



A Crisis in Confederate Command: Edmund Kirby Smith, Richard Taylor, and the Army of the Trans-Mississippi

Jeffery S. Prushankin

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In *A Crisis in Confederate Command*, Jeffery S. Prushankin scrutinizes the antagonistic relationship between Confederate general Edmund Kirby Smith and his key subordinate, Richard Taylor. Prushankin offers a perspective on the events in the Trans-Mississippi through the eyes of these two high-strung men and analyzes how their clash in personalities and in notions of duty and glory shaped the course of the Civil War.

Smith and Taylor, Prushankin explains, disagreed over how to thwart Federal incursions across Louisiana and Arkansas. Smith, a West Point graduate and disciple of Joseph E. Johnston, owed a debt to politicians in Arkansas and Missouri for helping him secure his appointment and so opted for a defensive policy that favored those states. Taylor, a Louisiana political general who had served his apprenticeship under Stonewall Jackson, argued for an offensive strike against the enemy. The friction between the two reached a climax at the Red River campaign in 1864 when Taylor blatantly disobeyed orders from Smith and attacked Federal troops. Prushankin shows that what began as a dispute over strategy degenerated into a battle of egos and a succession of caustic personal attacks that eventually led to Smith's relieving Taylor from command.

Despite their discord, Prushankin argues, Smith and Taylor produced one of the Confederacy's greatest military accomplishments in the Red River campaign victory against a Yankee juggernaut. With his insightful portraits of Smith and Taylor, use of previously untapped primary sources, and new interpretations of correspondence from key figures, Prushankin imparts fresh understanding of the psychology of leadership in the Civil War as a whole.

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