



Military Order of the Stars and Bars

Colonel Richard Bennett Hubbard

Chapter 261 Tyler, Texas

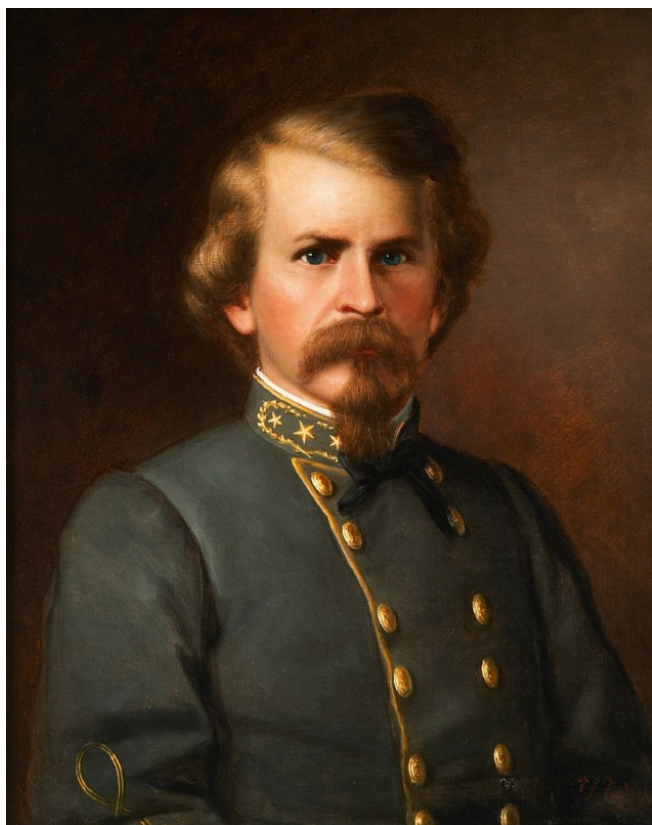
Vol. 2

June 1, 2018

Issue No. 6

Tribute To :

MAJOR – GENERAL : EARL VAN DORN



Major General Earl Van Dorn

1820-1863

Early Life and Career

Earl Van Dorn, was born September 17, 1820, near Port Gibson in Claiborne County, Mississippi, to Sophia Donelson Caffery, a niece of Andrew Jackson, and Peter Aaron Van Dorn, a lawyer and judge. He had eight siblings among whom were two sisters, Emily Van Dorn Miller and Octavia Van Dorn (Ross) Sulivane. His sister Octavia, had a son, Clement Sulivane, who was a Captain in the CSA forces and served on Earl's staff; he later became a Lieutenant Colonel. In December 1843, Van Dorn married Caroline Godbold, and they had a son named Earl Van Dorn, Jr. and a daughter Olivia.

In 1838, Van Dorn enrolled in the United States Military Academy at West Point graduated 52nd out of 68 cadets in the class of 1842. His family relations to Andrew Jackson had secured him an appointment there. He was appointed a Brevet Second Lieutenant in the 7th U.S. Infantry Regiment on July 1, 1842 and began his army service in the Southern United States.

Van Dorn and the 7th were on garrison duty at Fort Pike, Louisiana, in 1842-43, and were stationed at Fort Morgan, Alabama, briefly in 1843. He did garrison duty at the Mount Vernon Arsenal in Alabama from 1843 into 1844, and he was ordered to Pensacola Harbor in Florida from 1844 to 1845, during which Van Dorn was promoted to Second Lieutenant on November 30, 1844.

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**Col. Richard Bennett Hubbard
Chapter 261
Tyler, Texas**

**PUBLISHED MONTHLY IN
THE INTEREST OF CONFEDERATE
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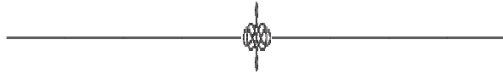
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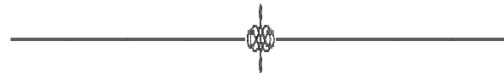


Military Order of Stars and Bars



**Col. Richard Bennett Hubbard
Chapter 261
Tyler, Texas**

**Next Chapter Meeting
October 18th 2018, 6:00 pm
Portofino's Italian Restaurant
Tyler, Texas**



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Military Order of Stars and Bars



Col. Richard Bennett Hubbard
Chapter 261
Tyler, Texas

OUR OFFICERS 2018

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We are looking for new members.

If you have an Ancestor who
was an Officer or
Served in the
Confederate Government,
Contact:
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about membership

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Col. Charles DeMorse's
29th TEXAS CAVALRY SCV Camp # 2269



Commander Bobby W. Smith
Editor-Compiler

Fellow Compatriot's,

In Honoring our Confederate Officer's, I bring to this month's edition, a very interesting Maj. General Earl Van Dorn. He had a major roll in Texas History, and during the War between the States, and was a major player as an Officer for Southern Cause. I hope you find the articles interesting as we look back to the Proud, and interesting history of Southern Gentlemen. Be sure to visit our web site for other newsletters, which pay Tributes to Officer's of the Confederacy.

<http://MOSBTX261.org/>

Thank You

*Deo Vindice
Bobby W. Smith*



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Continued from front page....1

MAJOR – GENERAL EARL VAN DORN

War with Mexico

Van Dorn was part of the 7th U.S. Infantry when Texas was occupied by the U.S. Army from 1845 into 1846, and spent the early stages of the Mexican–American War on garrison duty defending Fort Texas (Fort Brown) in Brownsville, the southernmost town in Texas.

Van Dorn saw action at the Battle of Monterrey on September 21–23, 1846, and during the Siege of Vera Cruz from March 9–29, 1847. He was then transferred to Gen. Winfield Scott's Command in early 1847 and promoted to First Lieutenant on March 3. Van Dorn fought well in the rest of his engagements in Mexico, earning himself two Brevet Promotions for conduct; He was appointed a Brevet Captain on April 18 for his participation at the Battle of Cerro Gordo, and to Major on August 20 for his actions near Mexico City, including the Battle of Contreras, the Battle of Churubusco, and at the Belén Gate. Van Dorn was wounded in the foot near Mexico City on September 3, and wounded again during the storming of the Belén Gate on September 13.

After the war with Mexico, Van Dorn served as Aide-de-Camp to Brev. Maj. Gen P. F. Smith from April 3, 1847, to May 20, 1848. He and the 7th were in garrison at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, from 1848 into 1849, and then at Jefferson Barracks in Lemay, Missouri, in 1849. He saw action in Florida against the Seminoles from 1849 to 1850, and was on recruiting service in 1850 and 1851.

From 1852 to 1855 Van Dorn was stationed at the East Pascagoula Branch Military Asylum in Mississippi, serving as Secretary then Treasurer of

the post. He spent the remainder of 1855 stationed at New Orleans, Louisiana, briefly on recruiting service again, and then in garrison back at Jefferson Barracks. He was promoted to Captain in the 2nd Cavalry on March 3, 1855. Van Dorn and the 2nd were on frontier duty at Fort Belknap and Camp Cooper, Texas, in 1855 and 1856, scouting in northern Texas in 1856, and fought a minor skirmish with Comanche on July 1, 1856. He was then assigned to Camp Colorado, Texas, in 1856 to 1857, scouting duty again in 1857, returned to Camp Colorado in 1857 to 1858, and finally stationed at Fort Chadbourne located in Coke County, Texas, in 1858.

Van Dorn saw further action against the Seminoles and also the Comanches in the Indian Territory. He was wounded four separate times there, including seriously when he commanded an expedition against Comanches and took two arrows (one in his left arm and another in his right side, damaging his stomach and lung) at the Battle of Wichita Village on October 1, 1858. Not expected to live, Van Dorn recovered in five weeks. Van Dorn led six companies of cavalry and a company of scouts recruited from the Brazos Reservation in a spring campaign against the Comanche in 1859. He located the camp of Buffalo Hump in Kansas in a valley he erroneously identified as the Nescutungna (or Nessentunga), and defeated them on May 13, 1859, killing 49, wounding five and capturing 32 women. He served at Fort Mason, Texas, in 1859 and 1860. While at Fort Mason, Van Dorn was promoted to the rank of Major on June 28, 1860. He then was on a leave of absence from the U.S. Army for the rest of 1860 and into 1861.

Civil War service

Van Dorn chose to follow his home state and the Confederate Cause, and he resigned his U.S. Army Commission, which was accepted effective January 31, 1861. He was appointed a Brigadier General in the Mississippi Militia on January 23, and replaced Jefferson Davis as Major General and Commander of Mississippi's state forces in February when Davis was selected as the Confederacy's President.

After resigning from the Mississippi Militia on March 16, 1861, Van Dorn entered the Regular Confederate States Army as a Colonel of infantry on that same date.



He was sent west to raise and lead a volunteer brigade within the new Confederate Department of Texas. On April 11 he was given command of Confederate forces in Texas, and was also ordered to arrest and detain any U.S. troops in the state who refused to join the Confederacy.

Leaving New Orleans on April 14 and arriving at Galveston, Texas, he and his men succeeded in capturing three Union ships in the town's harbor, on April 17 and then headed for the last remaining regular U.S. Army soldiers in Texas at Indianola, forcing their surrender on April 23. While at Indianola, Van Dorn attempted to recruit the captured U.S. soldiers into the forces of the Confederacy, but was largely unsuccessful.

Van Dorn was summoned to Richmond, Virginia, and appointed a Colonel in the 1st C.S. Regular Cavalry on April 25, leading all of Virginia's Cavalry Forces, and then quickly promoted to Brigadier General on June 5. After being promoted to Major General on September 19, 1861, Van Dorn was given Divisional Command in the Confederate Army of the Potomac five days later, leading the 1st Division until January 10, 1862. Around this time Confederate President Davis needed a Commander for the new Trans-Mississippi District, as two of the leading Confederate Generals there, bitter rivals Sterling Price and Benjamin McCulloch, required a leader to subdue their strong personalities and organize an effective fighting force. Both Henry Heth and Braxton Bragg had turned down the post, and Davis selected Van Dorn. He headed west beginning on January 19 to concentrate his separated commands, and set up his headquarters at Pocahontas, Arkansas. He assumed command of the district on January 29, 1862.

Battle of Pea Ridge

By early 1862, Federal forces in Missouri had pushed nearly all Confederate forces out of the state. When Van Dorn took Command of the department, he had to react with his roughly 17,000 man, 60 gun Army of the West to events already underway. Van Dorn wanted to attack and destroy the Union forces, make his way into Missouri, and capture St. Louis, turning over control of this important state to the Confederacy. He met his now-concentrated force near Boston Mountains on March 3, and the army began moving north the next day.

In the spring of 1862, Union Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis entered Arkansas and pursued the Confederates with his 10,500 strong Army of the Southwest. Curtis collected his four divisions and 50 artillery guns and moved into Benton County, Arkansas, following a stream called Sugar Creek. Along it on the northern side he found an excellent defensive position and began to fortify it, expecting an assault from the south. Van Dorn chose not to attack Curtis's entrenched position head on. Instead he split his force into two, one division led by Price and the other by McCulloch, and ordered them to march north, hoping to reunite in Curtis' rear. Van Dorn decided to leave behind his supply wagons in order to increase their moving speed, a decision that would prove critical. Several other factors caused the proposed junction to be delayed, such as the lack of proper gear for the Confederates (some said to lack even shoes) for a forced march, felled trees placed across their path, their exhausted and hungry condition, and the late arrival of McCulloch's men. These delays allowed the Union commander to reposition part of his army throughout March 6 and meet the unexpected attack from his rear, placing Curtis' forces between the two wings of the Confederate army. Plus when Van Dorn's advance guard accidentally ran into Union patrols near Elm Springs, the Federals were alerted to his approach.

The Battle of Pea Ridge would be one of the few instances in the American Civil War where the Confederate forces outnumbered the Union forces. Just prior to taking command of the district, Van Dorn wrote to his wife Caroline, saying "I am now in for it, to make a reputation and serve my country conspicuously or fail. I must not, shall not, do the latter. I must have St. Louis—then Huzza!"

After waiting for McCulloch to join him, Van Dorn grew frustrated and decided to act with what he had on March 7. Around 9 a.m. he ordered Price to attack the Union position close to Elkhorn Tavern, and despite Price being wounded they had succeeded in pushing the Union forces back by nightfall, cutting Curtis' lines of communication. Meanwhile, McCulloch, under orders from Van Dorn to take a different route and hurry his march, had engaged part of Curtis' defenses. Early on in the fighting McCulloch and Brig. Gen. James M. McIntosh were killed, leaving no commander there to organize an effective attack. When Van Dorn learned of the problems with his right wing, he



renewed Price's attacks, saying "Then we must press them the harder," and the Confederates pushed Curtis back. That night the junction of Price and what remained of McCulloch's men was made, and Van Dorn pondered his next move. With his supplies and ammunition 15 miles (24 km) away and the Union force between them, Van Dorn maintained his position.

The following day, March 8, showed Curtis and his command in an even stronger position, about a mile back from where they were on March 7. Van Dorn had his men arranged defensively in front of Pea Ridge Mountain, and when it was light enough he ordered the last of his artillery's ammunition fired at the Union position, to see what the Federals would do. The Union artillery answered back and knocked out most of Van Dorn's guns. Curtis then counterattacked and routed the Confederates, mostly without actual contact between the opposing infantries. Van Dorn decided to withdraw south, retreating through sparse country for a week and his men living off what little they got from the few inhabitants of the region. The Army of the West finally reunited with their supplies south of the Boston Mountains. In his official report Van Dorn described his summary of the events at Pea Ridge:

"I attempted first to beat the enemy at Elkhorn, but a series of accidents entirely unforeseen and not under my control and a badly-disciplined army defeated my intentions. The death of McCulloch and McIntosh and the capture of Hebert left me without an officer to command the right wing, which was thrown into utter confusion, and the strong position of the enemy the second day left me no alternative but to retire from the contest."

Casualties from this battle have never been fully agreed upon. The figures given by most military historians are about 1,000 to 1,200 total Federal soldiers and around 2,000 Confederate.

However, Van Dorn detailed significantly different numbers in his official reports. He stated losses of about 800 killed with 1,000 to 1,200 wounded and 300 prisoners (about 2,300 total) for the Union, and only 800 to 1,000 killed and wounded and between 200 and 300 prisoners (about 1,300 total) from his army.

The Confederate defeat at this battle, coupled with Van Dorn's army being ordered across the Mississippi River to bolster the Army of Tennessee, enabled the Union to control the entire state of Missouri and threaten the heart of Arkansas, left virtually defenseless without Van Dorn's forces. Despite the loss at Pea Ridge, the Confederate Congress would vote its thanks "for their valor, skill, and good conduct in the Battle of Elkhorn in the states of Arkansas" to Van Dorn and his men on April 21. In his report on March 18 to Judah P. Benjamin, then the Confederate Secretary of War, Van Dorn refuted suffering a loss, saying

"I was not defeated, but only foiled in my intentions. I am yet sanguine of success, and will not cease to repeat my blows whenever the opportunity is offered."

Second Battle of Corinth

The performance of Van Dorn at the Second Battle of Corinth that autumn led to another Union Army victory. As at Pea Ridge, Van Dorn did well in the early stages of the battle on October 1–2, 1862, combining with Price's men and prudently placing his force that now was roughly equal in size to the Federals at about 22,000 soldiers. However, Van Dorn failed to reconnoiter the Union defenses, and his attack on Brig. Gen. William S. Rosecrans' strong defensive position at Corinth, Mississippi, on October 3 was bloodily repulsed.

On October 4–5 his command was "roughly handled" along the Hatchie River by Union soldiers led by Brig. Gens. Stephen A. Hurlbut and Edward Ord. However, Rosecrans' lack of an aggressive pursuit allowed what was left of Van Dorn's men to escape.

Total casualties for the Second Battle of Corinth totaled 2,520 (355 killed, 1,841 wounded, 324 missing) for the Union, and 4,233 (473 killed, 1,997 wounded, 1,763 captured/missing) for the Confederates.

After the battle Van Dorn ordered a retreat, falling back through Abbeville, Oxford, and Water Valley, Mississippi, where he and his staff were nearly captured on December 4, then on to Coffeeville, Mississippi, constantly skirmishing with Federal Cavalry on December 4. Two days



later Van Dorn halted the retreat at Grenada. Following the defeat at Corinth, Van Dorn was sent before a court of inquiry to answer for his performance there. Though he was acquitted of the charges against him, Van Dorn would never be trusted with the command of an army again, and he was subsequently relieved of his district command.

Return to Cavalry Service

Van Dorn proved to be more effective as a Cavalry Commander; his action in a raid at Holly Springs, Mississippi, on December 20, 1862, seriously disrupted Ulysses S. Grant's first Vicksburg Campaign plans, capturing 1,500 soldiers and destroying at least \$1,500,000 USD worth of Union supplies. Van Dorn and his men then followed the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, fought unsuccessfully at Davis's Mills, skirmished near Middleburg, Tennessee, passed around Bolivar, and returned to their Grenada base by December 28.

On January 13, 1863, Van Dorn was appointed to Command all cavalry in the Department of Mississippi & East Louisiana, and then was ordered by Gen. Joseph E. Johnston to join the Army of Tennessee, operating in Middle Tennessee. Van Dorn and his force left Tupelo, Mississippi, went through Florence, and reached the army on February 20 at Columbia, Tennessee. Van Dorn set up his headquarters at Spring Hill at White Hall and assumed command of all of the surrounding cavalry from there. He was ordered by the army Commander, Gen. Braxton Bragg, to protect and scout the left of the army, screening against Union Cavalry.

Van Dorn was also successful at Battle of Thompson's Station, on March 5, 1863. There a Union brigade, under Col. John Coburn, left Franklin to reconnoiter to the south. About four miles short of Spring Hill Coburn attacked a Confederate force composed of two regiments and was repulsed. Van Dorn then sent Brig. Gen. William Hicks Jackson's dismounted soldiers to make a direct frontal assault, while Brig. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest's troopers went around Coburn's left and into the Federal rear. After three charges were beaten back, Jackson finally carried the Union position as Forrest captured Coburn's wagon train, blocking the road to Columbia and the only Union escape route. Nearly out of ammunition as well as surrounded, Coburn surrendered.

On March 16, 1863, Van Dorn was given Command of the Cavalry Corps of the Army of Tennessee, and fought his last fight April 10 at the First Battle of Franklin, skirmishing with the Cavalry of Gordon Granger and losing 137 men to Granger's 100 or so. This minor action caused Van Dorn to halt his movement and rethink his plans, and subsequently he returned in the Spring Hill area. Nathan Bedford Forrest, commanding one of Van Dorn's cavalry brigades, criticized his judgement as a general, and an angered Van Dorn challenged Forrest to a duel. However, Forrest talked him out of it and so prevented an altercation that may have been fatal to both of them.

Death

It was Van Dorn's reputation as a womanizer, not a Union bullet that led to his death. Van Dorn made his headquarters in the home of Martin Cheairs in Spring Hill, Tennessee. Ever the ladies' man, he attracted the attention of Jesse Helen Kissack Peters, the wife of a prominent local physician, Dr. George Peters, who was taking time away from practicing medicine to serve in the state legislature. Mrs. Peters, the 4th wife of Dr. Peters and nearly 25 years his junior, was described by locals as "bored" by her husband's long journeys away from home. Gossip quickly spread around town about Van Dorn's visits to Mrs. Peters' home and their frequent unchaperoned carriage rides together. Dr. Peters returned home on April 12 and was immediately confronted with the mockery of local townfolk that he was a cuckold. Peters let it be known that he would shoot Van Dorn or any of his staff who set foot on his property. Eventually, the doctor hid outside the house at night where he saw Van Dorn arrive. Peters rushed inside and found Van Dorn and his wife in a passionate embrace. He threatened to shoot Van Dorn on the spot, but the general pleaded for mercy if he would spare Mrs. Peters from any responsibility in the incident. Dr. Peters accepted this offer. Nonetheless, a few weeks later, on the morning of May 7, Dr. Peters arrived outside the Cheairs mansion. Van Dorn's staff recognized him, as he frequently stopped to obtain passes through the Confederate lines, and let him inside. Peters walked into Van Dorn's office, where the general was busy writing at his desk, pulled out a pistol, and shot him in the back of the head. A few minutes later, the daughter



of Martin Cheairs ran outside announcing that Peters had shot Van Dorn. The general's staff found him unconscious, but still alive. However, nothing could be done to save Van Dorn and he died four hours later, having never regained consciousness. The nature of Van Dorn's death was similar to the death of President Lincoln two years later in that the small caliber pistol round had traversed through his brain and lodged behind his forehead. Van Dorn's brain swelled from intracranial pressure, leading to a cerebral herniation and eventual cardiac and respiratory arrest. Peters was later arrested by Confederate authorities, but was never brought to trial for the killing. In defense of his actions, Dr. Peters stated that Van Dorn had "violated the sanctity of his home." Condemnation of Van Dorn in the South was widespread, as the code of chivalry ran strong in the region, and Confederate general St. John Liddell, a brigadier in the Army of Tennessee, said that there was little sympathy to be had for him. A number of conspiracy theories have been raised around Van Dorn's death, including the possibility that Dr. Peters was motivated more by politics than the sanctity of his marriage. Peters had earlier taken the oath of loyalty to the United States in Memphis, and although he divorced his wife soon after her affair was revealed, the couple later reconciled and Peters received a mysterious land grant in Arkansas. Van Dorn's sister later wrote a memoir of the general in which she postulated that Peters had come to side with the Union in the war and this was the real reason for shooting him.

General Van Dorn is one of the three major generals in the American Civil War who died violently but from private problems. The others were Union Major General William "Bull" Nelson, shot as the result of a feud with then Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis in September 1862; and Confederate Major General John A. Wharton, shot as the result of an argument with Colonel George Wythe Baylor in April 1865.

Van Dorn's body was taken back to Mississippi and buried at Wintergreen Cemetery in Port Gibson. His father Peter had also been buried there, and Earl Van Dorn was laid to rest beside him.

His childhood home, the Van Dorn House in Port Gibson, Mississippi, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Assessment

Controversial throughout his life, Van Dorn as a military commander was an able leader of small to medium groups of soldiers, particularly cavalry, but was out of his depth with larger commands. Military historian David L. Bongard described him as

"Aggressive, brave, and energetic but lacked the spark of genius necessary for successful high command in combat ."

Military historian Richard P. Weinert summarized Van Dorn:

"A brilliant Cavalry Officer, he was a disappointment in command of large combined forces."

Military historian and biographer John C. Fredriksen described him as

"A brave and capable soldier, but he proved somewhat lacking in administrative ability."

Fredriksen goes on to say that Van Dorn belonged in Cavalry Command, stating him to be "back in his element" and "demonstrated flashes of brilliance" with that branch of the service. Fredriksen also believed Van Dorn's successes at Holly Springs and Thompson's Station in the spring of 1863 made him one of the leading cavalry leaders in the Confederacy, and notes that his death cost the service a

"Useful leader at a critical juncture of the Vicksburg campaign"

and also states that Van Dorn was the Senior Major General in the Confederate States Army at the time of his murder.

Physically short, impulsive, and highly emotional, Van Dorn was also a noted painter, writer of poetry, was respected for his skill at riding a horse, and also known for his love of women.

A reporter at the time dubbed him
"the terror of ugly husbands"
shortly before Van Dorn's murder.



Burial Site



Major General-Earl Van Dorn

Birth

17 Sep 1820
Claiborne County, Mississippi

Death

7 May 1863 (aged 42)
Spring Hill, Maury County, Tennessee

Burial

Wintergreen Cemetery
Port Gibson, Claiborne County, Mississippi,

Plot

Located approx. 50 yards to the left of the main
entrance (along the cemetery's North wall)

Memorial ID

9110

Maintained by: Find A Grave

Added: 16 Apr 2000

Find A Grave Memorial **9110**



Wintergreen Cemetery



Earl Van Dorn was laid to rest
beside his father Peter Van Dorn



Wintergreen Cemetery is a historic cemetery
in Port Gibson, Mississippi. It was added to the
National Register of Historic Places on July 22,
1979. It is located at East Greenwood Street.

Burials

- James G. Spencer
- Benjamin G. Humphreys
- Samuel Reading Bertron
- Major General Earl Van Dorn
- Peter Aaron Van Dorn



Military Order of Stars and Bars



**Col. Richard Bennett Hubbard
Chapter 261
Tyler, Texas**



UPCOMING EVENTS

**MOSB TEXAS REUNION
May 4-5-2018
Hilton Garden Inn, Ridgemont, Street
Abilene, Texas**

Waiting for more Information!



**Louisiana Society
The 80th Anniversary
General Convention
of the
Military Order of the Stars & Bars
will be held:**

July 12 - 14, 2018

**at the:
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Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70801
Tel: (225) 344-5866 (Main)
(800) 955-6962 (Reservations)**

Military Order of Stars and Bars

"All that was, or is now, desired is that error and injustice be excluded from the text-books of the schools and from the literature brought into our homes; that the truth be told, without exaggeration and without omission; truth for its own sake and for the sake of honest history, and that the generations to come after us not be left to bear the burden of shame and dishonor unrighteously laid upon the name of their noble sires."

**Rev. James Power Smith,
Last Survivor of the Staff of
Lt. General
Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson**



Article Submittal Request

Welcome

If you have an article that you would like to be considered for publication, please send your submittal to Bobby W. Smith (Editor General) at bsmith9305@aol.com.

Chapter and Society News is also welcome. Please email to the address.

The preferred submittal is one in which the articles are in MS Word format and that all pictures are in jpeg for-mat as this makes it easier to format to the proper scale within this publication.

Note that references and footnotes are requested to support where the original information is acquired as it is up to the article writer to provide such material.

If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thanks.....

Bobby W. Smith



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We saved the historic house General James Longstreet used as his headquarters during the winter of 1863–64 from demolition and are developing it into a museum, (See www.longstreetmuseum.com), and historic Bethesda Church which was used as a hospital by both armies, and battlefield preservation.

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