



Figure 1: This pen canceled ten-cent blue engraved Type 1 Jefferson Davis (CSA Scott 11) on cover with no town postmark is addressed to “Gen. B.J. Hill, Jacksonville, Ala.”

## A Scout Requests Instructions from Gen. Benjamin J. Hill

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

In the CSA Catalog,<sup>1</sup> there is a small section titled “Confederate Generals’ Mail.” This may seem like an unusual thing to be listed in a catalog devoted to stamps and postal history, but there were some enthusiastic collectors of correspondence to and from generals who sorely wanted this.

Only those with the rank of general conferred by the Confederate government are included in the one-page catalog section, not those who held the rank of general in the Confederate army or state militias.

The government-conferred ranks include 426 generals and one admiral nominated by President Jefferson Davis and confirmed by the senate.

Of these, 124 are recorded as sending mail. There are examples of mail sent to approximately fifty generals for whom there are no recorded examples of mail sent by them.

The postage on all mail was required to be prepaid, with very few exceptions. The Act of July 29, 1861,

permitted any officer, musician, or private of the army, engaged in the actual service of the Confederate States, to send all types of mailable matter without the prepayment of postage.

The postage was to be collected from the recipient upon delivery. All such mail was to be endorsed with the name and unit of the soldier. In the case of officers, they were to also include their title.

Robert E. Lee famously endorsed almost all his envelopes with “R.E. Lee, Gen’l.” Other generals endorsed their envelopes in like manner. Letters and important papers were most often carried by military courier, and sometimes through the Confederate postal system. Because such mail usually originated on the field of battle, it is known as field mail and the endorsement as a field signature.

The Figure 1 cover shows an envelope franked with a ten-cent blue engraved Type 1 Jefferson Davis (CSA Scott 11), pen canceled with no town postmark.

Near Perkins Ferry  
Coosa River  
March 4<sup>th</sup> 1865  
Gen. B. J. Hill  
Sir - When I  
left your Head Quarter  
near Oxford - I proceed  
ed to this place -  
My Company were to  
have met on the next  
Monday - they were pre-  
vented by high water from  
meeting me on that day -  
There are some 15  
or 20 on this side of the  
River, and we are to meet  
on next Tuesday at John  
Chapman's, one mile from  
the above ferry - in order  
to cross Coosa; and collect  
the ballance of the Company  
and organize My Company  
and I then aim at going  
up about Bridge Port.

Figure 2: The original scout's letter to Gen. Hill with dated heading, "Near Perkins Ferry, Coosa River, March 4th 1865."

The accompanying letter heading, shown in Figure 2, establishes the origin as "Near Perkins Ferry (Alabama) Coosa River, March 4th, 1865."

The envelope is addressed to "Gen. B.J. Hill, Jacksonville, Ala." The docketing up the left end of the cover establishes the date, late in the war, by "Answered March 11th 1865." It would be less than a month before Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia.

There are no covers from Gen. Benjamin J. Hill listed in the CSA Catalog. I am uncertain if there are any recorded to him.

The second page of the letter, shown in Figure 3, is signed by sender "H.W. Arledge, Capt. Com(anding) Co(mpany) Scouts," who tells General Hill that when he left Hill's headquarters near Oxford, he proceeded to Perkins Ferry on the Coosa River.

Part of his command was on this side of the river, but they were to collect the balance of the company and proceed to Bridgeport. In the letter, Arledge says

I just now learn that  
you request me to report  
to you at Jacksonville  
on the 15<sup>th</sup> inst -  
I will report to you at  
that, if High Water does  
not prevent me -  
I have no information  
worth your attention -  
I am troubled about  
Arms and Ammunition -  
Some of my men are poorly  
Mounted -  
Yours Obedient  
H. W. Arledge Capt  
Com(anding) Co(mpany) Scouts

Figure 3: The second page of the subject letter signed by "H.W. Arledge Capt Com(anding) Co(mpany) Scouts."

he has just learned that General Hill requests he report to him at Jacksonville. Capt. Arledge says he will do so if high water does not prevent him. He is troubled by inadequate arms and ammunition and further states that some of his men are poorly mounted.

Scouts were generally skilled horsemen who were experienced in operating in enemy territory and adept at collecting useful intelligence and surveilling Union army movements.

Military scouts were often at the heart of espionage efforts. It was a dangerous endeavor as such scouts risked being swiftly killed as spies rather than taken as prisoners of war. Both Northern and Southern armies used such means of securing information.

The tactics and strategy of warfare depend on information as well as on soldiers and guns. Well-known names of such brave soldiers in the Confederacy included cavalry raiders such as those serving under Col. John S. Mosby, as well as those of Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>2</sup>

H.W. Arledge served in Company I, Tennessee 28th Cavalry, Army of Tennessee. He is shown as a prisoner of war surrendered by Brig. Gen. B.J. Hill at Chattanooga, Tennessee, on May 16, 1865. His oath of allegiance and parole is on file at the National Archives, signed in the same hand as the letter.

The website “Tennessee & the Civil War,”<sup>3</sup> notes:

*No record of authorization for this regiment was found except in parole records in 1865, most of them dated May 16, 1865, at Chattanooga, Tennessee. It was probably formed in 1865 by the addition of other companies to a battalion of Cavalry or Scouts commanded in December 1864, by Captain Jourdan Hays. On December 11, 1864, Lieutenant General John B. Hood, with headquarters on the Franklin Pike, six miles from Nashville, advised Colonel Benjamin J. Hill, commanding at Shelbyville: “Captain Jourdan Hays, commanding a battalion of Cavalry, has been ordered to report to you with his command, without delay. His battalion will constitute a portion of your command.” On the same date, instructions were issued to Captain Jourdan Hays, near Winchester, to report to Colonel Hill. On December 14, inquiry was made as to whether Captain Hays had reported as ordered. This is the only record found on Captain Hays’ Battalion.*

### **Brig. Gen. Benjamin Jefferson Hill**

Brig. Gen. Benjamin Jefferson Hill (1825-1880, Figure 4), organized the First Tennessee Rifle Regiment, which became the 5th Tennessee Regiment at the beginning of the war.

In November 1861, the regiment was notified to become the 35th Tennessee because another regiment was organized as the 5th Tennessee some four months prior in West Tennessee. The 35th was part of Gen. Pat Claiborne's brigade at the Battle of Shiloh. In this battle, Col. Hill commanded, for a time, the left of Cleburne's brigade and several other regiments.

At Chickamauga, Col. Hill won from Lt. Gen. D. H. Hill (no identified relation to either him or Gen. A.P. Hill) the following tribute:

*The extraordinary merit of Colonel Hill of the Thirty-fifth Tennessee came under my personal observation. This noble officer has been distinguished on many a hard-fought field, and has been content with a subordinate position, provided he can serve his country.*

During part of 1863 and 1864, Hill was acting Provost Marshal General of the Army of Tennessee. Col. Hill was promoted to brigadier general on November 30, 1864. He was repeatedly commended



**Figure 4: A portrait of Brig. Gen. Benjamin Jefferson Hill.**

for his gallantry and earned the devotion of his men. From 1855 until the beginning of the war, Gen. Hill was a successful merchant and Tennessee state senator. Before the war, he privately stated to then-candidate Abraham Lincoln, that he opposed secession but, if war came, he would side with the South, as many did when put to the test.<sup>4</sup>

Decorated for bravery many times and seemingly oblivious of the dangers of combat, he demonstrated he was an outstanding military leader who loved and cared for his men.

Known by his men as the “Lion of Ben Lomond,” Hill had a great affection for his home state, especially the mountains. He held a special fondness for Ben Lomond, which looked so green, lush, and peaceful as he walked the streets of McMinnville in the days before the war. In leading his men in an attack, instead of saying “forward” he would say, “Come on, boys, recollect the mountains.”

After the war, Hill returned to his home in McMinnville, where he again engaged in the mercantile business. He was also president of the McMinnville and Manchester Railroad. It is said he was a prime mover in his day and that things happened whenever he was around.

In 1867, an effort was made to organize a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in McMinnville. Gen. Hill and Col. John H. Savage, both Confederate officers, and Col. W.J. Clift, a Union officer from McMinnville, all

made speeches condemning the Klan and its objectives at a meeting held in the courthouse.

They stressed that Warren Countians could work out their own problems and protect their citizens whether black or white, Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish.

In 1870, Hill closed his store. While his wife continued to manage the Warren House, he began the study of law and later set up practice in McMinnville. No Klan was organized in Warren County until the 1880s when a clandestine organization calling itself the Klan was created ostensibly to protect the illegal whiskey makers throughout the county.

Today, the McMinnville area includes more than 450 nurseries. The nursery business generates more than \$300 million in revenue and has given the area the title of, “the nursery capital of the world.” It appears the area still generates the visions of lush greenery with which Hill was so enamored.

### Endnotes

1. Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., and Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and*

*Postal History* (Sumter, S.C.: Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012), p. 382.

2. “The Scouts: Couriers, Raiders, and Spies,” *Civil War/Confederate Espionage, Evolution of Espionage in America*, Intel.gov; <https://www.intelligence.gov/evolution-of-espionage/civil-war/confederate-espionage/the-scouts> (Accessed November 22, 2022)
3. Tennessee and the Civil War, <https://tngenweb.org/civilwar/28th-jourdan-hays-tennessee-cavalry-regiment/> (Accessed November 20, 2022)
4. About General Benjamin Jefferson Hill, SCV Camp 1615, <https://www.angelfire.com/in/scvcamp1615/bjhill.html> (Accessed November 20, 2022)

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