

### Confederate Struggle for Command: General James Longstreet and the First Corps in the West

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## Review

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**Mendoza, Alexander** *Confederate Struggle for Command: General James Longstreet and the First Corps in the West*. Texas A&M; University Press, \$32.95 hardcover ISBN 9781603440523

### War in the Western Theater

Alexander Mendoza provides a revisionist interpretation of Confederate General James Longstreet's seven-month sojourn in the western theater during the Civil War. Many historians chastise Longstreet, attributing many Confederate military debacles to his obstinacy and arrogance. Mendoza argues against negative interpretations of Lee's "Old Warhorse" in this examination of one of the Confederacy's most controversial generals.

Mendoza's favorable account of Longstreet's career in the West contains a multi-part thesis. First, he sets out to provide a complete history of the Army of Northern Virginia's First Corps in the West. He provides a detailed description of their exploits in the western theater, filling a gap in Civil War scholarship. Second, Mendoza addresses the question of morale in the First Corps during its western campaign. Earlier publications emphasize the rampant demoralization in the First Corps during its trek across the western theater. Mendoza notes the complexity of morale in Civil War armies. While Longstreet's men faced hardships, they never doubted their ability as soldiers nor did they ever lose faith in the Confederate cause. Finally, Mendoza hopes to provide a balanced picture of Confederate General James Longstreet by noting his tenacity and resolve to keep fighting in the face of defeat, insubordination, and a host of other complications.

Mendoza begins his narrative with Longstreet's arrival in the West. Confederate President Jefferson Davis became alarmed after Union General William S. Rosecrans outmaneuvered Confederate General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee during the Tullahoma Campaign. Richmond responded by detaching Longstreet's First Corps from the Army of Northern Virginia to assist

Bragg in the West. Subsequently, Longstreet's Corps participated in both the Chickamauga and Chattanooga campaigns. Mendoza describes the First Corps's participation in the campaigns and the personal conflict that ensued between Longstreet and Bragg. Bragg became enraged by Longstreet's insubordination and approved Richmond's decision to send him on an independent mission against Union General Ambrose Burnside's command in Knoxville. Mendoza describes Longstreet's unsuccessful excursion against Knoxville and the First Corps's eventual return to the Army of Northern Virginia.

Mendoza addresses the complicated nature of Longstreet's military record. In spite of many personal foibles, Lee's "Old Warhorse" understood the importance of the western theater and contributed to the Confederate victory at Chickamauga. Furthermore, Mendoza asserts that the Confederate command problems that plagued the western armies created a difficult atmosphere for Longstreet to exploit the First Corps's potential. Mendoza argues, however, that "Longstreet contributed to these quarrels and obstacle" (201). But he balances this indictment by noting the organizational and command challenges Longstreet faced.

The most notable feature of Mendoza's book is his attention to Confederate command problems in the West. Many Confederate generals in the Army of Tennessee despised Braxton Bragg. Longstreet joined the anti-Bragg cabal upon his arrival in the West during the Chickamauga campaign; a decision that created tension between Longstreet and Richmond. In chronicling command tensions within the Confederate army, the book compliments Steven E. Woodworth's *Jefferson Davis and His Generals* (1990). Mendoza also addresses Confederate command relationships within the First Corps, describing the hostility that emerged between Longstreet and many of his subordinates. Ultimately, Mendoza claims that the majority of Longstreet's failures in the West resulted from First Corps command hostilities and not simply from "Old Pete's" poor generalship.

Mendoza provides a wonderfully lucid narrative that sheds light on a forgotten subject within the often neglected Western theater of the war. Although the author clearly empathizes with Longstreet and goes against the grain of most modern scholarship, his book is an excellent revisionist addition to the literature analyzing this controversial general's wartime performance.

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