

Brigadier General Tyree H. Bell, C.S.A.: Forrest's Fighting Lieutenant

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Review

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Hughes, Jr., Nathaniel Cheairs, Moretti, Connie Walton, and Browne, James Michael. *Brigadier General Tyree H. Bell, C.S.A.: Forrest's Fighting Lieutenant.* University of Tennessee Press, \$45.00 ISBN 157233309X

Tyree of Tennessee

An indispensable inferior

Armed with an unpublished autobiography, and supported by other primary sources, historian Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, ably assisted by Connie Walton Moretti and Jim Michl Browne, has produced an insightful glimpse into the life of a Tennessee farmer turned citizen-soldier with the publication of **Brigadier General Tyree H. Bell, C.S.A.: Forrest's Fighting Lieutenant.**

Throughout the long historiography of the American Civil War, scores of books have been penned on the legendary exploits of Confederate cavalryman Nathan Bedford Forrest. The simple fact is the vast majority of these publications have focused attention on detailing Forrest's personal character, battlefield generalship, and life experiences at the expense of fleshing out the stories of the men who served under him. This routine approach is not altogether improper, but the emphasis on Forrest the man and legend has long overshadowed any analysis of the important and complex command relationship existing between the combative cavalryman and his subordinate field officers. In this regard, this new biography on the life and war experiences of Tyree H. Bell is a breath of fresh air.

For a year and a half, Bell served and fought as Forrest's right arm, a well-deserved nickname he earned while in command of a brigade in Forrest's Cavalry Corps campaigning in Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Alabama. Born in Kentucky, Bell was raised on a Tennessee plantation and became a farmer and livestock raiser. When civil war erupted, friends and neighbors of the community of Newborn, Tennessee, asked him to captain a company of local

volunteers being raised for inclusion in the Provisional Army of Tennessee. He entered Confederate service with the 12th Tennessee Infantry, and was rapidly promoted its lieutenant colonel. The farmer turned soldier soon distinguished himself in battle, participating in the engagement at Belmont, Missouri, and demonstrating his courage and leadership capabilities at bloody Shiloh. Promoted colonel of the 12th, he led the regiment in the Kentucky Campaign, seeing service with Kirby Smith's Army of East Tennessee in the engagements at Cumberland Gap and Richmond, Kentucky. The following summer, Bell was ordered to West Tennessee, where he was assigned to General Gideon J. Pillow's Conscript Bureau. In a short period of time, despite having to operate within territory loosely occupied by United States army forces, Bell managed to recruit 2,500 badly needed volunteers for war service in the Confederate army. That fall, while on a visit to north Georgia to secure arms for his recruits, Bell met General Forrest, who had recently received an offer from Jefferson Davis to raise a mounted command for the defense of Mississippi. Forrest invited Bell to join him in the enterprise and with the formal approval of President Davis, Bell and his recruits provided a crucial combat nucleus as a mounted brigade in Forrest's developing cavalry corps.

For the next 19 months, Forrest's corps fought engagement upon engagement, in a desperate attempt to stem the tide of war in the West. Bell repeatedly proved his value in hard fought battles at Fort Pillow, Brice's Cross Roads, and Harrisburg (Tupelo), and on raiding expeditions against Federal supply lines and depots, before participating in General John Bell Hood's disastrous invasion of Tennessee. Commissioned brigadier general in February 1865, Bell ably commanded his troopers through the remaining months of the conflict. He and his remaining troopers finally yielded to Federal authority and surrendered with the remaining veterans of Forrest's command at Gainesville, Alabama, on May 10, 1865. Paroled, Tyree Bell returned to his family, living in Sumner County, where he resumed farming, before eventually moving his family to California. He spent the remainder of his postwar career in business and land speculation. After participating in a Confederate veteran reunion, the old general fell ill while traveling through New Orleans, and died in the Crescent City on August 30, 1902.

Forrest's Fighting Lieutenant offers an excellent portrait of one of the unsung Confederate field officers of the Civil War. Tyree H. Bell was a key figure among the small corps of indispensable subordinate officers upon whose tactical knowledge, skill, and ability General Nathan Bedford Forrest would

forge his legend. This Tennessee farmer risked a great deal to serve the Confederacy, and now his experiences in life and contributions as perhaps Forrest's most capable lieutenant have been duly served by Nat Hughes insightful observations.

Stacy D. Allen is a 20-year veteran of the National Park Service and currently serves as Supervisory (Chief) Park Ranger at Shiloh National Military Park in Tennessee. He has published contributions in five books, authored three issues of Blue & Gray magazine, numerous essays, and book reviews.