

A BGES Premier Civil War Field University Program:
The Iron Dice of Battle:
Albert Sydney Johnston and the War in the West
With Tim Smith
October 9-13, 2024; from Brentwood, Tennessee

“If Albert Sydney Johnston is not a general, then we have no generals.”

Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy

Life is a hard and sometimes cruel experience, and a new nation endowed with great leadership potential often finds fame is fleeting—so it was for the CSA and Albert Sydney Johnson. As the South seceded, some of America’s best officers resigned their U.S. Army and Navy commissions and offered their services to their home states. The South had harvested robustly with men like Col. Robert E. Lee, Brig. Gen. Joe Johnston, and Col. William Hardee, but the senior cavalry colonel, Albert Sydney Johnston, was the prize catch. Davis immediately gave him command of the West from Kentucky beyond the Mississippi. Yet in less than a year, he was dead from a wound on the first day of the Battle of Shiloh. From that point onward, the Confederacy’s western armies lacked strong leadership to mirror what Lee brought to the eastern armies.

This is a program that examines the brief but impactful Civil War career of General Johnston. It is based on a demi-biography published in late 2023 by LSU Press and entitled [*The Iron Dice of Battle, Albert Sydney Johnston and the Civil War in the West*](#), written by our tour leader, Dr. Tim Smith. Smith is an engaging and highly sought-after new historian whose works are driving discussion for a new generation of Civil War historians and enthusiasts.

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Wednesday, October 9, 2024

6 PM. Gather at the Holiday Inn Express, Brentwood South (Cool Springs), where Tim will introduce you to General Johnston. A few years ago, Tim did a program on General Grant in the same region that ended at Shiloh. This is the Confederate mirror image of early strategy in the Kentucky, Tennessee, region in 1861 and 1862, and it ends up at Shiloh.

Hotel is included. We will break for dinner on your own.

Thursday, October 10, 2024

7:20 AM: Have your bags on board; we will leave at 7:30 for our 3½ hour ride to Mill Springs Battlefield, Kentucky, the extreme right of General Johnston's command. This is one of the National Park Service's newest parks, and as we tour the battlefield, we will talk about the impact of the action on Johnston's western strategy. Road trips can be monotonous, but in Civil War programs like this, they are instructive. We will travel to Bowling Green, which was Johnston's headquarters, to overnight.

Your lunch and hotel are included. Dinner is on your own.

Friday, October 11, 2024

8:30 AM: As the strategic center of Johnston's line, he assumed that any move against his line would come through Bowling Green. There are some residual artifacts, buildings, and sites from the Civil War that we will examine and consider, but like Johnston, our time there will be short and, again like him, we will retreat south. There is much to discuss about Johnston and his personality and character. If you read Tim's book, you will be fully armed to engage in open discussion about Johnston and his brief tenure in command after giving up the Bluegrass State.

Since Johnston does not actually participate in Forts Henry and Donelson, we will not go there, but we will briefly visit his headquarters at Edgefield in Nashville. Johnston continues on, of course, to Corinth, Mississippi, an important railroad town and junction for western communications. On the way, we will stop at Decatur, Alabama, an often overlooked but critically important Civil War town on the Tennessee River. We will then track into Corinth, where we will spend the next two nights.

Hotel, lunch, and dinner are included.

Saturday October 12, 2024

8:30 AM: All of what we really know about Albert Sydney Johnston and his major war experience is situated here in Corinth and on his final battlefield near the Hornet's Nest at Pittsburg Landing. We can assess his tenure as theater commander and how he responded when he brought major portions of his command to this northern Mississippi town. We can see how he viewed his opportunities and what his challenges were. We can see him in the company of different personalities who bring their command resources to this railroad town. We can look at the plans that were drafted and the manner in which he modified and adapted them. We can see how he delegated and when he believed it necessary to provide more pointed guidance. We can see him managing councils of war and how he deals with prevaricating subordinates who lose their nerve on the eve of battle. And we can evaluate him on a major battlefield—his demeanor, his judgment, and his courage. We can see how he manages violence and how he influences subordinates.

Finally, we can see him on the field of combat in leadership and second guess his lack of judgment in exposing himself to danger. While he dies a hero's death, it is a very fair question to ask: Did he serve the Confederacy well?

In this last question, we get to the essence of military leadership. Everyone has a function on a battlefield, and the lateral difference between a commanding general and the brigadiers and other junior officers leading the actual fighting is a robust distinction. One assumes the maturity that a senior officer brings to the control and events in the theater they command. Johnston dies, and thus the story ends leaving the students of history to endlessly game what might have been the progress of the war in the west had Johnston survived and applied his experience to future battlefields. Those lessons of experience are manifest in his opponents—Grant and Sherman.

We also see the battlefield maturity of Lee in the east—what might Johnston have done opposite Henry Halleck in May 1862? What about the Kentucky Campaign and Perryville? What might a battle-seasoned Johnston have done with Rosecrans at Stones River? Would he have allowed Grant to besiege Vicksburg or the opportunities presented at Chickamauga? Would Johnston have bled out his army suffering from an absence of resources, or would Lee have found a mighty western leader whom he could coordinate the use of manpower with? What might have been the collective wisdom of the 55-year-old Robert E Lee and the 59-year-old Albert Sydney Johnston—two of the old United States army's most senior leaders in the 1850s?

Very few people focus constructively on the lost opportunities such twists of fate deny. What is true is that we will never know, but Johnston's death removed a lethal weapon from the Confederacy's arsenal. Considering these "What ifs?" is a productive intellectual exercise that you will enjoy.

Hotel, lunch, and dinner are included. After dinner, Tim will make his farewells and return home near Corinth.

Sunday, October 13, 2024

We will deadhead back to Cool Springs, Tennessee—about 4 hours on I-40. We will take a break about halfway and get you back by 1 PM. Lunch is included.

About the Faculty

Tim Smith is a well-established star in the Civil War community. He has been increasing popular on BGES tours; however, his robust scholarship precedes him. He previously constructed a tour for us based upon his book [*The Real Horse Soldiers*](#). This program comes immediately after the completion of his book on Albert Sydney Johnston. His other publications are too numerous to mention—all focus on war in the Mississippi Valley, with his most recent scholarship breaking apart the Vicksburg Campaign in multiple volumes. Altogether, Tim has published more than

20 books, and he shows no sign of slowing down. This is an excellent historian, and you will want to see him at his peak productivity. He teaches at the University of Tennessee at Martin.

Hotel Information

Your registration fee includes four nights' hotel starting on October 9 at the Holiday Inn Express, Brentwood South, Cool Springs, 8097 Moore's Lane, Brentwood, Tennessee; 615/309-8860. Other hotels in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and Corinth, Mississippi, will be announced, but we will make all arrangements and pay for your hotels.

Transportation

The servicing airport is Nashville (BNA). This major metropolitan area has multiple interstates and the traffic to go with it. At rush hour, cars from Brentwood to Nashville and from Nashville to Brentwood are bumper to bumper.

Recommended Reading

You will be provided with maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. These books are available online.

Charles Roland: [*Albert Sydney Johnston, Soldier of Three Republics*](#)

Timothy Smith: [*The Iron Dice of Battle, Albert Sydney Johnston and the Civil War in the West*](#)

Timothy Smith: [*Shiloh, Conquer or Perish*](#)

Wiley Sword: [*Shiloh, Bloody April*](#)

Registration Form

The Iron Dice of Battle:

Albert Sydney Johnston and the War in the West

A BGES Civil War Field University Program

Presented by Tim Smith

October 9-13, 2024; from Brentwood, Tennessee

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes four nights lodging, four lunches and two dinners, maps, the academic program, support of a professional historian, a tour director, and transportation. We will also provide snacks and cold bottled water.

_____ Registration \$1395 single or \$1095 per person double occupancy

_____ Current BGES member \$1295 single or \$995 per person double occupancy

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate or I am a member who is past due to renew. Please accept my donation of \$_____ (must be \$75 or more which is tax deductible).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$300 per person plus full payment for any memberships. Total enclosed is \$ _____,

_____ I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed.

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$ _____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, PO Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531, or fax credit cards to 434-432-0596 . You may also register on line at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.