

## **Episode 167: Joseph Johnston and John Buford**

**<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

On December 16, 1863, the Confederate Army of the Tennessee gained a new commander. Braxton Bragg had resigned and was replaced by Joseph Johnston, a new leader for the soldiers of this army but an old face in Confederate command.

Johnston was born at Longwood House in Farmville, Virginia in 1807. He graduated in the West Point class of 1829 and distinguished himself during the Mexican-American war. Johnston would eventually rise to the rank of Brigadier General in the U.S. Army before resigning and joining the Confederate effort. He was instrumental in the Southern victory at First Bull Run and was commander of the Army of Northern Virginia until the Battle of Seven Pines on May 31, 1862. During the Mexican War, U.S. commander Winfield Scott had proclaimed that "Johnston is a great soldier, but he had an unfortunate knack of getting himself shot in nearly every engagement." This statement seemed predictive years later as Johnston was severely wounded at Seven Pines and was out of action for nearly six months. He was replaced at the head of the Army of Northern Virginia by Robert E. Lee.

When Johnston recovered, he was placed in charge of the Confederate Department of the West. There things did not go so smoothly as before. In July of 1863, Union forces had captured the vital Mississippi River town of Vicksburg and President Jefferson Davis was not happy with Johnston's defense of the town. This friction exacerbated a relationship between Johnston and Davis that was rocky before the Civil War even began.

Then in the fall of 1863, Braxton Bragg's victory at Chickamauga had been followed by defeat at Chattanooga. Bragg resigned from his post and the officers in the Army of the

Tennessee advocated for Johnston to take over. Davis eventually agreed with them and now appointed Johnston despite his misgivings.

Far to the north, a Union commander received an eleventh hour promotion. John Buford, Jr. was one of the North's most effective cavalry officers and one of the true heroes of Gettysburg. Buford, also a West Point grad, commanded the small cavalry force that delayed the Confederates for crucial hours on the first day of the Gettysburg battle and allowed the Union army to claim the high ground when they arrived. The courage of Buford and his command in the face of overwhelmingly superior numbers lives on in military lore.

Following Gettysburg, Buford continued to be active and effective during Union operations in central Virginia. Unfortunately, during the fall of 1863 he became very ill, most likely from typhoid. He was taken to Washington, D.C. and by mid-December it became obvious that he would not survive the disease. At the urging of Union officers, President Abraham Lincoln agreed to promote Buford to the rank of Major General.

Buford was given the news of the promotion shortly before he died on December 16, 1863. His reported final words were "Put guards on all the roads, and don't let the men run to the rear." He was thirty-seven years old.