



# Jefferson Davis in Blue: The Life of Sherman's Relentless Warrior (History Book Club Selection)

*Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Gordon D. Whitney*

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Besides his illustrious name, Jefferson Columbus Davis, who fought for the Union, is best known for two appalling actions: the September 1862 murder of General William "Bull" Nelson- his former commanding officer-and the abandonment of hundreds of African American refugees to the mercy of the Confederate cavalry at Ebenezer Creek during Sherman's march through Georgia in 1864. Not surprisingly, historians have generally dismissed Davis (1828-1879) as a reckless assassin, a racist, a journeyman soldier at best, and an embarrassment to the Lincoln war effort. But as Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr., and Gordon D. Whitney demonstrate in the first biography of the unredeemed general, such smoke of notoriety obscures the real story of a complex military leader.

Through careful research and absorbing prose, Hughes and Whitney bring order to the muddle of contradictions that was Davis's life and offer an impartial profile of the soldier and the man. They describe his distinguished service in the Mexican War and at Fort Sumter, and his rapid advancement to general officer. Although Davis's sensational killing of Nelson-for which he was never tried-undoubtedly damaged his career, the authors show that he was venerated by professional military men even as he was vilified by civilians. They also follow Davis into his postwar career, first as a commissioner with the Freedmen's Bureau and then as an influential commander in territorial Alaska.

With this study, Hughes and Whitney shatter the collective memory of "Jef" Davis as a grim, destructive child of war and replace it with a more rounded portrait of an energetic, faithful patriot who must be remembered for his splendid contributions as well as his startling failures.

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