not always received well by his superiors. During the time that the Texas Brigade spent at Bean’s Station, Robertson allowed his frustration regarding his men’s poor conditions to get the better of him. When Robertson vented his frustration, his words became scrutinized, resulting in a court-martial based upon charges brought by General Jenkins.

²⁹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 466.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 470.

³¹ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 376.; OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 467-468.

According to Jenkins, during action near Bean's Station, Tennessee, Robertson had engaged in "[c]onduct highly prejudicial to good order and military discipline."³² The specifics of the charge stated that when Jenkins had ordered Robertson to advance, he protested the orders and said he would require them in writing and would only then carry them out under protest. Furthermore, Jenkins stated that Robertson had gathered the regimental commanders of his brigade together to express his lack of confidence in the campaign due to their lack of rations and supplies, which would cause them to retreat following the next engagement regardless of its outcome.³³ Jenkins proceeded with the charges under the full support of General Longstreet, who believed that Robertson "appeared more worried about his men's health and living conditions than he was in winning the war."³⁴

Based upon Robertson's nature, as previously revealed, the welfare of his men was always at the forefront of Robertson's concern. Therefore, it is only natural that a man who had consistently demonstrated that nature since joining the Texas Brigade would continue to be as passionate. The previous winter, the Texas Brigade had received helpful assistance from the people of Virginia, yet in Tennessee, the citizens did not provide the brigade with any such gifts, and food rations were miserable, consisting of "too little meat that was often sticky or slimy, and sometimes sparkled with an ominous blue hue."³⁵ Considering the winter conditions that the brigade faced, their supplies running low, and the fact that they were not receiving any aid from the people of Tennessee, it is understandable that tensions would be high among the enlisted men and, therefore, weigh heavily on a commander such as Robertson. It was also not out of character

³² OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 470.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Susannah J. Ural, "A little body of Malcontents': a new commander helped restore the Texas Brigade's sagging morale," *Civil War Times* (June 2014): 69.

³⁵ Susannah J. Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade: The Soldiers and Families of the Confederacy's Most Celebrated Unit* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 197.

for Robertson to refuse an order that he believed risked his men's health. In a previous incident, Robertson had ignored an order from headquarters that would have required him to march "his barefoot men in the snow, when their bleeding feet the day before had left stains along the road."³⁶

The specifics of what Robertson said are unknown, but General Jenkins's complaint against Robertson, witnessed by the commanders of the First, Fourth, and Fifth Texas Regiments, claimed that the substance of Robertson's statement was as follows. Robertson complained, "[t]hat there are but three days' rations on hand, and God knows where more are to come from; that he had no confidence in the campaign; that whether we whipped the enemy in the immediate battle or not we would be compelled to retreat, the enemy being believed by citizens and most others to be moving around us, and that we were in danger of losing a considerable part of our army."³⁷ After identifying his aggravation with their situation from a military point of view, Robertson began to express his concerns regarding his men's health and well-being. Jenkins reported that Robertson said "that our men were in no condition for campaigning; that General Longstreet had promised shoes, but how could they be furnished; that we only had communication with Richmond, and could not even get a mail from there in less than three weeks; that he was opposed to the movement, and that he would require written orders, and would obey them under protest."³⁸

Once Jenkins identified Robertson's statements, he then expressed his concerns related to the damaging quality of Robertson's words. Jenkins claimed that Robertson's "language was calculated to discourage [the regimental commanders] and weaken their confidence in the

³⁶ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 14.

³⁷ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 470.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

movement then in progress for the development of the campaign, to create a distrust in regard to the safety of the troops, to prejudice them in regard to the management of the campaign, and tending to prevent that hearty and hopeful co-operation necessary to success.”³⁹ Though Robertson’s exact words may be lost, he did make statements that likely reflect Jenkins’s report, though not with the intention that Jenkins claimed. Considering how miserable the conditions were for the Texas Brigade, Robertson’s comments are not surprising. As Harold Simpson described the ordeal that the Texas Brigade faced during this period, he stated, “[t]here is no doubt that during the East Tennessee Campaign, the men of Hood’s Texas Brigade suffered greater hardships than at any other time during the war.”⁴⁰ J.B. Polley made a few points worth noting when he wrote about the incident. First, he identified that Jenkins did not complain about Robertson’s ability as a brigadier general or that Robertson was “guilty of unsoldierly conduct on the field.”⁴¹ Polley’s observation is important because, in Longstreet’s January 1 report, he claimed that Robertson’s division commander, Jenkins, “had made several complaints of his incompetency.”⁴² Suppose Jenkins had so frequently complained of Robertson’s incompetency. Why did Jenkins leave those concerns out of his charges against Robertson when he could completely air his grievances?

The second noteworthy observation that Polley made was that the orders Jenkins gave Robertson would have required the men to engage in “a long and hurried march over a rough and mountainous country and great hardship,” which, as previously stated, the Texas Brigade was in no condition to undertake.⁴³ Considering that at the time Jenkins gave this order, by his

³⁹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 470.

⁴⁰ Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 380.

⁴¹ Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 118-119.

⁴² OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 466.

⁴³ Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 119.

admission, the enemy was already in retreat, his order does not seem to be a reasonable expectation for men in his division who were in such poor shape.⁴⁴ Additionally, knowing that the cavalry units that Longstreet ordered to pursue the enemy were unable to catch them, then Jenkins's orders to an infantry unit indeed were unreasonable.

The last point Polley made that is worth considering relates to the way that the men of the Texas Brigade responded to Robertson's statements. Polley not only confirms the substance of Robertson's words, but he also identifies that the charges Jenkins brought against Robertson "did not affect the standing of "Aunt Pollie" with the Texas Brigade."⁴⁵ Polley goes on to confirm the terrible conditions of the brigade during the period and states that the men never disapproved of Robertson's actions but that "on the contrary, the brigade heartily approved of his course."⁴⁶ As Polley reflected on the brigade's feelings toward Robertson's actions, he identified that "its survivors are yet grateful to him for the firm stand he took and for the interest and fatherly solicitude he always manifested in the well-being of his men."⁴⁷

These last observations reveal that, though Jenkins had Robertson's regimental commanders sign his charges as witnesses, they were not acting with malice toward Robertson but were simply attesting that Robertson had made the statements in their presence. Additionally, had the men of the Texas Brigade believed that Robertson intended to discourage them from serving the Confederacy, they would not have continued to hold Robertson in such high regard. The members of the Texas Brigade were not only committed to Robertson, but they were also deeply committed to serving the Confederacy. In January 1864, the Texas Brigade had the opportunity to re-enlist for the duration of the war, as they were all suffering from the poor

⁴⁴ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 470.

⁴⁵ Polley, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 119.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

conditions of their winter encampment. Though they could have seized the opportunity to go home, as they likely would have done if Robertson's speech had discouraged anyone, instead, "the entire brigade re-enlisted with but a few exceptions."⁴⁸

When the court finally heard the charges in February 1864, Robertson received a guilty verdict, though not to the degree that Jenkins had hoped. While the court did agree that Robertson had committed the offense, which does not seem to have ever been disputed by Robertson, they did express that they believed that Robertson's "language was not designed to weaken the confidence of the officers to whom it was addressed," and they exempted the word "highly" from his charges.⁴⁹ The court reprimanded Robertson, which included losing command of the Texas Brigade and ending his time with the famous unit. Though a scandal marked the end of his time with the brigade, there was far more to the circumstances of the court martial than what the surface reveals.

The issue between the generals, Robertson, Law, Longstreet, and Jenkins, was born from Jenkins having been appointed to command Hood's Division during General Hood's recuperation. The men of Hood's Division preferred Law, who had distinguished himself while leading the division after both of Hood's injuries during the battles of Gettysburg and Chickamauga and was the division's senior brigadier general.⁵⁰ Since Robertson was a close friend and supporter of Law's, he also got caught in the fire from Longstreet. Though several aspects were at play in the drama within the division, Longstreet's biographer, Jeffrey D. Wert, identifies that "More than anyone else, Longstreet was responsible for the feuding within the

⁴⁸ Simpson, *Hood's Texas Brigade*, 363.

⁴⁹ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 101.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

division.”⁵¹ Following the October incident, Longstreet and Jenkins made it their mission to remove Robertson and Law from their commands. Furthermore, by the time Longstreet’s forces became engaged at Bean’s Station, word was spreading throughout the Confederate forces regarding General Hood’s promotion to Lieutenant General and that he would not be returning to command his division.⁵² Longstreet and Jenkins wanted a clear path for Jenkins’s command of Hood’s Division to become permanent, meaning they needed to remove any potential rivals, specifically General Law, who was a favorite of the men.

Given Longstreet’s military service with the U.S. Army before the Civil War, it is unsurprising that he was willing to act on behalf of Jenkins to help secure his position and rank. As a young officer, Longstreet married the daughter of General John Garland. Though historians believe the marriage occurred due to the couple’s romance, “it undeniably worked to Longstreet’s advantage.”⁵³ After the Mexican-American War, Longstreet served on the frontier for twelve years and rose from first lieutenant to major. During the bulk of that period, Longstreet “served with or near his father-in-law under circumstances which suggest Longstreet benefitted from favoritism.”⁵⁴ Longstreet earned his promotions on his own, but he knew that “[p]romotions in peacetime were agonizingly slow.”⁵⁵ Though Longstreet had been a brevet major during the war, he retained the pay of a first lieutenant until he earned a promotion to higher ranks.

⁵¹ Jeffry D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: the Confederacy’s Most Controversial Soldier: a Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 337.

⁵² Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 118.

⁵³ William Garrett Piston, “Petticoats, Promotions, and Military Assignments: Favoritism and the Antebellum Career of James Longstreet,” In *James Longstreet: The Man, the Soldier, the Controversy*, edited by R.L. DiNardi and Albert A. Nofi, 53-75, (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Publishing, 1998), 54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

While Longstreet served under the influence of General Garland, “he frequently received preferential treatment...[as] Garland greatly influenced the nature, scope, and location of his son-in-law’s assignments.”⁵⁶ According to historian and former professor of history at Missouri State University, William Garrett Piston, “evidence suggests that Garland manipulated personnel assignments to ensure his son-in-law an independent command [to secure his posting at Fort Bliss], even if it meant reducing the garrison there to dangerously low levels.”⁵⁷ Since Longstreet had been the beneficiary of his father-in-law’s influence and knew how helpful his manipulations had been, then it stands to reason that he would be willing to do the same for an officer that he believed showed promise, such as Jenkins. Additionally, considering that Longstreet saw his father-in-law sacrifice the good of the soldiers to place Longstreet in a better position, it is reasonable to believe Longstreet shared Garland’s questionable judgment. Ultimately, Longstreet intentionally supported Jenkins’s advancement, as his father-in-law had supported his military career. Longstreet’s support occurred because Jenkins was “a favorite of Longstreet,” and according to Longstreet, in the Fall of 1861, Jenkins was “the best colonel in the army,” the two officers remained close afterward.⁵⁸ Furthermore, since Jenkins was aware of Longstreet’s favoritism, his actions toward Robertson make sense as an effort to secure a favorable position for himself.

Bean’s Station gave Jenkins an opening against Robertson and allowed Longstreet to bring charges against General Law. Longstreet eagerly sought a court martial for Law under two different charges, both occurring shortly after Robertson’s incident on December 16. Like Robertson, Law was also charged with [c]onduct highly prejudicial to good order and military

⁵⁶ Piston, “Petticoats, Promotions, and Military Assignments,” 67-69.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁸ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 119.

discipline,” but Longstreet also leveled a charge of “[c]onduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.”⁵⁹ Law’s circumstances were in stark contrast to Robertson’s situation. Law had seemingly resigned his command in favor of a cavalry command in Alabama but never officially resigned; therefore, he returned to his command of the Alabama Brigade.⁶⁰ Longstreet believed that Law had done all of this under a pretense to gain a leave of absence and “create discontent amongst his troops.”⁶¹ Longstreet rushed to the conclusion that Law’s resignation was set because, to his mind, the “way appeared to be opened for the promotion of Micah Jenkins.”⁶² J. B. Polley noted that the purpose of removing Law from his command was to ensure that Jenkins had “a better chance of securing the commission of a major-general and the command of Hood’s Division.”⁶³

Longstreet began to establish a pattern of attacking the character and reputation of the generals in his command whom he had disagreements with or who stood in the way of his desires. In addition to bringing charges against Robertson and Law, Longstreet also engaged in removing General McLaws and sought his arrest and court martial as well. McLaws was charged with “[n]eglect of duty,” and almost unsurprisingly, General Jenkins was one of Longstreet’s witnesses.⁶⁴ These particular charges involved action near Knoxville on November 28 and 29, 1863, and McLaws took the attack on his professional character personally, pressing for a trial to not only restore him to his command but repair his reputation as well.⁶⁵ Like Robertson, McLaws’s case went before the court in February 1864, though McLaws received a more

⁵⁹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 471-472.

⁶⁰ Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenant’s: A Study in Command; Vol. III* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), 303-305. Douglas S. Freeman includes a detailed account.

⁶¹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 471.

⁶² Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenant’s*, 304.

⁶³ Polley, *Hood’s Texas Brigade*, 118.

⁶⁴ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 503-504.

⁶⁵ Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenant’s*, 301.

favorable outcome. One reason for this was McLaws gained the support of General Braxton Bragg, who was eager to act against Longstreet in retaliation for an issue between the two men that occurred the previous fall. As Bragg reviewed the case, he noted Longstreet had “calculated to destroy the integrity of [McLaws’s] service.”⁶⁶ In the three instances that Longstreet cited as a neglect of duty, the court only found McLaws guilty on one count, and Major General S. B. Buckner, the president of the court, dismissed the guilty verdict as it was decided without evidence to support it, returning McLaws to his command.⁶⁷ Later in life, Longstreet came to regret his actions toward him, admitting “that he should not have filed charges against McLaws,” though he did not extend the same courtesy to Robertson or Law.⁶⁸

In addition to McLaws’s situation’s similarities with Robertson’s case regarding Longstreet wanting to rid himself of officers he found problematic, there is also a coincidence that goes beyond their removals. Just as Longstreet had written a report with inconsistencies after the engagement at Bean’s Station, Longstreet also acted inconsistently regarding the removal of Robertson and McLaws. At the end of Longstreet’s January 1 report, he closed with a discussion of Robertson’s previous circumstances from November 1863, when Longstreet first requested him to be removed from command. Longstreet identified that he brought the matter up because Robertson had “more or less important bearing upon the campaign,” which is strange considering Robertson spent the battle guarding Longstreet’s train.⁶⁹ Throughout the report, Longstreet identifies that McLaws consistently carried out his orders with reluctance due to the lack of food for his men. However, at the end of the report, Longstreet notes that he had arrested General

⁶⁶ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 363.

⁶⁷ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 505-506.

⁶⁸ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 365.

⁶⁹ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 466.

Robertson “under charges of a suspicious character” but makes no mention of arresting McLaws or charging him with any wrongdoing.⁷⁰

One possible reason that Longstreet left out his desire to charge and remove McLaws could be that he had already addressed the issue in a letter he sent to General Cooper, the Adjutant and Inspector General of the Confederacy, two days earlier, on December 30, 1863. In this letter, Longstreet claims he has no authority to order “courts-martial or any other authority which is necessary to separate command.”⁷¹ The rest of the letter focuses on Longstreet accepting responsibility for the failure of the East Tennessee Campaign. Amid his appeal requesting replacement as commander due to his shortcomings, Longstreet includes that he “thought it necessary a few days ago to relieve Major-General McLaws from duty with this command and to order him to Augusta, Georgia,” almost as an afterthought.⁷² That same day, Longstreet wrote a separate letter to General Cooper stating that “McLaws was not arrested when he was relieved from duty here, for the reason that it was supposed that his services might be important to the Government in some other position. If such is the case, I have no desire that he should be kept from that service or that his usefulness should be impaired in any way by a trial.”⁷³ In this letter, he also requests an order for a court to try Robertson, which marks the inconsistency. Two days later, when Longstreet issued his official report, he identified reasons to justify removing McLaws but provided no evidence to support a court-martial for Robertson.

Though the circumstances surrounding the two generals suffered from inconsistencies, McLaws escaped the clutches of Longstreet’s ire, and Robertson was removed shortly after McLaws’s trial. Yet there was one more general that Longstreet sought to eliminate, and General

⁷⁰ OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 466.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 467.

⁷² OR. vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 467-468.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 468-469.

Law had yet to receive justice that would satisfy Longstreet. Word reached Longstreet that the original charges against Law were not going to be entertained, which prompted Longstreet to level the second charge against Law, which more or less restated the original charge.⁷⁴ On April 27, 1864, Longstreet received notice again that the charges against Law would not be entertained and that Law had orders to resume his command.⁷⁵ The notice prompted Longstreet to contact General Lee to make him aware of the charges against Law, which resulted in Lee contacting the Adjutant and Inspector General to recommend an investigation of the charges.⁷⁶ This request seems to have been the final straw in the Longstreet versus Law court-martial drama, as President Jefferson Davis personally stepped in to resolve the matter. Davis requested that the Secretary of War communicate to General Lee that, had Law “misbehaved...[anywhere] in the face of the enemy, charges should have been preferred, not injurious statements made in a letter to prejudice his case in a different transaction. General Longstreet has seriously offended against good order and military discipline in re-arresting an officer who had been released by the War Department, without any new offense being alleged.”⁷⁷

The nature of Longstreet’s quest to discredit and remove three generals under his command resembles axe grinding. Longstreet went to great lengths to charge and push for trials against Robertson, Law, and McLaws. Furthermore, Longstreet had also strained his relationship with President Jefferson Davis and the War Department through his accusations and challenging their authority regarding the situation with all three generals and his “transparent preference for Jenkins.”⁷⁸ Longstreet’s actions towards the three generals were not an isolated event, as he had

⁷⁴ OR, vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 472.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 473.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 473-474.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 374-375.

previously conspired to remove General Bragg from command. This action was part of the contention that had been growing amongst the commanders of the Army of Tennessee, which resulted in their plotting to remove Bragg following the Battle of Chickamauga. According to Longstreet's biographer, "The affair enhanced none of the participants' reputations...[and] at the center of it stood Braxton Bragg, Jefferson Davis, and Longstreet."⁷⁹ When Bragg remained a commander, Longstreet's relationship with him did not improve, and the two continued to have a conflict with one another during the Knoxville Campaign in the fall of 1863.⁸⁰

Additionally, Longstreet struggled with command failures similar to the ones he held Robertson responsible for, such as the assault on Fort Sanders at the end of November 1863. Longstreet delayed action against the fort for ten days, continuing to postpone or cancel the plans that were brought to him by his subordinates. Once Longstreet decided to take action, Generals McLaws and Jenkins cautioned against the plan, yet Longstreet dismissed their concerns. When the Confederate attack was launched, it resulted in "a tragic debacle, and for this, Longstreet bears responsibility."⁸¹ Furthermore, in historian R.L. DiNardo's assessment of Longstreet, he noted that Longstreet receives "heavy criticism in his treatment of some of his subordinate commanders...especially Lafayette McLaws, Jerome Robertson, and Evander Law. To be sure, such criticism is justified. The treatment of McLaws and Law, as it took its course, was extremely shabby."⁸² DiNardo omitted Robertson's inclusion as having received "shabby" treatment, likely because Jenkins was more directly responsible for the charges brought against

⁷⁹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 323.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 341-342.

⁸¹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 352.

⁸² R.L. DiNardo, "James Longstreet, the Modern Soldier: A Broad Assessment," In *James Longstreet: The Man, the Soldier, the Controversy*, edited by R.L. DiNardi and Albert A. Nofi, 31-51, (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Publishing, 1998), 35-36.

Robertson. However, since Longstreet sanctioned and supported Jenkins's actions, Robertson deserves to be directly associated with the ill-treatment of Longstreet's commanders.

In light of each situation and the decisions reached by those in command, it is hard to hold Robertson's actions and subsequent punishment against him, nor allow it to tarnish his reputation as a leader of the Texas Brigade. During the period leading up to the trial and afterward, when Robertson lost his command, he maintained the support of Hood and the Texas Brigade. General Hood wrote to Robertson on two separate occasions and included his sympathy to Robertson for his troubles with Jenkins, as well as to try and provide an early warning about his pending court-martial, which are certainly not the actions of a man who believed the charges against Robertson.⁸³ Launcelot M. Blackford, a staff officer in Longstreet's command, wrote to his mother about Robertson's treatment, saying, "I am satisfied he has been unjustly dealt with and is 'more sinned against than sinning.'"⁸⁴

When the Texas Brigade learned of Robertson's removal "without a hearing" before he went to trial, the Fourth and Fifth Texas Infantries drafted a petition seeking his reinstatement as their commander, stating that he was "one fully able to command the brigade; and at all times willing to sacrifice himself for us and our glorious cause."⁸⁵ Additionally, the Third Arkansas Infantry also held a meeting to discuss Robertson's removal and decided that losing Robertson would be "seriously felt, both in our social and official relations" and that he had "ever borne himself with a degree of firmness and gallantry as an officer and courtesy as a gentleman, that has secured the esteem and confidence of both officers and men."⁸⁶ The testimony of the men he commanded and their confidence in Robertson as their commander identifies him as someone

⁸³ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 56-57.

⁸⁴ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 361.

⁸⁵ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 57-59.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

they had not only followed into danger but were willing to continue to do so if their requests were granted.

The men of the Texas Brigade loved Robertson for all that he had done for them and all that they knew he was willing to do for them. In Robertson, they found a leader who maintained a cool head in battle and prioritized their needs and welfare. It is not unreasonable to conclude that it was easy for the men to respect and admire Robertson because he held them in equal standing. Robertson provided one of the most remarkable testimonies of the regard with which he held his men. In his farewell to the Texas Brigade on April 9, 1864, Robertson stated, “[m]y highest ambition was to have shared your toils and triumphs as long as there was left an arm to bear your victorious flag, and by a discharge of my whole duty, merit the confidence with which I have been so highly honored.”⁸⁷ J.B. Robertson commanded the Texas Brigade longer than any of their other commanders. Robertson’s time with the brigade carried them through some of their most challenging war experiences, and his commitment to his men never wavered. The loyalty that Robertson demonstrated to his men was worthy of the nature of a Texan’s commitment to his fellow Texans and his state. The character of Robertson’s service is another example of why he deserves a higher standing among the Civil War generals from Texas. Robertson did not flinch from service; he fought and led his men bravely and stood for their well-being at his own expense, sacrificing himself for the good of his fellow soldiers.

J.B. Robertson’s time leading the Texas Brigade ended, and he was about to begin a new phase in his service to the Confederacy. All of the events that occurred at the end of Robertson’s time in the Eastern Theater of the war transpired just before his son, Felix Robertson, became part of General Joseph Wheeler’s cavalry and accompanied them throughout eastern Tennessee.

⁸⁷ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 64.

During 1864, J.B. Robertson's significant war-time experiences ended due to a politically charged fiasco intended to besmirch his established military record. However, in October of that same year, Felix Robertson took part in an event that has largely been forgotten but should serve to define his military service.

When General John Stuart Williams led his forces away from Murfreesboro after the brief cavalry skirmish and continued their journey to rendezvous with General Wheeler, their path took them to Virginia and a town called Saltville. The events at Saltville, possibly more than any of Robertson's other experiences, are why he should be discussed among other Confederate generals and recognized for his service. However, unlike the notable service or admirable strategic planning that other Confederate generals receive credit for, General Felix Robertson's actions stand out as an example of what amounts to a war crime and deserves the regard of infamy.

Saltville, Virginia, is located in the southwestern reaches of the state, and during the Civil War, was responsible for providing the Confederacy with the means to preserve the beef that fed many of the soldiers. To the northeast of Saltville's salt mines were the plentiful and equally important lead mines near Wytheville, Virginia, and connecting these two areas of Virginia to Tennessee was the Virginia Central & East Tennessee Railroad. General Hood entertained dreams of liberating eastern Tennessee from the grip of the Federal forces to open up a supply line between the Eastern and Western portions of the Confederacy. Hood was not the only general dreaming of how beneficial Saltville could be for their cause. On the Federal side of the conflict, General Stephen Gano Burbridge also saw the potential that Saltville could offer.

However, Burbridge's ambitions were much more personal as he hoped to capture the area to gain the favor of Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas and evade the scrutiny that his

treatment of the District of Kentucky had earned him. Word had reached Burbridge's superiors that he was possibly involved with forcing farmers to sell to the government at below-market prices, punishing citizens for the actions of Confederate guerillas, and arresting those suspected of opposing Lincoln's reelection.⁸⁸ Burbridge formulated a plan to take the area of Saltville, which the Union Army Chief of Staff, Major General Henry W. Halleck, approved and was set into motion on September 19, 1864, with over 7,000 soldiers moving against a Confederate department that was defended by a few hundred, poorly equipped soldiers.⁸⁹

General John Echols was the Confederate officer in charge of defending the area of Saltville, and upon learning about the approaching Federals, he began to orchestrate a defense of the area. Echols began coordinating with General Breckinridge, who had recently returned to his former command of the Department of Southwestern Virginia. Breckinridge attempted to bring reinforcements with him, but none of the commanders could spare any soldiers, so the two generals began to look to other areas for support. General Echols learned about the detached cavalry and artillery units from General Wheeler's forces led by General "Cerro Gordo" Williams, who attempted to avoid the Federal forces in eastern Tennessee and had ridden north into Virginia to rejoin Wheeler. Echols contacted Richmond to request a temporary reassignment of Williams's troops to him and received the approval, which rerouted Williams and his command, including General Felix Robertson, toward Saltville if they could arrive in time to support the city's defense.⁹⁰

While the Confederates anxiously awaited the arrival of reinforcements, the Federal advance was making headway. Colonel Henry L. Giltner commanded a cavalry brigade at

⁸⁸ William C. Davis, "Massacre at Saltville." *Civil War Times*. Volume IX, Number 10 (February 1971): 4.

⁸⁹ Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," 4-5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

Saltville and brought his men out to attempt to slow the approaching Federals. On October 1, Giltner fought with the Federals at Clinch Mountain. However, the Federals forced Giltner to fall back to Laurel Gap, where he mounted another small defense before retreating to Saltville, where the Federals also fell back briefly. General Burbridge believed that his superior numbers would easily overcome the smaller Confederate forces, and since night was falling, he decided to have his men make camp. Historian William Davis, an authority on the Battle of Saltville, speculates that had Burbridge gone on to Saltville, “he would probably have taken the town and salt works without a fight, for the place was then defended by barely 400 reserves!”⁹¹ Delaying the battle until October 2 proved to be the downfall of the Federal ambitions for Saltville. Davis identifies that the “resolute delaying actions of Giltner, and Burbridge's seeming overconfidence in not pushing on...prove[d] fatal to the Federal expedition.”⁹²

Had Burbridge pressed his advantage and attacked Saltville on October 1, the terrible events that unfolded in the aftermath of the battle might have been avoided. However, Confederate reinforcements arrived that night with Colonel Robert T. Preston’s regiment of Virginia reserves. During the day, General Alfred E. “Mudwall” Jackson assumed command of the defense of Saltville and directed the construction of numerous defensive barricades. When Colonel Preston reported to Jackson, the two discussed the information Jackson had available regarding the Federal forces, which included numerous men from the 5th United States Colored Cavalry. William Davis noted the racially charged conversation that was exchanged between the two officers, which revealed that the Confederates led by Preston would revel at the opportunity to not only fight the Black troops but “cut ’em up.”⁹³

⁹¹ Davis, “Massacre at Saltville,” 7.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

The following morning, on October 2, General Burbridge's forces moved toward Saltville while the Confederates attempted to slow their progress, desperately hoping for more reinforcements. Colonel Giltner's force of about 400 soldiers was hard-pressed to resist the lead Federal force of Colonel Robert W. Ratliff, which was 1,500 strong. Just as it seemed the Confederates would be overwhelmed, an advance cavalry unit led by General Felix Robertson that had detached from General Williams's forces earlier that day arrived to restore their hope. Robertson's arrival impressed Giltner's men, who noted that Robertson presented a "gallant and handsome" figure as he led a patchwork assembly of several cavalry units pieced together to create a temporary brigade to provide swift relief to Saltville.⁹⁴ This moment contrasts with Robertson's actions following the battle and is the last time he took an action worthy of recognition associated with gallantry. A few hours later, the rest of General Williams's forces arrived, swelling the Confederate forces to almost 2,800 to face Burbridge's 5,200, and more Confederate reinforcements were on the way.

Once General Williams arrived, he took command of the Confederate forces and ordered the men into positions around the area to defend it from the rest of Burbridge's forces. The bulk of the fighting occurred on the right of the Confederate line, where Robertson took position along with Colonel George G. Dibrell's Tennessee brigade and Lieutenant Colonel Robert Smith's Thirteenth Battalion of Virginia Reserves. Amid the fighting were the men of the 5th Colored Cavalry who "rushed upon the works with a yell, and after a desperate struggle carried the entire line, killing and wounding a large number of the enemy and capturing some prisoners."⁹⁵ William Davis described the fighting as vicious hand-to-hand combat that forced Robertson and Dibrell's lines back to the safety of their breastworks as they "withdrew

⁹⁴ Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," 9.

⁹⁵ OR. vol. 39, pt. 1, p. 557.

stubbornly, resisting Ratliff's advance at every step."⁹⁶ The soldiers of the 5th Colored Cavalry suffered jeers and taunts from their white Federal soldier counterparts on their march to battle, as the white troops predicted that the men would not fight. Their actions silenced those same soldiers during the march back from Saltville, as Colonel James Brisbin, the white officer in command of the 5th Colored Cavalry, described their courage during the battle. Brisbin reported that "the men could not have behaved more bravely. I have seen white troops fight in twenty-seven battles, and I never saw any fight better."⁹⁷

Colonel Brisbin may have taken great pride in the way his soldiers carried themselves on the battlefield, but the Confederate soldiers resented the success of the black soldiers. As the Federals advanced toward Dibrell's line, his soldiers "became exasperated" seeing the black regiment, and "so great was their contempt and anger" that they leapt over their works with their pistols in hand to rush the black soldiers.⁹⁸ Dibrell's men paid for their foolish charge with the lives of "at least four officers killed and another captured" as the intense fighting continued for another three hours.⁹⁹ During the heat of this fighting, Robertson pulled his forces back for an unexplained reason and failed to notify Dibrell of his withdrawal, which allowed Federal forces to fill in the gap his retreat created. By late afternoon, Robertson and Dibrell abandoned their positions and retreated to the town to establish a new line against the Federals.

By evening, Burbridge had failed to advance to Saltville from any of the attempts he had mounted. His forces suffered heavy casualties from their efforts, had exhausted their ammunition, and due to the prolonged nature of Burbridge's overall expedition, their rations were running dangerously low. As the day ended, Burbridge received orders from General

⁹⁶ Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," 10.

⁹⁷ OR. vol. 39, pt. 1, p. 557.

⁹⁸ Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," 11.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

William T. Sherman, recalling him to Kentucky, so he left the task of withdrawing his assembled forces to General Edward H. Hobson. The Confederates successfully defended Saltville and suffered less than one hundred casualties compared to the 350 reported by Burbridge, most of whom were left behind on the battlefield in the wake of the Federal retreat. The ranks of the 5th Colored Cavalry did what they could to bring their wounded off the battlefield out of fear of what the Confederates might do to any of their men left behind. The men were strongly motivated because the black soldiers who “fell into the hands of the enemy during the battle were brutally murdered.”¹⁰⁰ Colonel Brisbin described the desire of the men to be taken from the battlefield, even without an ambulance and despite the pain, because they “preferred present suffering to being murdered at the hands of a cruel enemy.”¹⁰¹

During the night, the atrocities of Saltville began. George Mosgrove of the Fourth Kentucky Regiment was riding through the battlefield that night and encountered General Robertson. Without much else to say, Robertson spoke to Mosgrove and reported that he believed his men had “killed nearly all the negroes.”¹⁰² According to William Davis, Robertson may have added that “if they hadn’t, they soon would.”¹⁰³ Mosgrove was stationed at the main ford on the Holston River near Saltville, and the following day at dawn, he was alerted by the sound of gunshots from his right. The firing was so great that Mosgrove believed “the enemy were still in our front,” as he reported, “I heard a shot, then another and another until the firing swelled to the volume of that of a skirmish line.”¹⁰⁴ Mosgrove followed the sounds of gunfire to investigate the source but was unprepared for the sight that awaited him. There was dense fog all

¹⁰⁰ OR. vol. 39, pt. 1, p. 557.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² George Dallas Mosgrove, *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie: Reminiscences of a Confederate Cavalryman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 205.

¹⁰³ Davis, “Massacre at Saltville,” 43,45.

¹⁰⁴ Mosgrove, *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie*, 206.

around the area of Saltville on October 3, so Mosgrove could not be sure of what lay before him until he was on top of Robertson's and Dibrell's brigades and found that the gunfire came from those units as they were executing the Federal wounded on the battlefield. As he drew near the Tennesseans, Mosgrove saw the signs of numerous white and black Federal soldiers dead from the previous day's battle, and he also noticed that several of the black soldiers had been shot recently.

When Mosgrove reached Robertson's and Dibrell's men, he discovered that they were "mad and excited to the highest degree...shooting every wounded negro they could find."¹⁰⁵ There were more sounds of gunfire coming from other parts of the field, which Mosgrove believed were the sounds of similar executions. Mosgrove knew that the two brigades had lost several men during the battle and were taking their revenge, noting that "they were so exasperated that they could not be deterred from their murderous work."¹⁰⁶ Sadly, some of the wounded soldiers were able to attempt to flee the killing field but were not fast enough to escape and were struck down by the bullets of the enraged Tennesseans. As Mosgrove described the scene, "It was bang, bang, bang, all over the field—negros dropping everywhere."¹⁰⁷ Several white Federal soldiers who lay wounded on the same battlefield supported Mosgrove's account. Private Harry Shocker described the taunting of the wounded men from one of the Confederates, whom he later identified as Captain Champ Ferguson, asking, "Where will you have it, in the back or in the face?"¹⁰⁸ Both Mosgrove, Shocker, and Captain Orange Sells of the 12th Ohio witnessed more murders at a nearby log house that Ferguson was part of and the perpetrator of as well. Confederates forced Shocker to watch as Ferguson took two black soldiers out of the house

¹⁰⁵ Mosgrove, *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie*, 206.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁰⁸ Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," 45.

and “emptied ten shots into them,” and afterward, they took Shocker into the house where two more black soldiers were taken outside, where he again heard more gunshots.¹⁰⁹

A Federal surgeon, William H. Gardner, with the 13th Kentucky Infantry, was left behind with the wounded when the Federal troops withdrew. Gardner reported that the morning after the battle, several Confederates came to the field hospital where he was treating wounded soldiers and took five wounded black soldiers and shot them. The violence did not stop on October 3; Gardner said that on October 7 and 8, after the field hospital was moved to Emory and Henry College Hospital, more Confederate soldiers arrived and killed two more black soldiers on the first day. The next day, soldiers returned and killed Lieutenant Elza C. Smith and then began demanding to know where several other officers were, “swearing that they intended to kill all of them,” before surgeons and attendants chased them away.¹¹⁰ Each of the officers whom the Confederates demanded were all survivors of Saltville. Union General Nathaniel C. McClean also recorded the murder of “our colored soldiers who were wounded and made prisoners by the enemy,” as well as the murder of Lieutenant Smith by Ferguson.¹¹¹

Throughout the killing that occurred on October 3, none of the witness reports mention Robertson or Dibrell taking notice or attempting to stop the murders. Lieutenant George Carter of the 11th Michigan also witnessed some of the murders and noted that he could not identify “that anybody had command. They all appeared to be commanding themselves.”¹¹² While witnesses did not report that either Robertson or Dibrell participated in the murders, they share the burden of responsibility for not trying to stop the murders either and for allowing their men to have free reign to exact their revenge on helpless and wounded soldiers. Mosgrove said that

¹⁰⁹ Davis, “Massacre at Saltville,” 46.

¹¹⁰ OR. vol. 39, pt. 1, p. 554.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 556.

¹¹² Davis, “Massacre at Saltville,” 45.

there were no Confederate officers who attempted to stop the cold-blooded killings until General Breckinridge arrived on the field with General Basil W. Duke. Breckinridge was furious to discover the scene that was playing out before him and “with blazing eyes and thunderous tones, ordered that the massacre be stopped.”¹¹³ Despite Breckinridge’s order, the killing resumed as soon as he rode away “until every Negro who had not escaped or hidden was dead.”¹¹⁴ Sadly, another Confederate officer, Captain Edwin O. Guerrant, confirmed the deplorable execution of the wounded black soldiers on October 3. Guerrant wrote in his diary that “the continued ring of the rifle, sung the death knell of many a poor negro who was unfortunate enough not to be killed yesterday. Our men took no negro prisoners. Great numbers of them were killed yesterday and today.”¹¹⁵ Mosgrove confirmed Guerrant’s account that no negro prisoners were taken, recalling, “They were all killed—a multitude of them. The sable soldier was not accorded the privilege of surrendering himself a prisoner of war.”¹¹⁶

The exact number of soldiers from the 5th United States Colored Cavalry murdered at Saltville is unknown due to the regiment not having been organized before the battle. Professor Thomas D. Mays notes that the unit “reported losing 118 of its 400 men” and also draws attention to the newspaper accounts of the battle, which identified a disparity in the white soldiers killed, 106, to the 150 black soldiers killed.¹¹⁷ While many deaths occurred as a result of the battle, Mays proposed a “conservative estimate of the number of blacks murdered at Saltville is forty-six,” based upon the men listed and kept on the Missing In Action rolls “until well after

¹¹³ Mosgrove, *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie*, 207.

¹¹⁴ William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 459.

¹¹⁵ William C. Davis and Meredith L. Swentor, ed. *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 546-547.

¹¹⁶ Mosgrove, *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie*, 208.

¹¹⁷ Thomas D. Mays, *The Saltville Massacre* (Abilene, TX: McWhitney Foundation Press, 1998), 66-67.

the war.”¹¹⁸ A separate study supports this estimate, which pushed the number a little higher to between forty-five and fifty murdered soldiers.¹¹⁹ William Davis drew comparisons between the massacre at Saltville and other acts of savagery committed against black soldiers, such as the Fort Pillow Massacre. Davis identifies an essential distinction between the events due to Saltville occurring after a peaceful night when the Confederates were no longer enraged by the heat of the battle, as could be said of other similar events. Instead, the actions at Saltville have the mark of cold-blooded premeditation. As Davis states, “There can be no explanation other than they went out that morning with the sole purpose of killing the Negroes.”¹²⁰ Tragically, none of the Confederate soldiers who participated in the atrocities at Saltville, nor the officers who allowed it to occur, ever officially answered for their barbarism.

Initially, General Breckinridge was not aware of the severity of the massacre at Saltville, so he did not mention the event to General Lee or any Confederate officials. After a few days, though, the details of the massacre were revealed to Breckinridge, and he immediately sent an account of the events via telegraph to Lee. Breckinridge was especially concerned to learn that “one of the general officers present at Saltville actually took some hand in the killing, either by pulling a trigger himself or by encouraging his men.”¹²¹ The identity of the general suspected of being part of the massacre is undoubtedly General Robertson. There has yet to be a discovery of any evidence revealing an eyewitness account of actions taken by Robertson. Still, even in the absence of a smoking gun, there are enough breadcrumbs to follow directly to Robertson.

¹¹⁸ Mays, *The Saltville Massacre*, 72.

¹¹⁹ Brian D. McKnight, *Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 213.

¹²⁰ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 459.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 460.

Within the messages between Breckinridge and Lee, William Davis has identified that the two men did not directly name Robertson but discussed the need to arrest the guilty party. Specifically, the message also stated that if the suspect had already left Breckinridge's Department, then Breckinridge should "forward the charges to be transmitted to the Department [of War]." ¹²² When Lee wrote the message on October 5, only two general officers had left Breckinridge's Department, Robertson and General Williams. Davis's research has cleared Williams of being the general in question because he had already been arrested by Breckinridge at General Wheeler's request due to Williams having allegedly separated "from [Wheeler's] command without permission." ¹²³ The only possible suspect at that time would be Robertson because each of the generals at Saltville was still with Breckinridge. Robertson, however, had left Breckinridge's Department on October 4 with General John C. Vaughn's Cavalry Command. General Robertson was in charge of the soldiers who had formerly been under General Williams's command, and it was known that he was to rejoin General Wheeler in Hood's Department since he was still attached to his service.

While the evidence gathered by Davis does implicate Robertson as being responsible according to what Breckinridge believed, his belief is not enough to damn Robertson without further proof. Breckinridge had not forgotten how Robertson worked with General Bragg after Murfreesboro to damage his reputation, so an opportunity to settle a vendetta would not be unreasonable if Breckinridge's suspicions were all that were available. Robertson's actions after Saltville provide another clue to his potential guilt. Before Saltville, Robertson's military record was strong and respectful, and he had received praise from several of his superiors, including Breckinridge. However, while Robertson accompanied General Vaughn, something changed,

¹²² Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," 47.

¹²³ Ibid.

which became visible in his actions. Since October 4, the day after the massacre, Robertson had been traveling with Vaughn through Eastern Tennessee, but on October 11, he uncharacteristically abandoned Vaughn.

Vaughn wrote to Breckinridge to inform him of the issue, stating that “Brigadier General Robertson refuses to cooperate and will move...to Georgia.”¹²⁴ Robertson wanting to proceed to Georgia to rejoin Wheeler would not be enough to cast suspicion upon him, except that Vaughn noted an urgency to Robertson’s departure. When Robertson declared his intention to depart in four days from Jonesborough, he asserted that he had “orders to report to General Hood; that he was relieved by [Breckinridge] from duty in this department, and will act accordingly.”¹²⁵ The soldier who had previously relished an opportunity to engage the enemy and now had the chance to lead a cavalry unit in direct action against the Federals was suddenly trying to avoid any delays that might keep him from leaving the vicinity of Breckinridge’s command. The next day, on October 12, Robertson again refused to cooperate with Vaughn.

Additionally, Vaughn noted that Robertson would not even lend him aid and that “the sooner they are ordered from the department, the better.”¹²⁶ Along with Robertson’s lack of assistance, he was allowing his men to make a nuisance of themselves as they were “straggling all over the country, destroying a large quantity of supplies and forage around Jonesborough.”¹²⁷ William Davis further notes that once Robertson rejoined the Army of Tennessee, he continued to be “a thorn in the side of other commanders as well.”¹²⁸ These actions are in direct contrast with

¹²⁴ OR. vol. 39, pt. 1, p. 565.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 460.

his service before Saltville, which indicates that something related to the events there affected Robertson and his usefulness to the Confederate Army.

The most probable explanation for Robertson's actions is that he was guilty of playing a role in the massacre after the Battle of Saltville. Robertson likely knew that word of the killings would spread and there could be severe consequences; therefore, he wanted to put as much distance between himself and Virginia as he could. Adding to the likelihood that Robertson knew how damaging his actions were, is the fact that he avoided discussing Saltville in his interview, in addition to his experiences in Virginia and Tennessee until he got back to Georgia. The only mention he makes of the experience is to say that General Williams was arrested, leaving the command to Robertson, who "bent his energies to get [to Atlanta] without mishap and arrived safely."¹²⁹ As discussed previously, Robertson's arrival at Saltville came when the Confederate forces desperately needed support, and he helped keep the Federals at bay until more reinforcements arrived. Robertson's omission of such a heroic tale is a testament to how much he wanted to distance himself from the events that transpired after the battle at Saltville.

Each of these details supports the idea that Robertson bears some of the responsibility for the massacre at Saltville, in some capacity, whether he fired a gun or supported the men who did. Yet, the most substantial evidence that Robertson was in some way involved in the massacre comes from an official Confederate document. On February 22, 1865, Robertson received orders to attend a court of inquiry on March 15 to investigate his actions.¹³⁰ The Confederate Senate also rejected Robertson's nomination to the rank of brigadier general that same day, making his

¹²⁹ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 11, 1927.

¹³⁰ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214, 13.

promotion unofficial, even though he had acted as a general since July 1864.¹³¹ In 1970, Dr. James H. Colgin published an article, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson,” in the *Texana*, which includes the full interview that Robertson gave to Helen Pool. Colgin’s introduction condenses the events described in the article and provides added background information, giving context to Robertson’s experiences. As Colgin discusses Robertson’s promotion to brigadier general, he states, “For some reason unknown, the Confederate Senate consistently refused to confirm the promotions of Robertson from major to brigadier general.”¹³²

Colgin’s description of the events at Saltville is marginally more detailed than Robertson’s, though he does include that a battle occurred there. Colgin discusses that the Federal forces wished to capture or destroy the salt works there, Robertson’s small brigade took part in the battle, and because Saltville was a natural fortress, the Federal forces were “repulsed and hastened back to Kentucky.”¹³³ The massacre that occurred at Saltville seems to have been a well-kept, or at least an unacknowledged secret until William Davis’s detailed account of the battle and aftermath was published in February 1971. Though Davis speculates that Robertson’s lack of cooperation and his behavior after leaving Saltville is likely part of the reason for the denial of his promotion, Davis also notes that Robertson’s actions at Saltville might have played a role in the decision.¹³⁴ Robertson’s promotion was forwarded to Jefferson Davis on December 9, 1864, by Secretary of War James Seddon, which also included General Hood’s promotion,

¹³¹ The National Archives. *US, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted Men, 1861-1865*. Publication number: M331. Nara Catalog Id: 586957. Record Group: 109. Roll: 0214, 4.

¹³² James H. Colgin, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," *Texana* 8 no. 2 (1970): 159.

¹³³ Colgin, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson," 159.

¹³⁴ Davis, “Massacre at Saltville,” 48.

among other officers.¹³⁵ Davis approved the nominations and sent them to Congress on December 14, where the list was read, but no further actions were taken.

When Congress denied Robertson's promotion in February, a significant change occurred in the Confederacy; General Breckinridge replaced James Seddon as the Secretary of War. Previous to Breckinridge's new position, he had attempted to bring Robertson to justice by sending "several orders for him to appear before a court," though Robertson never appeared due to a miscarrying of the orders or because "Robertson simply ignored them," according to William Davis.¹³⁶ Now that Breckinridge was in a position to take action against Robertson with greater authority, he utilized his friend and fellow Kentuckian, Henry Cornelius Burnett, to help him bring some measure of justice against Robertson.¹³⁷ Burnett, who was on the Committee of Military Affairs, delivered a recommendation to the Confederate Senate on February 20, 1865, that they should "not advise and consent to the appointment."¹³⁸ In addition to their friendship, Breckinridge and Burnett were also housemates at the time, so there is little doubt that it would have been easy for Breckinridge to work with Burnett to ensure that the Senate squashed Robertson's promotion.¹³⁹ While it was lacking in severity, Breckinridge and the Senate's actions assured that Robertson received some measure of justice for his involvement in the Saltville Massacre. Though Breckinridge was strongly motivated by Robertson's actions at Saltville, it is hard to imagine that Breckinridge did not take some personal pleasure in having Robertson's

¹³⁵ *Journal of the Senate of the Second Congress of the Confederate States of America* Vol. 4, In "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875." Courtesy of The Library of Congress, 350-351.

¹³⁶ William C. Davis, *An Honorable Defeat: The Last Days of the Confederate Government* (San Diego, CA: Harvest, 2002), 261.

¹³⁷ Davis, *Breckinridge*, 497. Davis notes that Breckinridge and Burnett were friends.

¹³⁸ *Journal of the Senate of the Second Congress of the Confederate States of America*, 581.

¹³⁹ Davis, *An Honorable Defeat*, 261.

promotion denied, considering the animosity between the officers after the political conflict with General Bragg.

The evidence against Robertson supports that he played a role in the events during the massacre at Saltville. However, the extent of Robertson's participation or how much he encouraged his soldiers may never be known. Even with all the research William Davis has completed regarding the events at Saltville, he notes that Robertson's actions during the massacre are "pure conjecture," though it is apparent throughout his writings that he places blame on Robertson, and with good reason.¹⁴⁰ Though Robertson may not have been a confirmed general, as previously discussed, he was acting with the authority of a general, and he could have prevented the massacre or, at the least, tried to put a stop to the events and hold those guilty of such atrocities accountable. Robertson failed to take any action to stop the events, and he never reported on the events to name any of the guilty soldiers. He fled Breckinridge's authority as soon as possible, and then Robertson never appeared before the court to respond to their inquiry. Robertson's actions indicate a person trying to distance themselves from the events to avoid association or guilt. When discussing the events of the Saltville Massacre, Robertson's potential guilt, and his actions afterward, Professor of History Dr. Brian D. McKnight commented, "Where there's smoke, there's fire, and for Felix Robertson, there was certainly enough smoke to believe there must have been a fire."¹⁴¹

Beyond losing his official confirmation to brigadier general, Robertson never faced any consequences for his actions at Saltville. Though the Senate never made his promotion official, it hardly mattered. Robertson had been referred to as a general for seven months by the time Congress took action, and with the state of the Confederacy by that time, no one took notice as

¹⁴⁰ Davis, "Massacre at Saltville," 47.

¹⁴¹ Personal conversation via telephone with the author. October 2022.

there were more pressing concerns. Robertson continued to use the title through the end of the war and for the rest of his life, which everyone accepted, being none the wiser due to the collapse of the Confederacy a few weeks after the denial of his promotion. Sadly, the massacred soldiers of the 5th United States Colored Cavalry never received justice for what occurred at Saltville. The closest that anyone came to answering for the massacre was Champ Ferguson. Though the Confederates had arrested Ferguson, he was released when their government collapsed. In May 1865, Federal forces arrested Ferguson, and he went to trial in Nashville, Tennessee, where he answered for his multiple crimes, including “the murder of Lieutenant Eliza Smith,...twelve soldiers whose names are unknown at Saltville, Virginia...and two negro soldiers, names unknown, while lying wounded in prison, at Saltville.”¹⁴² Ferguson was found guilty of his crimes and was hung, fittingly, with members of the 15th United States Colored Infantry in attendance.¹⁴³

Felix Robertson’s time with the Confederate Army ended under the cloud of Saltville, Breckinridge’s suspicions, and the destructive nature of his actions, which further tarnished his previously good reputation. The younger Robertson’s actions are a substantial departure from his father’s, who departed the Texas Brigade under the cloud of his court-martial, though he maintained his rank and dignity. Felix Robertson’s actions were unbecoming of an officer, inhumane, selfish, and deplorable, whereas J.B. Robertson’s actions were born out of his concern for his men. The elder Robertson acted to uphold his calling as a physician and his compassion for his men to care for and protect them, which he did despite the personal cost. Numerous voices of support flocked to J.B. Robertson’s defense and pleaded for his return to command of

¹⁴² Mays, *The Saltville Massacre*, 71.

¹⁴³ Davis, “Massacre at Saltville,” 48.

the Texas Brigade. Not one single voice was heard to defend Felix Robertson, which further indicates his culpability in the Saltville Massacre.

Though both Robertsons's time in the Eastern Theater of the Civil War ended under unfavorable circumstances, their experiences continue to demonstrate why they should be studied and included with greater importance in Civil War histories and Texas history. J.B. Robertson's court-martial points to the dedication of Confederate generals to their men and the bonds between them. Furthermore, Robertson's actions stand out as many generals receive recognition for their military ability, but Robertson demonstrated that he was a good leader on and off the battlefield, which was not true of every general, no matter which side of the conflict they fought. Felix Robertson, however, demonstrates that there were severe faults within the Confederacy due to the individual actions of some soldiers. Still, the younger Robertson's situation proves the leadership of the Confederate Army, and the government did not condone those actions. As the modern desire to hold historical figures accountable for their actions grows, Felix Robertson's experience provides an opportunity to not only expose his actions and bring greater attention to the Saltville Massacre but to recognize that the senseless deaths of the 5th Colored Cavalry deserve attention. While J.B. Robertson deserves more credit for his actions during the war, Felix Robertson's actions deserve to be brought to light and exposed.

Chapter 10

Life After the War

J.B. Robertson and Felix Robertson experienced a consequential period toward the end of their service with the Confederate Army. Their situations were dramatically different, yet each event marked a striking change in the Robertsons and the service they provided to the Confederacy. The final period of the war was also a transitional period in the lives of each man. As the war ended, the two Robertsons not only needed to separate themselves from their wartime experiences and adjust to civilian lives, but they were also required to navigate the new laws that attempted to change the old regime of the South. During the war, both Robertson men had been associated with well-known historical figures, they each participated in decisive battles, and both men's service stands out, marking them as significant and deserving greater attention. Beyond the Civil War experiences of the Robertsons, their lives during Reconstruction offer the last evidence for their inclusion in studies of Civil War and Texas histories, as their lives after the war complete the narrative by providing a contrasting view to how their lives were before the war.

The service of J.B. Robertson did not end with his removal from command of the Texas Brigade; he continued his service to the Confederacy, though in a different capacity. While Generals Longstreet and Jenkins maneuvered against Robertson, he was busy trying to serve the interests of the Texas Brigade. During the winter of 1863-1864, the Texas Brigade suffered from a low number of able-bodied soldiers to fill their ranks. By Robertson's calculations, there were 987 soldiers and 99 officers listed on the muster rolls for the entire brigade, and of that number, there were 697 soldiers and 87 officers present for duty.¹ Even though there were almost 800

¹ Harold Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor: The Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood's Texas Brigade* (Hill Junior College Press: Hillsboro, Texas, 1964), 52.

men counted as “present for duty,” Robertson noted that “there [were] many whose physical condition is such to prevent them from remaining with their command in any arduous and fatiguing march.”² Robertson compiled these numbers, hoping to gain permission to take the Texas Brigade back to Texas to allow the men to rest and recruit replacements for their unit. The recruitment plan that Robertson created involved enabling the men to return to Texas where they would each act as “a recruiting officer” and then return by April 1, 1864, which Robertson was “confident that they would not only return promptly but each officer and man would bring with him one or more recruits.”³

The struggles that Robertson’s tired and weary men faced were clearly on his mind during the encounter at Bean’s Station, further explaining his demeanor during the battle occurring the day after Robertson forwarded his recruitment plan to the Confederate Congress. A copy of the plan was also sent to General Hood, who approved the plan and promised to speak with President Davis about the matter, adding his grief “to know that [his] old troops [were] not doing well.”⁴ Before Robertson received General Hood’s response, he also requested leave to plead his case in Richmond, hoping his appeal might help convince Congress to approve his plan.⁵ Unfortunately, Robertson never had the opportunity to take the Texas Brigade home, Longstreet denied his request for leave, and the War Department refused to consider his plan, even though General Hood and the Texas delegation in Congress had both approved it.⁶

Following the court-martial and Robertson’s removal from his command of the Texas Brigade, he sought the command of any open Texas brigade. Sadly, Robertson was informed that

² Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 52-53.

³ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁶ Harold B. Simpson, *Hood’s Texas Brigade: Lee’s Grenadier Guard* (Fort Worth, TX: Landmark Publishing, 1999), 379.

there were no commands available to him. Robertson requested a ninety-day leave to return home on April 1, 1864, and received confirmation three days later, though orders to report to Major General John B. Magruder in Houston, Texas, cut his leave short on May 30.⁷ Almost a month later, on June 24, Robertson received an official command, his last of the war. Special Orders No. 147 assigned Robertson to command “the reserve forces of the State of Texas” with an expectation to “complete their organization and cause them to be mustered into service at once.”⁸ As the commander of the reserves, Robertson was allowed to establish his command as he saw fit and was able to secure any necessary facilities. The order also placed any unassigned officers or regular forces under Robertson’s command where he was “authorized to assign them temporarily to duty with the reserves.”⁹

Though Robertson had been replaced as the commander of the Texas Brigade and was far removed from them, his concern for his former soldiers never left him. On October 25, 1864, Robertson beseeched Texas Governor Pendleton Murrah for his assistance in filling the ranks of the Texas Brigade.¹⁰ Once again, Robertson suggested his former plan to allow the soldiers to return to Texas for rest and recruitment to occur during the winter of 1864-1865. Since Robertson was in command of the Texas reserves, he had a strong, working knowledge of the men available in Texas to support the Texas Brigade’s needs and let the governor know that there was “material to recruit them.”¹¹ This request was the final official correspondence that Robertson kept from his wartime correspondence, and fittingly, his concern focused on the men he had been with from the time they had volunteered until his removal from command.

⁷ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 63-64.

⁸ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881-1901), vol. 34 pt. 4, p. 692 (hereinafter cited as OR; except as otherwise noted, all references are to Series I)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 65-66.

¹¹ Ibid., 66.

Robertson expressed his fear that without the replenishment of their ranks, then it would only be “a short time...until the last one of that gallant band will have fought his last battle, and that the Texas Brigade will live but in name, a fate I cannot believe that their gallantry, as well as the fair name of Texas, forbids.”¹²

Robertson may not have succeeded in assisting the Texas Brigade, but it is clear that his heart and mind were still with them even though he was not physically in their presence. This level of concern and dedication to his men sets Robertson apart from the other commanders of the Texas Brigade. Historian Susannah L. Ural fittingly stated, “While not their most talented or aggressive field commander, Robertson earned the loyalty of the men through his attentiveness to their needs and his leadership in two of their biggest and most challenging battles: Gettysburg and Chickamauga.”¹³ Just as Robertson demonstrated his dedication to the men of the Texas Brigade, he set himself to the task of organizing the Texas Reserves. On February 4, 1865, Robertson reported that there were thirty-nine companies “called into the field by recent orders from headquarters Bureau of Conscription,” successfully demonstrating his ability to get the men of the Texas Reserves ready to respond.¹⁴

Robertson’s success as the commander of the Texas Reserves proved that he was a capable commander willing to serve to the best of his ability in whatever command he held. As the war ended, Robertson received his final assignment on March 27, 1865. Robertson was replaced as the commander of the reserves and ordered to report to General Magruder “for assignment to the command of one of the brigades in the division of Brigadier-General [Samuel

¹² Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 66.

¹³ Susannah J. Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade: The Soldiers and Families of the Confederacy's Most Celebrated Unit* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 196.

¹⁴ OR. vol. 48, pt. 1, section 2, p. 1367-1368.

B.] Maxey.”¹⁵ Though Robertson’s final assignment placed him back in field command, Texas was never the principal scene of activity like the Eastern Theater of the war had been. Within two weeks of Robertson’s appointment, the armies of the East began to surrender, ending the main hostilities of the war. In June, Union General Gordon Granger came to Texas, proclaimed the end of slavery, and paroled all the officers and enlisted men of the Confederacy, which Robertson received on July 12, 1865, officially ending his service and time in the Confederate Army.¹⁶

Following Felix H. Robertson's flight from General John Breckinridge, he returned to General Joseph Wheeler’s command in Atlanta. Robertson’s final act in military service to the Confederacy added another connection that warrants including him in studies and discussions of Civil War generals. On November 28, 1864, Robertson participated in his final battle at Buck Head Creek. This battle stands out because it was part of the Confederate attempt to resist Union General William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the Sea from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia. The main force of Sherman’s army was underway, while smaller remnants were separated to perform other tasks, such as the cavalry division commanded by Union General Hugh J. Kilpatrick. The Federals planned to destroy bridges and railroads and attempt to free prisoners of war in the area of Augusta but were “vigorously opposed by General Wheeler,” as Robertson recalled.¹⁷

Wheeler’s Cavalry Corps, which included Robertson, was busily harassing Sherman’s lines for several days before the conflict at Buck Head Creek occurred. General John Bell Hood, who commanded the Confederate forces in Georgia, ordered Wheeler to keep his cavalry mobile and to “keep them constantly harassing the enemy, destroying his trains, and cutting off his

¹⁵ OR. vol. 48, pt. 1, section 2, p. 1447.

¹⁶ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 16-17.

¹⁷ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 12, 1927.

foraging parties.¹⁸ According to Robertson, “the Yankees took some pains to keep a good distance between themselves” and the Confederates, but Wheeler eventually gave “the command to strike the enemy.”¹⁹ The battle was not an epic event that determined a significant loss or victory, but the Confederates did succeed in encouraging the Federals to rejoin Sherman’s ranks. Robertson depicts his final military experience with a touch of flare, describing himself leading men into battle, riding four abreast, originally armed with a pistol, which he exchanged for his saber, finding it “a more useful weapon.”²⁰ Before Robertson could strike anyone, he was struck with a Federal bullet to his right elbow, “rendering his arm useless.”²¹ Robertson then took his sword in his left hand and his reins in his teeth to continue fighting, though the blow he struck upon the soldier who had shot him was ineffective as it “glanced off harmlessly.”²²

The wound that Robertson received was severe and required immediate attention. Once Robertson arrived at a nearby house, away from the battlefield, he was able to be treated by Dr. Frank Lynch, who was able to remove the bullet and save Robertson’s arm before he was sent on to Augusta to recover.²³ It is interesting to note that when Robertson was wounded, he was able to be brisksed away to receive medical treatment. However, he had recently participated in events at Saltville that denied the soldiers of the 5th United States Colored Cavalry the same courtesy. General Wheeler reported that his forces came close to capturing Kilpatrick twice during the fighting but that he was able to escape due to “having a fleet horse.”²⁴ Though Robertson was

¹⁸ OR. vol. 44, p. 868.

¹⁹ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 12, 1927.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ OR. vol. 44, p. 910.

injured early in the war, Wheeler still described him as “the gallant General Robertson, [who was] severely wounded.”²⁵

The wound ended Robertson’s time fighting for the Confederacy and allowed him to return to his former commander and political beneficiary, General Braxton Bragg. On November 30, Robertson reached Bragg, who wrote that Robertson’s arm was “badly broken at the elbow.”²⁶ General Bragg also wrote a letter to notify General Wheeler that Robertson was doing well but that he would “be long disabled.”²⁷ During his recovery, Robertson transferred to Macon, Georgia, where he received the news that General Robert E. Lee had surrendered. Robertson remembered that he was quickly captured and mustered out of the Confederate Army by Union General James H. Wilson when he reported to Wilson’s headquarters in person to surrender.²⁸ General Wilson and Robertson had known one another from West Point, which Robertson believed was partially the reason why Wilson treated him “very courteously,” in addition to his reputation as a “valorous soldier” which “had somewhat preceded him there.”²⁹

Knowing Robertson’s actions at Saltville, it is difficult to believe his final claim to being known for his valor; however, Robertson’s boast is likely not unrealistic. The massacre that occurred at Saltville was not well known, and there were only a small number of people who suspected Robertson’s involvement. Historian William Davis noted that General Breckinridge had compiled evidence against Robertson but chose not to act on it, preferring to allow the Federals to include it in their investigation. Though the exact nature of the evidence that Breckinridge collected is unknown, Davis states that Breckinridge carefully guarded the records

²⁵ OR, vol. 44, p. 910.

²⁶ Ibid. In the report, Bragg said that it was Robertson’s left arm that was broken, but it was his right arm.

²⁷ Ibid., 911.

²⁸ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 12, 1927.

²⁹ Ibid.

and planned to leave them behind for the Federals, though there were never any charges made against Robertson.³⁰ Robertson surrendered on April 20, 1865, and as he reflected on his surrender, he recalled, "I hated to surrender...but it had to be done. Many of the soldiers cried and cursed when they had to. After all the excitement had died down, we belatedly thought of ways and means to get home."³¹

Before Robertson began the journey back home to Texas, there was one more final event he participated in that provided a final interesting connection between Robertson and the notable moments of the Civil War. After General Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox on April 9, the Confederacy maintained hope to continue the struggle. However, Lee was just the first domino to fall, leading to the eventual collapse of the Confederacy, though it was not an immediate response. President Jefferson Davis, along with his cabinet, fled Richmond, hoping that the government could escape and regroup in Texas with several parts of the Confederate Army to continue the struggle from the Trans-Mississippi Department and hold out for better terms than an unconditional surrender.³² Slowly, Davis's cabinet abandoned him, and he struggled to maintain the sorely needed support of soldiers due to monetary issues and their disillusionment after so much defeat at the end of four years of fighting. As Davis traveled across Georgia, avoiding Federal patrols, he stopped in Washington, Georgia, where he learned that General Joseph Johnston had surrendered a few days previously. Then, Davis received word from Secretary of War John Breckinridge that the soldiers who had been with him were close to mutiny and would no longer continue their service without receiving payment soon.³³

³⁰ William C. Davis, *An Honorable Defeat: The Last Days of the Confederate Government* (San Diego, CA: Harvest, 2002), 262.

³¹ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 12, 1927.

³² Davis, *An Honorable Defeat*, 263.

³³ *Ibid.*, 248-250.

The signs became clear to President Davis that the Confederacy could not continue in its current state and that he needed to act. On May 4, 1865, Davis called together the few generals in Washington, along with the Confederate Postmaster General and acting Secretary of the Treasury, John H. Reagan, and the Secretary of the Navy, Stephen R. Mallory. Davis wanted to wait to hold this particular meeting for the arrival of Breckinridge, but the circumstances in the vicinity were unfriendly, and Davis knew that he could not delay. Had Breckinridge been in attendance, there may have been an exciting encounter at the meeting since one of the generals in attendance was Felix Robertson. Breckinridge was still dissatisfied that Robertson had escaped justice for Saltville. Therefore, it was probably in Robertson's best interest that Breckinridge could not be present. Davis called the meeting to announce he would "disband the government temporarily" until they could reform in Texas, though he insisted that "he did not have the constitutional authority to dissolve the government" completely.³⁴

Robertson's presence at such an important meeting was born from chance rather than his importance. Since Robertson was in the area and was recognized as a general, he was included in the meeting despite the lack of any confirmation of his rank by the Confederate Congress. Whether the meeting members knew the extent of the charges against Robertson is unknown. However, it seems likely that they would have been aware of a suspicious situation in which Robertson was involved, at the least. A little more than four years before the meeting took place, Robertson had been present for the first shots that began the Civil War, and now, Robertson was present for the end of the Confederacy as well. As important as the event was, marking the end of an era, Robertson omitted the meeting from his interview, demonstrating that he either did not consider the meeting significant or simply did not want to associate himself with the end of the

³⁴ Davis, *An Honorable Defeat*, 262.

Confederacy. Regardless of his personal feelings, William Davis did not spare any disdain for Robertson's presence at the meeting. Davis stated, "That a man only a step short of being a wanted criminal could now be sitting here in what would be the last official meeting Jefferson Davis would ever hold as president spoke eloquently of just how deep ran the overall collapse, civil and military."³⁵

Just a few weeks before the massacre at Saltville, while Robertson traveled through Tennessee, he married Sallie Davis on September 11, 1864.³⁶ Once the war ended, Robertson's duty to the Confederacy expired with the collapse of the government, and he began to make his way home with his bride, eventually arriving in Independence on December 1, 1865. Like many Southerners, Robertson had to adjust to a new way of life, though he also had to discover what working and earning a living meant. Robertson had transitioned from childhood to the Military Academy and then to a soldier at war, but he had never worked. J.B. Robertson was also back home in Independence and had resumed his medical practice. The younger Robertson began to work as a surveyor to generate an income, but he recalled that in the early days of Reconstruction, "living was precarious, and things were in a generally chaotic state."³⁷

As Robertson described his experiences during Reconstruction to Helen Pool, he provides a final glimpse of the nature of his character, which casts further suspicion on him, and his potential guilt related to the Saltville Massacre. Robertson describes disliking the men of the Freedmen's Bureau, who were "a great hardship to the Southerners."³⁸ Though men from the bureau had cut off the buttons from J.B. Robertson's coat, the real reason the younger Robertson

³⁵ Davis, *An Honorable Defeat*, 262.

³⁶ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

³⁷ Helen Pool, "The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson" *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 13, 1927.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

took offense to their presence was their efforts on behalf of the newly freed slaves. His feelings were clear as Robertson described suffering “indignities” such as having to march “between two lines of negro soldiers to vote.”³⁹ Robertson further complained that “Many negroes during first reconstruction days...roamed about the country enjoying the privileges of freedom to the fullest extent.” Robertson then lamented that the Southerners “didn't know what our rights were” and that “[w]e were hardly fit to be co-equals with our slaves, and yet we had to be.”⁴⁰ The younger Robertson offered no other examples of the Freedmen’s Bureau “exercis[ing] their authority forcibly.”⁴¹ However, to address their actions, he did note that “Wherever it was possible, the native inhabitants killed off the perpetrators of these insults as nuisances to be got rid of the best way possible.”⁴² The racist sentiments that Robertson harbored were hardly enough to convict him, as many former Confederates shared his views. Yet, Robertson’s comfort with the idea of Freedmen’s Bureau workers being “killed off” seems to indicate a level of approval toward murder that could easily be associated with his actions at Saltville.

Felix Robertson stayed in Independence, working on the family farm, until 1868, when he decided to relocate to Crawford, near Waco, Texas, with his wife. That same year, J.B. Robertson’s wife, Felix’s mother, passed away, which prompted the elder Robertson to go into semi-retirement for a few years.⁴³ In the Waco area, Felix Robertson’s family flourished. Felix became an attorney, and the family grew, welcoming their son, Felix D. Robertson, and two daughters, Julia and Sallie.⁴⁴ In 1874, Robertson participated in the McClennan County

³⁹ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 13, 1927.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 19.

⁴⁴ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 13, 1927.

Democratic Convention, which represented the “unterrified Democracy of old McClennan,” and focused on supporting the newly elected Democrat governor, Richard Coke.⁴⁵ While attending the convention, Robertson was nominated and elected to serve as a delegate from McClennan County, demonstrating that he was becoming a well-known figure in the community, which was likely due to his former role as a general in the Confederacy.⁴⁶ Coke’s election to governor signaled the end of political Reconstruction in Texas, which explains why the Democrats of McClennan County lauded the return of “old McClennan.” Robertson further served the community of Waco in the Second Regiment Volunteer Guards as the colonel of their unit.⁴⁷

Back in Independence, J.B. Robertson kept himself busy and proved the compassion and concern he had held for his men during the war did not vanish with the end of his leadership of the Texas Brigade. In addition to providing shelter to “some friendless old soldiers sick in body and bankrupt in worldly goods,” Robertson also helped to organize Hood’s Texas Brigade Association in 1872.⁴⁸ The association was an active veteran’s group recognized as one of “the first and strongest associations to be organized among Confederate veterans.”⁴⁹ Robertson was active in the organization for eighteen years; he was the first vice president, then served as president and was reelected eleven times, serving as their chief executive longer than anyone else.⁵⁰

In 1874, along with Governor Coke's election, J.B. Robertson returned to political office after receiving an appointment from Coke. For over two years, Robertson served the State of Texas as the State Superintendent of the Bureau of Immigration until 1876, when the

⁴⁵ *The Galveston Daily News*, Vol. 34, No. 179, Ed. 1, Sunday, August 2, 1874.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ John G. & Levin Rankin, *The Daily Banner* (Brenham, TX), Vol. 4, No. 146, Ed. 1 Thursday, June 19, 1879.

⁴⁸ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 18-19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Constitutional Convention abolished the position. Unsurprisingly, Robertson committed himself to his position as he had dedicated himself to each of his previous positions. Robertson's service to the State of Texas "contributed much to the economic and population growth of Texas during the period."⁵¹ After the dissolution of his office, Robertson continued to contribute to the growth of Texas by working with the Houston and Texas Central Railroad as an immigration agent, where he helped "settle thousands more immigrants in Texas."⁵² Robertson married Hattie Hendly Hook, Governor Coke's niece, while he was working for the railroad company.

In 1879, Robertson left Independence to join Felix in Waco, where it seems that he finally gave up his medical practice, as there are no records of him ever practicing in the area.⁵³ Robertson was drawn to Waco to be near his son and to take advantage of the better business opportunities in the area. Reunited, the two Robertsons went into business together as Land and General Agents, advertising their former military ranks at the top of their letterhead.⁵⁴ The two men invested in property around McClennan County, "engaged in several enterprises," and worked at "railroad promotion and building in West Texas," which further contributed to the development of post-Reconstruction Texas.⁵⁵ Texas politics attracted J.B. Robertson one final time in 1882 when his name was teased as a potential gubernatorial candidate, though it never did materialize.⁵⁶ In 1889, a United Confederate Veterans Camp was organized in Bryan, Texas, named for General Jerome B. Robertson, honoring him as one of the few camps named for a living veteran.

⁵¹ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁵⁴ Jerome B. Robertson to Harry Castles, May 23, 1882, letter, May 23, 1882. Courtesy of Hood's Texas Brigade Files, Texas Heritage Museum-Historical Research Center, Hillsboro, Texas.; Jerome B. Robertson to Moses Austin Bryan, March 31, 1882, letter, March 31, 1882. Courtesy of the Albert and Ethel Herzstein Library at the San Jacinto Museum of History.

⁵⁵ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 21.

⁵⁶ *The Evening Light* (San Antonio, TX), Vol. 2, No. 125, Ed. 1 Thursday, June 15, 1882.

On January 7, 1890, the life of Jerome Bonaparte Robertson came to an end as he succumbed to a battle with “cancer in the face.”⁵⁷ J.B. Robertson passed away in Felix Robertson’s home at the age of 76 and lay in state the next day “dressed in Confederate gray with his military decorations carefully and proudly displayed on his chest.”⁵⁸ As Robertson was escorted to the depot of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad he had once worked for, citizens of Waco crowded the streets to watch the funeral procession pass by and see the general taken back home to Independence. As General Robertson made his final journey, the men to whom he had devoted himself carried him along his way. Members of the Texas Brigade who had served under Robertson during the war acted as his pallbearers to see their beloved general safely to his final resting place.⁵⁹ In honor of his funeral, an elegant eulogy recognizing Robertson’s contributions was drafted for public notification by the United Confederate Veterans which stated, “That the Camp realizes with full force the bereavement sustained in the death of General Robertson...to all ex-Confederate soldiers [and] to the State of Texas, whose infant struggle for liberty called him from his native state to her aid; to the South, which had the glorious service of the prime of his manhood, and to the nation which suffers the loss of a patriot and a worthy citizen whose life affords an example worthy of emulation.”⁶⁰

Felix Robertson continued to practice law in Waco for many years after his father’s death and remained active in the community. Robertson followed in his father’s footsteps and became politically involved in the governor's election in 1892. Robertson acted as the campaign manager for George W. Clark, who ran against the famous James Hogg.⁶¹ That same year, Robertson

⁵⁷ *The Galveston Daily News*, Vol. 48, No. 257, Ed. 1 Thursday, January 9, 1890.

⁵⁸ Simpson, ed. *Touched With Valor*, 21.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁶¹ Gene A. Howe, *Amarillo Daily News* (Amarillo, TX), Vol. 19, No. 167, Ed. 1 Saturday, April 21, 1928.

married his second wife, Lizzie Dwyer, and the two had a son whom they named in honor of his grandfather, Jerome Bonaparte Robertson. In 1894, Robertson relocated his father's remains from Independence to Oakwood Cemetery in Waco. In Harold Simpson's account of J.B. Robertson's life, he notes that when Robertson's remains were relocated, so were the remains of Mary E. Cummins Robertson, his first wife, and Felix Robertson's mother, as well as the remains of J.B. Robertson's mother, Clarissa Hill Keech Robertson. Simpson based this information on what he received from one of the last descendants of Felix Robertson, Sara Robertson Smith.⁶² However, visiting both cemeteries reveals that the gravestones of the two Robertson women are absent from Oakwood yet still present in Independence, along with J.B. Robertson's other two children, Julia and his son, Henry.

The connection of the Robertson family to Texas history did not end with the passing of J.B. Robertson. In the 1920s, the family had two final notable historical experiences. The first was the gubernatorial nominee for the Democrat party in 1924. Felix D. Robertson, the son of Felix H. Robertson and grandson of J.B. Robertson, was a party favorite to win the nomination as he ran against Miriam "Ma" Ferguson.⁶³ Robertson was the clear favorite in the first primary, with Ferguson trailing closely behind demonstrating that the race was a contest between the two candidates. Ferguson was the wife of Jim Ferguson, a former Texas Governor who was impeached, found guilty, and removed from office in 1917. During the election, Miriam Ferguson's husband supported her amidst concerns over having a female running for the governor's office. The pair developed a strategy to focus on Robertson's most significant

⁶² Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 23. Footnote

⁶³ *The Texas Mesquiter* (Mesquite, TX), Vol. 43, No. 48, Ed. 1 Friday, June 26, 1925.

drawback, his support from the Ku Klux Klan, “a legitimate force in Texas politics during the early 1920s.”⁶⁴

Felix D. Robertson was a well-known judge with the support of many Texans who openly endorsed his campaign with personal testimonies about his finer qualities.⁶⁵ Though Robertson’s support from the Klan was no secret, the numerous endorsements that speak of his morality and Christian principles help to identify the mood of Texas during the period.⁶⁶ One endorsement from H.H. Berryman of Alto, Texas, claims that his father served with J.B. Robertson and Felix H. Robertson for four years during the war and that he was taught by his father “that two better soldiers never lived.”⁶⁷ Berryman then states that Robertson’s record “shows him to be the same type of man.”⁶⁸ Berryman’s father is likely one of the two Berryman brothers from Cherokee County, where Alto is located, who was part of the First Texas Regiment in the Texas Brigade. Therefore, his father likely did know J.B. Robertson well but would not have served with Felix H. Robertson.⁶⁹

Despite the support of many Texas voters, both Robertson and Ferguson had qualities that others disliked. Being supported by the Klan was Robertson’s greatest downfall, and Ferguson struggled with not being supportive of women’s rights. Both candidates were so unfavorable to attorney Charles M. Dick that when the runoff election occurred, he took a critical step to prevent a victory for either candidate. Dick “filed a protest with the Democratic state executive chairman...arguing that Ferguson's sex disqualified her and Robertson's Klan connections made

⁶⁴ Shelley Sallee, “‘The Woman of It’: Governor Miriam Ferguson’s 1924 Election,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (1996), 2.

⁶⁵ N. P. Houx, *The Mexia Weekly Herald* (Mexia, TX), Vol. 26, No. 33, Ed. 1 Thursday, July 24, 1924.

⁶⁶ *The Texas Mesquiter* (Mesquite, TX), Vol. 43, No. 48, Ed. 1 Friday, June 26, 1925.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Susannah J. Ural, *Hood's Texas Brigade: The Soldiers and Families of the Confederacy's Most Celebrated Unit* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 261.

him ineligible,” therefore the court should remove their names from the ballot.⁷⁰ Though the opposition was strong, the Texas voters were allowed to vote in support of Robertson or Ferguson on election day. Robertson and Ferguson’s campaign for the nomination was hard fought and “represented the politics of womanhood...against a candidate heavily supported by the Klan.”⁷¹ After counting the votes, “Ferguson defeated Robertson by 97,732 votes, with the total vote, 729,770, a record for a Texas election to that time.”⁷²

While Felix D. Robertson lost the nomination for the Democrat party, his candidacy ties the Robertson’s to another influential period of Texas history, the election of the state's first female governor. The year after the election, *The Brenham Daily Banner* from Brenham, Texas, described the election as “not a victory for Ferguson, but a defeat for the Klan.”⁷³ Robertson’s connection to the Ku Klux Klan is also essential to the nature of Texas politics at the time. Similar to his father’s past, it is not an admirable or desirable connection, but it is vital to acknowledge that it existed. Naturally, Felix D. Robertson’s coziness with the Klan begs the question of Felix H. Robertson’s attitude toward that organization considering the allegations against him at Saltville and his attitude toward the Freeman’s Bureau. Felix D. Robertson was not elected governor of Texas but continued a family tradition of being connected with Texas politics.

Felix H. Robertson achieved one final noteworthy accomplishment, cementing his place in Civil War history just a few years after the election. On April 20, 1928, Robertson passed away in Waco at the age of 89, the last of the Confederate generals to die. Interestingly, Robertson was known to have desired a burial in the Texas State Cemetery next to Stephen F.

⁷⁰ Sallee, “The Woman of It,” 2. Footnote.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Brenham Daily Banner-Press* (Brenham, TX), Vol. 42, No. 166, Ed. 1 Friday, October 9, 1925.

Austin, “The Father of Texas,” but for reasons unknown, the family declined and informed officials that Robertson would be buried in Waco.⁷⁴ According to newspaper reports, the original plan for Robertson’s burial was for internment in Austin, but the family announced soon afterward that they decided against that plan in favor of the local burial.⁷⁵ General Felix Huston Robertson was laid to rest beside his father at Oakwood Cemetery in Waco, next to Robertson’s first wife, Sarah. The gravesite is simple, and as the two men were in life, they are surrounded by significant figures of Texas, with former Governor Richard Coke buried a few feet away, former president of Baylor University, Rufus C. Burleson nearby, as well as another former governor and Confederate general, Lawrence Sullivan Ross.

The lives of both the Robertson men are interconnected to several important events in both Texas and American history. Yet neither of the men is commonly recognized within discussions of Texas and American history. Evaluating the entirety of their lives, numerous connections between the Robertsons and historically significant aspects of Texas and America warrant giving the two men more attention. However, the Robertsons have been neglected outside of being included in the story of some other historical figure or being mentioned as part of historical events. The only works specifically focused on the Robertsons are Harold Simpson’s 1965 book, *Touched With Valor: Civil War Papers and Casualty Reports of Hood's Texas Brigade*, and James Colgin’s 1971 article in the *Texana*, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson.” Simpson’s work focuses on publishing J.B. Robertson’s Civil War papers and devotes twenty-three pages to a biographical account of Robertson’s life. Similarly, Colgin’s work focuses on bringing together the interview that Felix Robertson gave to Helen Pool,

⁷⁴ Gene A. Howe, *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe* (Amarillo, TX), Vol. 19, No. 168, Ed. 1 Sunday, April 22, 1928.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; John H. Sorrells & Herbert D. Schulz, *The Fort Worth Press* (Fort Worth, TX), Vol. 7, No. 174, Ed. 1, April 21, 1928.

initially published as a series of newspaper articles, which Colgin adds about seven and a half pages to provide context in his overview of Robertson's life.

The Simpson and Colgin accounts of the Robertsons are valuable to the historiography of their lives but do not provide enough exploration to provide a complete picture of who the two men were as citizens and soldiers. The Robertsons participated in pivotal moments of American and Texas history and had very different experiences during the Civil War. J.B. Robertson became attached to Texas during its infancy and was drawn to the emerging republic during the war for independence. Following Robertson's arrival, he joined the Texas Army, became a landowner, practiced medicine, and was highly involved in the local politics of his community. Additionally, during the period of the Lone Star Republic, Robertson also served his community in the militia, taking part in defending Texans from raiding Indians and Mexican invasions.

After the United States annexed Texas, Robertson was elevated beyond local politics and served at the state level; he also took part in helping the young Baylor College grow. During the turmoil of the secession movement, Robertson was selected to act as a delegate from Washington County to the Secession Convention, where he participated in the disunion of Texas from the United States and Texas's union with the Confederate States of America. Afterward, Robertson organized a volunteer unit and prepared them to join the Confederate war effort. During the war, Robertson served with the Texas Brigade, which became one of the most famous units of the war. As Robertson served with the Texas Brigade, he worked with notable and well-known generals and became the general of the brigade, commanding it longer than any other leader. As the commander of the Texas Brigade, Robertson led his men, most notably at the influential battles of Gettysburg and Chickamauga. Still, his most outstanding contribution was his compassion for his men. As Robertson was charged with conduct unbecoming and accused of

deliberately trying to demoralize the army, even the officials of the court martial saw that his interests were not treasonous but born from his concern for his men. After losing command of the Texas Brigade, Robertson devoted himself to service in his new role overseeing the Texas Reserves.

Following the war, Robertson resumed his medical practice and devoted much of his time to serving the veterans he had once commanded by helping to organize and lead the veteran's group, Hood's Texas Brigade Association. Eventually, Robertson served his state once more, working with Governor Richard Coke to help the struggling economy recover during Reconstruction as the Superintendent of the State Bureau of Immigration. Additionally, Robertson was respected enough in his community and the state that he was considered a possible candidate for governor. Even though it never materialized, it demonstrated the people of Texas's faith in him. Robertson encountered many prominent figures in Texas and American history, such as Sam Houston, John Bell Hood, James Longstreet, and Robert E. Lee. Robertson lived through the early defining periods of Texas history and participated in shaping that history, though his contributions have fallen from memory and acknowledgment.

Felix Huston Robertson's life began during the Republic of Texas, and he grew up as a child of the republic; Robertson's actions glimmer with examples of his native Texan heritage. Like his father, Felix Robertson has been part of American and Texas history, connecting the family to influential events worthy of recognition. Felix attended Baylor College, then a Texas military school, before he became a student at the United States Military Academy, West Point. When the states began to secede, and the Confederacy was formed, Robertson resigned from the prestigious institution to serve the Confederate Army. Once Robertson reached the Confederacy, he participated in the inauguration parade of President Jefferson Davis before being sent to South

Carolina, where he was present and involved in the opening act of the Civil War at Ft. Sumter. Robertson served in several areas of the war from South Carolina, to Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and Georgia.

During the Civil War, Robertson served under several notable Confederate Generals, including P.G.T. Beauregard, Braxton Bragg, John Breckinridge, Joseph Wheeler, John "Cerro Gordo" Williams, and John Bell Hood. Not only did Robertson participate in the beginning of the war, but he also fought at Shiloh, the first great battle of the war. Robertson also got a taste of the political and military fighting when he sided with General Bragg to implicate General Breckinridge for the failure at Murfreesboro. Robertson joined his father and the Texas Brigade as the reserve artillery commander during Chickamauga. As the Confederate Army tried to ride the momentum of their victory at Chickamauga, Robertson was with General Bragg when the Confederate hope of returning the war to their favor began to crumble outside Chattanooga.

As the Confederate Army fell back, Robertson was promoted to brigadier general, becoming the only native-born Texan to achieve such distinction. Robertson's promotion also made him and his father the only other father-and-son generals in the Confederacy outside Robert E. Lee and his sons. As a general, Robertson was attached to the cavalry command of General Wheeler and traveled north. Eventually, he was detached and sent to Virginia, where he participated in the Battle of Saltville. The aftermath of Saltville is unquestionably the defining moment of Robertson's military career. Though there is a lack of evidence to directly connect him to the murders of men from the 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry, there is no doubt that Robertson was involved and complicit in some capacity. Robertson's conduct at and after the Saltville Massacre disgraced his reputation and tarnished his military career, though he was able to escape

association with the events during his lifetime. Once the war ended, Robertson was present for the end of the Confederacy as Jefferson Davis dissolved the government.

Felix Robertson returned to Texas during Reconstruction and openly disdained the new order established across the South. Robertson became an attorney, had children, worked with his father in a company they created, and tried his hand at politics. Robertson's eldest son, Felix D. Robertson, ran for governor against Miriam "Ma" Ferguson, which connected the Robertson family to the election of the first female governor of Texas, though they were the opposition. Felix H. Robertson likely supported his son's gubernatorial aspirations and may have even helped with the campaign since he had once managed the campaign of William Clark against James Hogg. The last great connection to Texas and American history was the death of Felix Huston Robertson in 1928, making him the last Confederate general to pass away. John McCausland often receives credit for this honor, likely due to Robertson never receiving the Confederate Congress's approval for his promotion. Though Robertson may not have received confirmation of his rank from Congress, he did receive the promotion, acted as a general, led soldiers in battle as a general, and was acknowledged as a general in numerous official reports and throughout the rest of his life.

The lives of the two Robertsons share some similarities but diverge on an important detail: the nature of their characters. J.B. Robertson's life demonstrates a dedication to service and serving others, whereas Felix Robertson's life appears to be more self-centered, with a need to bring attention to himself. The younger Robertson demonstrated this as he aligned himself with Bragg, likely hoping to gain favor and promotion. Later in life, Robertson told Helen Pool about meeting John Bell Hood's daughter-in-law, the wife of John Bell Hood Jr., at a Confederate veteran's reunion. Robertson claimed that she once told him, "[h]is personal

recollections of her father-in-law [had] opened up new vista into his bravery for her.”⁷⁶ It is hard to imagine that Mrs. John Bell Hood Jr. was as sincere as Robertson believed, considering the numerous veterans attending those gatherings who would have spent more time serving with General Hood and were far better equipped to inform her than Robertson in his limited experience.

Studying the lives of the Robertsons adds an interesting perspective to Texas, American, and Civil War history. J.B. Robertson provides an alternative to studying generals based on their skill on the battlefield by offering his skill related to the care he demonstrated toward his soldiers. Felix Robertson provides a more cautionary tale about avoiding being entangled in ethically and morally wrong actions. In 2016, Richard M. Walsh, a historian, author, and adjunct professor specializing in American and European history, published a short book titled *Battle Hymn: The Best and Worst Civil War Generals*. The book discusses generals from both sides of the conflict, including many who are easily recognized and a few who are not well-known. In his introduction, Walsh identifies the qualities that make a general great, stating that “The ability to inspire and lead his troops to victory would top the list.”⁷⁷ Walsh separates the generals he discussed into “poor, mediocre to good, great, and political,” though neither of the Robertsons is discussed or even mentioned throughout the text.⁷⁸ Based upon the actions of Felix Robertson, he should undoubtedly fall into the “poor” classification. Still, the fact that Walsh has completely neglected a man whose deeds should make him infamous demonstrates the need for greater attention and historiography on Robertson. When J.B. Robertson is discussed in other works, it is

⁷⁶ Helen Pool, “The Life Story of Brig. Gen. Felix Robertson” *Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) January 7, 1927.

⁷⁷ Richard M. Walsh, *Battle Hymn: The Best and Worst Civil War Generals* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2016), 9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

often to connect him to leading the Texas Brigade following General Hood's promotion. However, J.B. Robertson is wholly omitted from the book and not even mentioned in the section devoted to Hood. Walsh writes about the command of the Texas Brigade as though Hood was still directly leading the men at Gettysburg when the unit was just part of his division at the time.⁷⁹

Though Walsh's *Battle Hymn* is not meant to be an exhaustive work and is a general historical account of the generals discussed within, the absence of either Robertson is part of the greater problem related to the two generals not being recognized for their contributions, positive or negative. J.B. and Felix Robertson should be included in Texas history and Civil War historical studies. J.B. Robertson exemplifies the ability of a general to be effective beyond the battlefield and emphasizes the importance of how a commander relates to his soldiers and provides for their needs. Felix Robertson demonstrates the need to expose, in greater detail, the Saltville Massacre and connect Robertson with the atrocity so that the racially motivated killings of the Union soldiers are not forgotten, and he is held accountable for his role in the massacre. In connection with events related to Texas history, the Robertsons helped shape the state from its time as an independent nation through Reconstruction. Though each Robertson played different roles in connection with the Civil War and Texas, their contributions serve to increase our understanding of history and are worthy of greater attention. Despite the shortcomings of either man, both Robertson's responded to the call of duty from Texas throughout their lives and were willing to "go cheerfully where duty call[ed] them."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Walsh, *Battle Hymn*, 34-35.

⁸⁰ Simpson, ed., *Touched With Valor*, 31.

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