

Evander McIver Law :Teacher and Confederate General

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It was 2:00 in the afternoon and my father, a friend and I had just eaten lunch and were heading back to the airport just outside Gainesville, Georgia. We had been duck hunting in Arkansas for the weekend, and I had invited Max, a fraternity brother, to join us. As is often the case, my father attempts to incorporate business in some way to everything we do. He says it's because he can write it off on taxes as a business expense.

I have tried to explain the character of my father countless times, but never seem to do him very much justice. He is unabashedly ADD, but when he does manage to focus on one thing it becomes the focal point of his entire world. He carries around a certain wisdom that can only be the product of a lifetime of experience, yet he still hasn't appeared to mature at all. To call him a character does a disservice to the word "character." His humor treads a fine line somewhere between funny and riotous. He has the innate ability to know exactly what should not be said, and then he says it very loudly. He thrives on the inappropriate. If you meet him you will laugh, and more than likely feel a little ashamed about it. The thing is, he does it no matter where you are or what you're doing. Whether at a function surrounded by people or just alone with his son, he will manage to misbehave in some form or fashion, quite frankly its part of his charm.

On this particular day, after concluding his business related lunch, we were en route to the airport when my father decided to pay a little visit to the final resting spot of Confederate General James “Pete” Longstreet, also known as Lee’s War Horse. The tombstone was not incredibly ornate, a simple 3-foot piece of granite, with the American and Confederate Flags crossed above his name. My father glanced from side to side and stepped forward, clutching his signature cigar in his teeth. A foot away from the gravestone, he gave the surrounding area one last glance before proceeding to urinate onto the granite to the utter shock and horror of both my friend and I. It would seem that being constantly exposed to his ways would harden, or at least prepare someone against such embarrassment, but I assure you that that is not the case. Mortified, I yelled at my father, “What the Hell are you doing!” My adult father looked back over his shoulder, cigar still in his mouth, and said, “If you knew anything about our family history you would understand.” Max has never returned. At this point it is reasonable to ask, what would inspire a grown man to do such a thing? It could simply be that he saw an opportunity to do something inappropriate, but there appeared to be motive in such an action.

The family history that my father was referring to is that of Confederate General Evander McIver Law. I guess one could say that General Law is an important figure in Confederate history, but mostly to my family. General Law was a very accomplished young general, and his story has always been a strong source of familial pride for me. General Law is, however, a strangely controversial character in the history of the Civil War, and has been the subject of some historical debate pertaining to Gettysburg and the latter years of the war. If one were to research Evander McIver Law they would find two variations of his history. The first being the recital of his young and successful military career, which was

“distinguished for gallantry on many hotly contested fields,” the same history you would read on the plaque of the Law Barracks at The Citadel (178 Confederate Veteran Magazine). His other history is shrouded in controversy, in which he is accused of ambitiously pursuing his own military agenda, coveting promotion and disobeying orders. The issue that I have found with these accusations is that General Law, who lived 55 years after the war as a teacher and newspaperman, could not be that person (150 Warner). General Law was first and foremost a teacher, before and after the war.

Evander McIver Law was born in Darlington, South Carolina, on August 7, 1836, to the honorable E. Augustus “Uncle Doc” Law and Elizabeth “Bettie” McIver. Augustus and Bettie Law settled in Darlington in the 1820’s, building the courthouse in 1825, and erecting their home in 1834, two years before the birth of their eldest. Evander McIver Law had three younger siblings “Cousin” Elma, Junius and John. In their youths Evander, Junius and John served in the Confederate Reserves. John would also go on to serve in the Confederate Army as a Captain, and Junius as a Colonel (294 Darlingtoniana). General Law attended University at The Citadel and graduated in 1856, it was known as the South Carolina Military Academy at that time. His academic record, which I found in The Citadel archives, places him with the third lowest amount of demerits. During his senior year, Law served as an assistant professor and as an instructor of Belles Lettres, basically a fancy term for writing. He remained in South Carolina for the next few years teaching at Kings Mountain Military School, in Yorkville. During this time he studied Law until 1860, when he moved to Alabama. In Alabama General Law co-founded the Tuskegee Military School, and remained at the institution as a history and writing teacher. When the Civil War began Law formed a unit of volunteers, mostly comprised of his students, known as “The Alabama

Zouaves" (422 Wheeler). The name Zouaves originated in France as a light-infantry unit, made up of Algerians, who remained in their exotic uniforms.

Evander Law began his involvement in the Civil War humbly enough, leading his volunteer unit to Pensacola, Florida, where they participated in the seizure and occupation of Federal navy yards and mainland forts. Following the fall of Fort Sumter, Law reorganized his troops for Confederate service, and was elected Captain. On May 7, 1861, Law received his first officer commission as a Lieutenant-Colonel, from General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. At the First Battle of Bull Run, also known as First Manassas, one of the first major engagements of the Civil War, Law and his troops were the first to engage the enemy. Despite suffering the heaviest losses on the field, they continually repulsed the Union's persistent advancement, so prominently defeating the Federal troops that they were never able to form again as a single unit (424 Wheeler).

Although there is some discrepancy on the origins of General "Stonewall" Jackson's nickname, some sources indicate that it was Law's unit that the famous lines were spoken to (424 Wheeler). As the story goes, at the First Battle of Bull Run General Jackson sat atop his horse unwavering in the face of enemy fire. One officer looked to his troops and said, "There is Jackson standing like a stone wall. Let us determine to die here, and we will conquer. Rally behind the Virginians!" Law and his troops, rallying around General Jackson, drove off the enemy and won the day. Law was severely wounded in the ensuing struggle, losing the use of his left elbow. Following the victory, "Stonewall" Jackson was promoted to Major-General and became Robert E. Lee's right-hand. Law's next service would come at the Yorktown Retreat, where his charge broke the Union's center, earning commendations

in General Jackson's official report praising "the magnificent charge of Hood's and Law's brigades" (424 Wheeler). Law was again wounded at the Second Battle of Bull Run, this time twice, but refused to leave the field or relinquish his command, a very impressive feat even by today's standards.

As a kid, growing up on my farm, my friends and I, armed to the teeth with fake muskets, would charge through the forest giving rebel yells, battling imaginary Union soldiers. From as early as I can remember, my father was telling me of the heroic General Law. Of course at the time I didn't know or understand what the Civil War was, to me it was simply the time, long ago, when the north invaded the south. The stories of General Law being wounded seven times throughout the course of the war were the most inspiring stories a young man could hear. I remember looking at the two pictures we have of General Law, his disabled left arm tucked into his jacket, and I would try to locate the other six wounds. As a kid, especially growing up in the south, General Law was my hero, simple as that. To me he was the commanding general fighting off the invading north. This image of his career, of course, would change as I would come to learn the true history of the Civil War, and the extent of his involvement, but I would nevertheless remain fascinated with my direct connection to the Army of the Confederacy.

In October of 1862, Evander McIver Law was again promoted, this time attaining the position of Brigadier-General, the youngest general in the army at that time (174 Warner). The Law Brigade was assigned to General Hood's division, then still part of "Stonewall" Jackson's Corps. Although Law's career, up until this point was admirable, it wasn't until the Battle of Fredericksburg that Law would truly prove himself as a valuable addition to

the Confederate's Officer Corps. Following Fredericksburg, General Hood praised Law's performance saying, "as usual Brigadier-General Law was conspicuous upon the field, acting with great gallantry, and had his horse killed under him while personally directing the movements of his brigade" (299 Wheeler). The relationship between Hood and Law would grow increasingly significant as the war progressed, persuading Law against resigning, as his relationship with General Longstreet deteriorated.

Today General Longstreet, in certain historical circles, is often regarded as a scapegoat for the Confederate loss at Gettysburg, the major turning point of the war (Thomas). Despite General Lee's well-known personal acceptance of all faults for the loss, Longstreet is frequently credited with moving his regiments slowly, without control, and overall not supporting the campaign. It was well known that Longstreet had voiced his personal qualms with General Lee's ambitious offensive, feeling the defensive war was the safest choice.

Prior to Gettysburg, Law had assumed command of Hood's division when Hood was wounded at the Battle of Chancellorsville, the same battle that took the life of General Jackson. General Longstreet commended Law's command in his reports of the skirmish. At the outbreak of Gettysburg, however, Law and his brigade were serving on picket duty 30 miles away in New Guilford (115 Wilcox). After marching double-time throughout the night, in order to make it in time for the fighting on the second day, they arrived on the field around noon on July 2nd. General Law's brigade took up its position within Hood's division, on the extreme right of the Confederate's flank. General Longstreet famously said that he never liked to enter battle without a boot, and in this case the Law brigade was the boot.

Longstreet failed to move his units into an attacking position quickly enough to ensure the frontal assault on the Union's center, a failure often attributed to Law's tardiness and "fixation on the round tops" (105 Frey). During this battle, General Law assumed command of the Hood division for a second time, when Hood was again wounded. Some historians attribute the cause of at least some of the chaos of the battle to General Law, saying that Hood's division lost its cohesion during the battle, not operating as effectively as it had in the past (Wert). This could not be more inaccurate, as these men were as much General Law's as they were Hood's.

Upon his arrival on the field the second day of Gettysburg, Law sent scouts ahead to determine the enemy's position and movements. General Law was informed that the union troops did not possess the Round Tops, as was believed to be the case. Law, realizing that the Round Tops were essential strategic defenses for General Meade's federal army, sent a courier to General Hood conveying his thoughts. General Hood concurred but this was in direct opposition to General Lee's plan of a frontal assault plan. Hood passed the word along to his superior, General Longstreet, who disregarded it on the grounds that it was not what General Lee had ordered (173 Oates). Hood sent two more couriers but Longstreet eventually sent a member of his staff to persuade Hood from any deviations in the plan. In the biography John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence, this event is discussed, but it omits General Law's role. Twenty minutes after the division began to move, Hood was wounded, and was forced to leave the field. Law took command of the division and began to make movements for the Round Tops, which sparked a chain reaction that "embroiled much of the division in the struggle for Devil's Den and culminated in the epic fight for Little Round Top" (67 Frey).

As previously mentioned Law's position on the extreme right put him at the base of Little Round Top, one of the notoriously bloodiest engagements in American history. This infamous struggle, which resulted in a Union's bayonet charge, won the opposing officer, Brigadier-General Chamberlain, of Killer Angels, one of the country's first Medals of Honor. General Law also managed to save a large portion of the Army of Northern Virginia at the closing of the battle. Realizing that Lee's troops were exposed, Law personally relocated two regiments and an artillery unit in order to protect its retreat. Witnessing this, General Benning would later write, "Lee's baggage and rear were saved. There was nothing else to protect them; this was an exploit that excited my admiration. Never was anything better managed" (177 Oates). Are these the records of a general who ineffectively lead his troops; it would not appear so. There is, however, more controversy surrounding Law's Gettysburg involvement, with regards to the Round Tops.

Colonel Oates served in the Law brigade, and in his comments on the battle he states the he "concluded that someone blundered." It is confirmed that Law's scouts returned with word that the Union Army did not yet possess the Round Top's. It is also true that Law conveyed this information to Hood, who agreed with his assessment. And finally it is true that Longstreet repeatedly refused General Hood permission to deviate in any way from the Commanding-General's plan (175 Oates). Had Longstreet granted change in plan early on in the fighting, the Rebel army might have held Little Round Top, stopping General Meade's Union Army in Pennsylvania. Without speculating on possible outcomes of the battle, had certain things happened differently, it is not unreasonable to infer that had the commanding officers supported General Law, the conclusion of the pivotal battle could have been very different.

This is one story that I vividly remember my father telling me a number of times throughout my childhood. My father, also an avid amateur Civil War historian, would tell me all about General Law's military career, specifically the key role he played at the Battle of Gettysburg. Gettysburg, as my father would say, was the deciding battle of the war, had the confederates won the English would have come in on the side of the Confederates, supplying both a navy and much needed supplies. The idea that the Rebels could have won had they simply listened to my great-great-great-grandfather was simply too much for a young boy to contain. Before I knew it, everyone in my middle school needed to know that the Civil War was lost because no one listened to my family. The only thing that stood between General Law and a Rebel victory was General Longstreet. I would later learn that this was not exactly the case, but the idea is still worth entertaining. When I was 15 years old, my father took me to the Gettysburg battlefield. While there we found a number of monuments in Law and his brigade's honor, mostly near the Round Tops. No one can truly grasp the horror and the scope of that battle until they see it. Until you see the sheer magnitude of the battlefields, as it did not contain itself to simply one field, the size of the massive boulders that riddled the notorious "Devil's Den," you cannot grasp the terror those men were faced with. I can remember reading the Civil War historical novel Killer Angels, and thinking the entire time that the character Chamberlain was the man that defeated my own relative.

At this point in the Civil War, General "Stonewall" Jackson had died and Hood's division was relocated within General Longstreet's corps. Both in fighting spirit and character, Hood's division, a very well known and battle-trying unit, was more appropriately suited to the famous "Stonewall Corps." It was not until after General Jackson's death that

any controversy would spring up within Hood's division. Following Gettysburg, General Longstreet perceived Hood's wound would be the end of his career, and began making arrangements for the promotion of a young favorite of his, the young Charlestonian, General Micah Jenkins. Micah Jenkins was two months Law's superior, meaning he was promoted two months earlier. His military career was noteworthy, but he had little experience with leading an entire division, and had even less experience with Hood's division. General Law had served with these troops almost the entire war, even commanding them at hotly contested engagements on two occasions. He knew these men, some had even been students of his, and they trusted his leadership whole-heartedly. General Hood would return, however, and put a hold on the developing feud.

The feud was put on hold, until General Hood was shot again at the Battle of Chicamagua, losing his leg and finishing his military career. Law assumed command of the Hood division for a third time, to which Longstreet expressed his "admiration and satisfaction," right before promoting General Jenkins for the following two engagements. During the course of the Battle of Lookout Valley, the feud between Law and Jenkins reached its boiling point. Jenkins remained Longstreet's favorite for the promotion, but Law was the choice of the officers, the soldiers and Jefferson Davis, the confederate president. Law was not the only victim, Longstreet had also filed reports to the War Department for the removal of both General McLaws, a former schoolmate and friend, and General Robertson, both on grounds of disobeying orders and of behavior not becoming of an officer. General Law finally had enough, and took a two-day, unapproved leave to consult with a friend 20 miles away. That friend was former confederate general James Bell Hood, Law's previous superior officer, but more importantly his friend (370 Wert). It

seems apparent that Law only took this leave to consult the general who previously held command of the division in question. Upon his return to the Confederate camp, Law found that General Jenkins had relocated three of his regiments to the other side of a river that split Lookout Valley. Law accused Jenkins's actions as being without reason except for spite. This move proved costly, as General Law, in an effort to return the regiments, arrived too late and the skirmish fell to the favor of the Federal troops. The other confederate officers confirmed Law's report. Surely after a move like that Jenkins would fall out of favor with Longstreet, but that would prove to not be the case. Longstreet again urged for the promotion of Jenkins, which both the War department and Jefferson Davis did not support (373 Wert).

Finally Law's tolerance of Longstreet's command was at an end, and refused to serve under Jenkins any longer. Law tendered his resignation and requested, of Longstreet, the unusual permission to hand deliver his resignation to Richmond. Longstreet, viewing Law's resignations as the perfect solution to the problem, granted the request. Once in Richmond Law again met with his friend and former commanding officer. Hood refused to permit Law's resignation; even personally tearing the letter apart, after all it was the Law brigade that had "added much to the reputation of Hood's command" (374 Wert). Law, figuring that he had not resigned after all, resolved to return to his brigade. Upon his return General Longstreet had him arrested for "conduct highly prejudicial to good order and military discipline." During his time away, members of the Law Brigade had begun to circle a petition for transfer back to their native state of Alabama, and act which Longstreet assumed Law orchestrated. Longstreet feeling that Law had tricked him, by gaining permission to leave on false pretenses, accused him of "deceiving his commanding general

to his real intentions.” Longstreet would later, after learning of Hood’s involvement, alter the charges against Law, saying that he did “purloin or clandestinely do away with said communication”(375 Wert). As his army was preparing to move to Virginia, Longstreet, in an act of pure spite, transferred the Law brigade to a division that was to remain in Tennessee. Colonel William Oates, of the 15th Alabama in the Law brigade, would later write that “the effort to punish the men of that brigade to gratify his malice against Law, its commander, was too small a thing for a man of Longstreet’s position to have stooped to perform. But he was brim-full of malice” (375 Wert).

The War Department, having had enough of Longstreet by this time, relieved Law from arrest and reinstated his command. General Lee informed Longstreet that Davis had “declined to entertain the charges,” and ordered Law’s reinstatement. Longstreet refused, challenging Davis’s authority. In a note to Lee, Longstreet stated, “I cannot yield the authority of my position so long as I am responsible for the proper discharge of its functions.” He concluded that if an investigation of Law was not conducted, he should be “relieved from duty to the Confederate States service” (376 Wert). Lee could not afford to lose yet another vital Lieutenant-General and offered that “Law be relieved from duty until an investigation can be had.” Two weeks later Jefferson Davis returned Law to his command and rebuked General Longstreet in the “strongest possible terms, stating that he had “offended against good order and military discipline, in rearresting and officer who had been released by the War Department, without any new offence having been alleged” (80 Piston). General McLaw’s was also exonerated of all serious offences that Longstreet accused him of, to which General Law sent congratulations and said, “Longstreet is certainly on the wane both in, and out of the army” (80 Piston). After again falling

wounded in battle, Law would recover and, at his request, be transferred to a Cavalry unit serving in South Carolina, where he remained for the rest of the war, even taking control of Columbia under martial law before Sherman's devastating march.

So after all of this, what is the point? A question not easily answered. For some reason I have always remained fascinated with General Law's life. Growing up in northern boarding schools, specifically my stint in Massachusetts, I was always harangued about being from the south. When kids from Boston or NYC found out that I lived on a farm the first question they would ask was invariably, "Do you have slaves?" To which I would always answer, "Well, of course." In today's world, a historical debate about the Civil War will inevitably turn into two opposing sides, the ones who believe the war was about slavery, and the ones who believe the war was for states rights. I feel that it is easy to make arguments in favor of both cases, but in reality it wasn't that simple. Everyone knows the Union's first choice for Commanding Officer was General Lee, who refused to wage war against his own state. Many confederate soldiers never had slaves, and probably were not very concerned with states rights, but they fought for the side that their state joined. General Law was not a slaveholder, though members in his family were. After the war he briefly managed his father-in-law's estate, but that was the closest to owning slaves that Law ever got. In a note written to a friend some years following the war, which I found at the Citadel, General Law mentions that the "freedmen" were becoming involved in political debate, and that it was becoming "increasingly nigger in complexion." It is important to note that at the time "nigger" did not carry the same overtly negative connotations as it does today, however, I cannot go so far as to claim that Law was some sort of abolitionist. From his note, it was apparent that he was concerned with social stability, in regards to

living in a region where he was, ironically, the minority, but he was certainly not angry that the slaves had been freed, nor did he seem angry of their political involvement.

So what is it that I deem worthy of remembering in General Law; it is his sense of duty to his home, and it is his unwavering bravery in the field of battle. But more important than either of these traditional virtues, it is because General Law was a teacher, before the war, after the war, until his death. After the war, Law and his family moved to Bartow, Florida, where he founded the South Florida Military Institute, which would later be absorbed into the University of Florida. Law also played a prominent role in establishing the system of Florida Public Education, while also being the editor of the local Newspaper, the Bartow inquirer. After his death on October 31, 1920, the town of Bartow inducted him into the Bartow Hall of Fame to “recognize his significant service to our community, state, and nation,” insuring “the continuation of his influence among our people.” The funeral was held on November 12, all shops were closed; the entire town was in attendance. On November 1st, 1920, in the *New York Times*’s obituary section, Major-General E.M. Law was listed as having past away after a week’s illness. As the obituary states, Law was the “ranking surviving officer of the Army of the Confederacy,” truly the last remnant of the war the nearly divided the country.

Forty-three years after General Law’s funeral, on December 29, 1963, a previous student of Law, R.A. Gray, wrote an article the *Orlando Sentinel* titled “I Saw a General Cry.” The article tells an event that happened to the 1903 senior class of the South Florida Military Institute. There was a misunderstanding between General Law, then still superintendent, and school authorities. General Law, taking great offence to the request

made by the authorities, in order to carry out the “traditions to which he felt bound, and to maintain his honor as he interpreted the situation,” decided that he had no other option but to resign. The senior class petitioned to the state authorities, but received no response. The newly appointed president, upon hearing rumors of the senior class’s intentions to resign as well, held a meeting advising the students that they “would not be permitted to resign.” The seniors held a meeting, and, as a class, unanimously voted to tender their resignation as well. General Law earnestly tried to convince them to reconsider, reminding them how close to graduation they were, but the students were determined. The senior class resigned on the same day that the General did, “as a gesture of loyalty and honor to him.” This would be the second time in General Law’s life that men under his command circled petitions in his honor, a true testament to this loyalty his men felt towards him, both during the war and after. The General, who commanded some of the most effective troops, in one of the most famous divisions, in the Civil War’s most hotly contested engagements, died the day the senior class resigned. In 1927, seven years after his funeral, the class of 1903 was awarded their diploma and added to the list of alumni by the University of Florida.

A few years ago, my father went to Bartow to visit a confederate museum there. When he informed the curator of his relation to General Law the man reacted as if he had met a rock star. After showing my father General Law’s uniform that was on display, he brought over a friend and had my father explain his relation again. It was apparent that General Law’s influence was still felt in the town where he had such an impact. For me it is the same, General Law was more than an able general and a man of “valor and unflinching courage,” he was an educator who touched the lives of countless people. General Law was

a southern gentleman of the “highest caliber,” operating with in a strict moral code of duty, service, integrity, and kindness. Given all this information, I do not think that Law would have permitted my father to act as he did to Longstreet’s headstone, but I would be willing to bet that he would understand my father’s actions. Max, on the other had, probably thought, and still thinks, that my father was crazy, and severely regretted getting in a plane that my father was the sole pilot of.