



Teacher of Civil War Generals: Major General Charles Ferguson Smith, Soldier and West Point Commandant

Allen H. Mesch

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From West Point to Fort Donelson, General Charles Ferguson Smith was a soldier's soldier. He served at the U.S. Military Academy from 1829 to 1842 as Instructor of Tactics, Adjutant to the Superintendent and Commandant of Cadets. During his 42-year career he was a teacher, mentor and role model for many cadets who became prominent Civil War generals, and he was admired by such former students as Grant, Halleck, Longstreet and Sherman.

Smith set an example for junior officers in the Mexican War, leading his light battalion to victories and earning three field promotions. He served with Albert Sidney Johnston and other future Confederate officers in the Mormon War. He mentored Grant while serving with him during the Civil War, and helped turn the tide at Fort Donelson, which led to Grant's rise to fame. He attained the rank of major general, while refusing political favors and ignoring the press. Drawing on never before published letters and journals, this long overdue biography reveals Smith as a faithful officer, excellent disciplinarian, able commander and modest gentleman.

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