ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

"STONEWALL" JACKSON: CHRISTIAN SOLDIER

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Lord Roberts, commander-in-chief of the British armies, observed early in the 20th Century: "In my opinion Stonewall Jackson was one of the greatest natural military geniuses the world ever saw. I will go even further than that—as a campaigner in the field he never had a superior. In some respects I doubt whether he ever had an equal."

Confederate General Daniel Harvey Hill commented of Jackson in an 1863 letter: "The striking characteristic of his mind was his profound reverence for divine and human authority. I never knew of any one whose reverence for Deity was so all pervading, and who felt so completely his entire dependence upon God." Well-known American Presbyterian cleric Moses D. Hoge was more succinct on the subject. "To attempt to portray the life of Jackson while leaving out the religious element would be like undertaking to describe Switzerland without making mention of the Alps."

Robert E. Lee also possessed military genius and religious devotion, but even the faith of Lee paled in comparison to that of his principal lieutenant. Jackson was extraordinary to many, enigmatic to others. He was an artillerist who excelled in infantry tactics, a devout Christian merciless in battle, an adult who loved the company of children, a man of odd habits but with an inflexible sense of duty. Jackson was more simple than complex, yet generations of historians and writers have sought to make him into a "loose cannon," an unpredictable figure of inconsistencies. The general does not deserve such judgments.

Jackson was a fascinating mixture of contrasts: eccentricity and excellence, ambition and humility, restlessness and repose, wrathfulness and righteousness. Each of those ingredients, in acceptable measurement, existed in his makeup. General John B. Gordon, who fought alongside Jackson, concluded that there were "in all his mental and moral characteristics the most perfect harmony."

Because Jackson lived in another time—a time that has little in common with life today, he remains somewhat difficult to understand. His real qualities were devotion, duty, and determination. He lived but thirty-nine years; his fame rests on exploits

performed in the last twenty-four months. However, the first thirty-seven years molded the simple man who became the supreme soldier.

No general ever rose from humbler beginnings. Thomas Jonathan Jackson was born in January, 1824, in the mountain wilderness of northwestern Virginia. He was the second of four children to Jonathan and Julia Jackson. His father and a sister died when he was two; his financially strapped mother was forced to give him away to relatives when he was seven. Julia Jackson died a year later.

The orphaned lad grew up under the care of an uncle who gave him security and little else. For ten years Thomas weathered the lack of a real family, the loss of his only brother, and the lack of familial love a lonely boy needed. He was never allowed to be a child; he was treated as an adult from the age of seven. Lacking the fundamentals of family affection and youthful happiness produced a young man shy, introverted, distrustful of others, and desperate to know how to give and receive love.

So sad and empty were the first seventeen years of his life that Jackson would never openly discuss the period. Still, the closed personality of the man was a direct outgrowth of the withdrawn boy.

In 1842 Jackson secured an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy. West Point offered Jackson the first, and perhaps the only, chance for a mountain orphan to make something of himself. Highly limited in formal education, be began cadet life ranked at the bottom of his class. Undaunted, he studied day and night for four years. Impassivity became his byword. All of his energies went toward the single purpose of learning.

In the now-famous West Point Class of 1846 (from which came twenty-one generals in the Civil War), Jackson ranked 17th of 59 cadets. Faculty and students alike agreed that had the curriculum lasted another year, the silent, humorless boy from Virginia would have been at the top of his class. Jackson himself attributed his achievement to one of his favorite maxims: "You may be whatever you will resolve to be."

High academic rank brought Jackson assignment as a lieutenant in the 3rd U.S. Artillery. Within six weeks of graduation, he was in the Mexican War with Gen. Winfield Scott's army. Meritorious service in three battles won him promotions to brevet major.

None of his West Point classmates did as well in Mexico. Jackson gained valuable insights from the brief war. He mastered the transition from textbook knowledge to practical application. The advantages of swift movements and flank attacks became obvious to him. In addition, Jackson discovered that the chaos of battle actually sharpened his judgments. Most of all, the Mexican contest revealed to him how important drill and discipline were in the handling of volunteer soldiers.

It was during the dull routine of garrison duty thereafter that Jackson gave increasing attention to religion. Reading the Bible became a daily duty. Jackson attended Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, and Catholic churches in futile search of a home. To his sister Laura (the only member of his family left), he wrote long letters of his quest for God's blessing and salvation.

That same 1847-1851 period was a time when Jackson worried most about his health. Medical knowledge in the mid-19th Century remained in the Dark Ages. People usually got sick, and they came more and more to care for themselves rather than submit to a physician's treatment that too often amounted to quackery. Health became an obsession with Jackson. While some ailments were hypochondriacal, he did suffer from digestive disorders, weak eyesight, partial deafness, and occasional disorders of the throat and muscular network. Jackson tolerated—and in some case—overcame these maladies through a rigid diet, hydrotherapy at spas, "water-cure" establishments, and deeper devotion to "my heavenly Father."

The peacetime Army offered few challenges and fewer promotions. In 1851 Jackson accepted an offer to become professor of natural and experimental philosophy at the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington in the southern end of the Shenandoah Valley. Jackson had little classroom experience; he had never taught young boys, and the courses he was to teach contained subjects (physics, astronomy, magnetism, light and vision) with which he was unfamiliar. Further, the Institute was only twelve years old and had but five faculty members.

Jackson would spend a fourth of his life at VMI. In those ten years he rose from a stumbling, rigid, and demanding teacher into a highly respected and oftentimes beloved professor. As cadets matured toward senior-class standing, they saw the rudiments of leadership "the Major" was trying to implant in them. The ridicule of freshmen became the respect of first classmen. More than one cadet stated that Jackson taught a mighty dull course; but if there should ever be a war, they wanted to serve under his command. Scores of them ultimately did so.

During the decade at VMI, Jackson found his religious home: the Lexington Presbyterian Church. He rapidly became one of the most devout Calvinists of his time. His faith was inflexible and total. Jackson dutifully attended every church service, even though he slept through a goodly part of each service. He tithed faithfully. Keeping the Sabbath holy became an obsession. No place existed in his Sunday schedule for labor, newspapers, or secular conversation.

His great refuge lay in prayer. Jackson habitually prayed whenever he drank a glass of water, opened or mailed a letter, entered the classroom. Through death, Jackson had lost almost everyone he had ever loved. He came to adore God with all of the intensity of a child because he saw that the love of God, and by God, could never be taken from him. A member of his congregation asserted that "It would be difficult to find in the entire Presbyterian Church any other member who disciplined himself so strictly, obeyed what

he believed to be the will of God so absolutely, prayed so fervently, or found so much happiness in his religion."

Jackson married twice, both times to daughters of Presbyterian ministers. His 1853 marriage to Elinor Junkin of Lexington brought Jackson the first real feelings of love he had ever known. Yet she died in childbirth fourteen months after their wedding. In 1857 he married Anna Morrison of Davidson, North Carolina. That union, bound extraordinarily by Christian love, produced a surviving daughter that Jackson saw but once.

Often misunderstood are Jackson's feelings about slavery. He owned two slaves, both of whom had asked him to purchase them after the deaths of their masters. Anna Morrison brought three slaves to the marriage. Jackson viewed human bondage with typical simplicity. God had established slavery for reasons man could not and should not challenge. A good Christian had the twin responsibilities of treating slaves with paternal affection and introducing them to the promises of God as found in holy scripture. Toward that end, Jackson taught a Sunday afternoon Bible class for all slaves and freedmen in Lexington.

Major Jackson and the VMI corps of cadets served as gallows guard at the December, 1859, hanging of John Brown for murder and treason. War clouds thickened in the months thereafter. Jackson remained calm. The dissolution of the Union, he told a minister, "can come only by God's permission, and will only be permitted if for His people's good."

Civil War exploded in April, 1861, and Jackson promptly offered his sword to his native state. The VMI cadets were ordered to Richmond to serve as drillmasters for thousands of recruits gathering there. On April 20, the professor led the corps out of Lexington. He never again saw his adopted hometown.

Jackson was an exceptionally large man. In an age when the average male adult was 5 feet, 7 inches tall and weighed 130 pounds, Jackson stood a full 6 feet and carried 175 pounds on a strong frame. Brown hair, thick beard, pointed nose, high forehead, unusually large hands and feet, high-pitched voice, and thin lips usually pressed tightly together, were other chief features. Yet what attracted the most attention were blue eyes that stared at everything with deep intensity.

He rode a horse awkwardly, bent forward as if he were leaning into a stiff wind. For the first year of the Civil War, Jackson's uniform consisted of a battered kepi cap pulled down almost to his nose, the well-worn blue coat of a VMI faculty member, and boots that reached above his knees.

Appearance was deceiving, however. The plodding college professor entered war with cool professionalism. Also present was an inner calmness that could instill confidence in others. Wedded to the precepts of drill and discipline. He would demand

blind obedience in others because he gave such obedience to his superiors. Yet another, overriding factor molded Jackson into the world-esteemed general he became.

He reduced his burning faith to military logic. The great national catastrophe that had descended was, for Jackson, a judgment from God to test the righteousness of man. Therefore, the Civil War must be a religious crusade to regain the Almighty's favor. Christian faith and the Confederate cause were, for Jackson, one and the same.

He thus became demanding, steel-cold, even pitiless, in the field. To be worthy of New Testament love, Jackson believed that he must fight with Old Testament fury. Thus, at the height of one of his great victories, Jackson turned to an aide and exclaimed joyfully: "He who does not see the hand of God in this is blind, sir, blind!"

Jackson's first assignment was as a colonel in charge of the rendezvous camp at Harpers Ferry, the northern entrance to the Shenandoah Valley and the northernmost point of the Confederate States of America. The commander quickly molded enthusiastic but militarily uneducated recruits into the semblance of orderly soldiers. He taught the ignorant, corrected the errant, and punished the insubordinate. A young officer returned from a brief trip and commented in wonder: "What a revolution three or four days has wrought! I could scarcely believe the change."

In mid-June, 1861, Jackson received promotion to brigadier general and appointment to command of the First Brigade of Virginia: five infantry regiments from the Shenandoah region. The most famous nickname in American military history came a month later in the opening battle of the Civil War. On July 21, opposing forces collided in battle along Bull Run near the vital rail junction of Manassas Junction. Union forces were driving against the Confederate left. Jackson's men were positioned on Henry House Hill, the high ground commanding that sector. The Southern lines broke and drifted slowly up the hillside. Gen. Barnard Bee shouted to his faltering troops: "Look, men! There stands Jackson like a stone wall! Rally behind the Virginians!"

A calm Jackson then unleashed his regiments. Federal attackers were at first blunted and then repulsed when other fresh Confederate units struck the Union flank. The Federal retreat became a rout. Thereafter, Jackson and his brigade lived under the name "Stonewall." Yet it was a misnomer. More often than not, Jackson was a hammer rather than an anvil.

In the autumn, Jackson received promotion to major general and command of the Shenandoah Valley military district. Reorganization, forays, drill, and discipline marked the ensuing winter months. By Spring, 1862, Jackson's responsibilities were twofold: to block any Union advance into the Valley, and to prevent Federals there and at Fredericksburg from reinforcing Gen. George B. McClellan's army then advancing up the Virginia peninsula toward Richmond.

Jackson loved his adopted Shenandoah Valley, and he was well aware of its military importance as a breadbasket and an avenue for invasion. "If this Valley is lost," he asserted, "Virginia is lost." Hence, when Union forces began edging into the Shenandoah early in March, the heavily outnumbered Jackson went into action. The result was a campaign so brilliant in conception and execution that it is still studied in military academies around the world.

Some 64,000 Federals in three separate armies came after Jackson and his 17,000 men in the Valley Campaign. Yet in forty-eight marching days, "Old Jack" (as his men fondly called him) marched his soldiers more than 670 miles, won victories at McDowell, Front Royal, Winchester, Cross Keys, and Port Republic , fought six skirmishes and a dozen delaying actions, and completely thwarted the Union war effort in Virginia. Jackson's men inflicted 7,000 casualties at a loss of half that number.

The campaign demonstrated Jackson's tactical weapons: hard marches, knowledge of terrain, unexpected assaults, singleness of purpose, heavy attacks concentrated at one point, and self-confidence arising from the belief that God was on his side. Thus did Jackson close his official report of the Valley Campaign with the affirmation: "God has been our shield, and to His name be all the glory."

With the Valley clear of Union threats, Jackson and what he called his "army of the living God" marched to the Richmond area to assist Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The ensuing Seven Days' Campaign brought McClellan's advance to a permanent halt, even though mistakes were plentiful as the Confederate army engaged in its first offensive operations. However, the campaign brought Lee and Jackson together; and for the next eleven months, these two men would come to be regarded as the greatest military partnership in modern warfare.

At a glance, it was a strange personal alliance. Lee's roots were deep in Virginia tidewater aristocracy. He was the son of a Revolutionary War hero, one of the most brilliant cadets ever to attend West Point, and a professional soldier with thirty years' experience when civil war began. So highly esteemed was Lee at the outset of hostilities that he was offered command of all Union forces. He declined in order to defend his "birthright:" Virginia. Lee had warmth, courtesy, tact; no soldier could match him for field fortifications, inner lines of defense, and audacity.

Jackson was seventeen years younger than Lee. He had few friends and courted none. An unswerving purpose to serve God and country dominated his thinking. Wrapped in silence, blind obedience, and total devotion to God, he was exceedingly contentious with many of his subordinate officers. Yet three things bound Lee and Jackson closely to one another: love of Virginia, faith in God, and aggressiveness in combat.

Only ninety days after McClellan was banging on the doors of Richmond, the two Southern commanders had cleared Virginia of all major Union threats. After the Seven Days came victories at Cedar Mountain and Second Manassas. Lee's hopeful invasion of

the North in September, 1862, came to a halt at Antietam. Confederates quickly exacted a measure of revenge three months later when the Union army made thirteen blind assaults on Lee's line at Fredericksburg. It was Lee's most one-sided victory of the war.

By then, Jackson was a lieutenant-general commanding half of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee had recommended his advancement by stating that Jackson "is true, honest and brave; has a single eye to the good of the service and spares no exertion to accomplish his object." Jackson's feelings for his commander were singularly superlative. "So great is my confidence in General Lee that I am willing to follow him blindfolded." Inside the army, and throughout the Southern press, Lee was the most respected general and Jackson the most beloved.

In November, 1862, Anna Jackson gave birth to a daughter. Jackson did not see the child until mother and daughter visited his camp in April, 1863. Those few days were the happiest of Jackson's life. His beloved wife was at his side, the child he had always sought was in his arms, the Confederate cause looked promising—all through the blessings of a loving God.

Then came Chancellorsville.

Again the Union Army of the Potomac started south through central Virginia toward the Confederate capital at Richmond. In the tangled confusion of the Wilderness, west of Fredericksburg, Jackson performed his most spectacular flanking movement. A secret, twelve-mile, circuitous march brought Jackson and his 28,000 men opposite Gen. Joseph Hooker's unprotected right flank near a crossroads known as Chancellorsville. Late in the afternoon of May 2, Jackson sent three divisions forward in an attack that drove disorganized Federals more than two miles before nightfall brought the fighting to a standstill.

Jackson was extremely anxious to continue pressing forward. Total victory seemed within his grasp. For the only time in the war the general rode out in the smoke, darkness, and confusion to make a personal reconnaissance of the enemy's position. He was returning through the woods to his own lines when Confederates mistook the general and his staff for Union cavalry. A blaze of gunfire tore through the trees.

Three bullets struck Jackson. Two inflicted only minor injuries, but the third shattered the bone in his left arm just below the shoulder. A nightmarish trip by litter and by wagon followed before aides succeeded in getting Jackson to a medical aid station in the rear. More than five hours after the general was shot, Surgeon Hunter McGuire amputated the limb. As the battle of Chancellorsville continued to rage, Lee said of Jackson's wound: "He has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right."

It was necessary to move Jackson to a place of safety. He had to endure a twenty-seven-mile ride over rough roads and in a wagon with no springs to a railhead at Guiney Station. Either pneumonia or sepsis rapidly developed. Medical science of that day had

no positive treatment for either disease. Jackson had always hoped that he might die on the Sabbath. At 3:15 on Sunday afternoon, May 10, 1863, he awakened from a coma long enough to say clearly: "Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees." Minutes later, Jackson died.

Shock waves of sadness rolled through the Confederacy. "I know not how to replace him," a grief-stricken Lee declared. No comparable replacement ever emerged. With Jackson's passing went much of the daring, the mobility, and the aggressiveness that had brought both success and fame to the Army of Northern Virginia. In a sense, the road to Appomattox and the end of the war began in the spring of 1863 at Chancellorsville.

It was Jackson's deathbed wish that he be buried in Lexington. This was done. In the weeks that followed, ministers throughout the embattled Confederacy conducted memorial services. The most frequently quoted scripture were the words of St. Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith …"

Thomas Jonathan Jackson

Born	January 20, 1824
Died	May 10, 1863
Buried	Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery, Lexington Virginia
Father	Jonathan Jackson
Mother	Julia Neale
Career Milestones	West Point graduate | Professor at Virginia Military Institute| Confederate Colonel, Brigadier General, Major General and Lieutenant General in command of the Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia.

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