

End Of The Road: Sherman Was Tenacious, But Johnston Was The Better Negotiator

Peter S. Carmichael

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Review

END OF THE ROAD

Sherman was tenacious, but Johnston was the better negotiator

Carmichael, Peter S.

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Bradley, Mark L. *This Astounding Close: The Road to Bennett Place.* University of North Carolina Press, 2000-09-01. ISBN 807825654

In the popular imagination, the image of Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant amicably discussing surrender terms in William McLean's parlor on April 9, 1865, symbolizes the end of the Civil War. The subsequent proceedings at Bennett Place, North Carolina, have often been an obscure footnote to the story of the Confederacy's collapse, even though Joseph E. Johnston's negotiations with William T. Sherman resulted in the surrender of 90,000 Confederates, the largest of the War.

In a superb study that incorporates the best of new military history, Mark L. Bradley makes it clear that Johnston's surrendering of the Army of Tennessee was not an inevitable consequence of Appomattox, nor an event of limited significance. In its discussion of the 1865 North Carolina campaign, **This Astounding Close** outlines the contours of the armies' movements, paying close attention to the logistical concerns and political pressures facing both generals. With tremendous care, Bradley shows how North Carolina civilians interacted and shaped the operations of the Confederate and Union armies.

Although many Tar Heels were weary of the War, Bradley puts to rest the notion that North Carolinians had abandoned the cause. Even the controversial Governor Zebulon Vance comes across in Bradley's pages as a devoted Confederate, not as a states' rights obstructionist. He energetically supported national armies whenever possible, delivering patriotic speeches while searching for ways to supply Southern forces without imposing civilian hardship. He did not want to drive his fellow Tar Heels out of the Confederacy through excessively intrusive measures. Bradley's provocative interpretation of Vance underscores the need for a re-evaluation of the governor's wartime career.

In the case of Sherman, Bradley assumes a more critical stance. Allowing the Confederate army to escape after the battle of Bentonville on March 19 enabled Johnston to take his army into the interior of the state, from where the Confederate commander advocated a linkage with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Johnston, it appears, had learned from the mistake of dispersing Confederate forces at Vicksburg. Lee and Confederate authorities, on the other hand, were preoccupied with Richmond, missing an opportunity to unite their forces with the Army of Tennessee's 30,000 men, which if combined would have put more than 80,000 men in the field. Had Lee been at the helm of such an army, Bradley believes the War could have been extended indefinitely.

Even after Lee's surrender, Johnston negotiated from a position of strength, largely because his smaller and more mobile army was beyond Sherman's immediate reach. Over the adamant protests of Jefferson Davis, Johnston courageously initiated negotiations with Sherman and relentlessly pursued his goal of stopping the bloodshed. When Washington authorities voided Sherman's more liberal concessions, granted in the initial surrender meetings, Johnston remained firm that his men take home their draft animals, field transportation, and one-seventh of their rifle muskets. Unlike Sherman, whom Bradley criticizes for failing to understand the political climate after Lincoln's assassination, Johnston was far more astute about the realities facing the South. In navigating the ebbing but treacherous political waters of the Confederacy, Johnston gained favorable terms for his men, maybe his most impressive and lasting contribution to the Civil War.

Peter S. Carmichl is an assistant professor of history at University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He is the author of Lee's Young Artillerist: William R. J. Pegram (1995), and is currently finishing a study of student youth in 1850s Virginia.