Confederate Combat Commander

The Remarkable Life of Brigadier General Alfred Jefferson Vaughan Jr.

Lawrence K. Peterson

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This book is dedicated to my aunt and uncle,
Marian and John Gaskill,
Whose support allowed it to come to fruition.
God Bless.

Contents

Illustrations

Figures

Maps

Preface

"Don't shoot! Don't Shoot! We surrender!" shouted the Yankees. Colonel Alfred J. Vaughan Jr. then commanded, "Ground Arms!" After the men complied, he asked the Union color bearer, "What is the name of your command?" He replied, "The 77th Pennsylvania." Colonel Vaughan then took the regimental colors and turned them, along with about 300 prisoners, over to his division commander, Major General Benjamin F. Cheatham.[1]

These events had all happened within seconds in darkness during the Battle of Chickamauga. In a few moments Colonel Vaughan had witnessed his brigade commander, Brigadier General Preston Smith, being mortally wounded (Smith would die in fifty minutes); his aide Captain Donelson being killed at his side while the colonel himself narrowly escaped being shot; and the surrender of nearly an entire Union regiment. What a mixture of sadness and victory must have been felt by this Confederate officer, a man who had been and would continue to be a model citizen throughout a busy, productive life.[2]

To the student of the American Civil War, a fact that separates Brigadier General Alfred J. Vaughan Jr. from other officers of that conflict was that he had eight horses shot out from under him, more than any other infantry commander on either side. The shooting of a soldier's mount in combat indicates that that man was in a casualty zone where he himself could be shot and either killed or wounded. Whether being there by luck, lack thereof, or choice, it was an indication of personal bravery. Also, for an officer, it means that he set an example for

his men and led them from the front, not pushing them from the rear. Although senior commanding officers were valuable and encouraged not to expose themselves to enemy fire, sometimes their leadership by riding or walking at the head of their commands provided that extra inspiration their men needed to continue an attack. Yet there was much more to Alfred Vaughan than his demonstrated personal bravery. As the reader will discover, Vaughan accomplished much in addition to his Civil War service. As a VMI cadet and first captain, a surveyor, an Indian-treaty negotiator, a plantation owner, a farmer, a businessman, an officer in the Granger movement, and a county clerk, he made his mark in a number of areas.[3]

This study will address many aspects of Vaughan's time in the Confederate army, one of which is a confusing situation with his last name. Of the 428 men generally recognized as general officers in the Confederate service, two had the last name of Vaughan, the other being Brigadier General John C. Vaughn (spelled without the second "a"). General Vaughn fought in the eastern theater, at Vicksburg, rode with Confederate cavalry general Nathan Bedford Forrest, and escorted Confederate president Jefferson C. Davis south after the fall of Richmond, Virginia. Unfortunately, on occasion Alfred J. Vaughan spelled, or had his last name misspelled, without the second "a," adding to the confusion between the two. It is important to realize that it is easy to confuse the two "Vaugh(a)ns" when differentiating who did what, where, and when.[4]

With the luxury of 150 years to examine each battle and campaign of the American Civil War, most books about a battle will take the reader chronologically through the action based on the many reports generated by those who participated (and survived), giving a "God's eye" view of the engagement. Yet the actual combatants did not have the luxury of this perspective. In fact, very few, if any, of them even understood what role they might play in the fighting or what effect they might have had on its outcome, enveloped as they were in the "fog of war." We are fortunate that Alfred Vaughan, because he was first a colonel and later a general, held enough rank to have had many of his actions, reported by others as well as himself, recorded in the *Official Records* and other sources, allowing us to follow the movements and actions of both Vaughan and his men. Taking this a step further, a regiment might conduct a skirmish sustaining only one casualty. Thus, most in the unit, as well as later historians, would not consider this fighting of any consequence—unless you were that one unlucky fellow.

In following Vaughan through the major battles in which he participated, the book will describe the various actions as he saw them and the consequences of these to both him and his men as well as to the Confederacy.

The senior generals on both sides during the Civil War were tasked with planning and leading the various military campaigns. These commanders have had their politics, philosophy, strategy, and actions evaluated in many books, magazine articles, roundtable discussions, and other venues over the years. Less well explored are the actions and viewpoints of regimental and brigade commanders. These 428 Confederate general officers led somewhere around one million soldiers to some victories, but ultimately defeat. Their influence was huge. How well did these men carry out their orders, the plans of their superiors, and what were their thoughts, opinions, and concerns as they attempted to comply? As this biography progresses through the Civil War years, it will look for insight into Vaughan's actions and responses to see how he performed as well as attempt to evaluate the consequences of his actions for the Confederacy.[5]

Alfred Vaughan spent the entire Civil War in the western theater, the area generally from the Appalachian Mountains west to the Mississippi River, including north-central Georgia. This region is where many historians believe the Civil War was decided. For many readers, however, this will be new or less-familiar ground to cover. The Civil War was a complex event with millions of active and supporting individuals involved. While not downplaying the importance of the fighting in the eastern theater (primarily Virginia), the Union had almost continuous success in the West as compared to the virtual stalemate in the East. Vaughan served in the Confederate Army of the Mississippi and then the Army of Kentucky before both were absorbed into the Army of Tennessee. These armies seemed to meet failure after failure in their attempts to protect their assigned areas. While Vaughan did achieve some success within the Army of Tennessee, which was largely responsible for defending the Confederacy's western theater, its failures in battle after battle must have weighed heavily not only upon him but also upon the many thousands of other soldiers in that command.[6]

Promotion to the rank of general was sought by many men from many backgrounds on both sides. This biography will examine the combination of events and circumstances that allowed Colonel Vaughan to become a brigadier general, as well as some of the factors involved, and analyze if he was deserving of the promotion and, further, why he was not eventually elevated to major general or higher.[7]

Prior to the Civil War, as well as after its conclusion, Vaughan led what appears to be a successful life. This work will analyze the events that shaped his prewar life and how his prior experiences affected his decision making. His Civil War service, as with that of most other men involved in the conflict, almost certainly was influenced by prior events in his life. His conduct in battle is examined to determine why, based on previous experience, he may have acted as he did.

But Vaughan presents an enigma to anyone researching his actions and conduct, especially during the Civil War. He seemed to be a man who operated virtually without any criticism of his orders, actions, or personality. It was unusual for any commander to not have at least some orders questioned by his subordinates or to have made some enemies, both personally and professionally. This would have engendered, at least on occasion, vitriolic or lesser inflamed comments, accusations, and responses that would have appeared in the *Official Records* or in diaries, newspaper articles, or other documents. Yet in Vaughan's case, other than in parts of his wife Martha Jane's diary, no criticism appeared to exist, although as we will see, General Braxton Bragg, commander of the Army of Tennessee, apparently decided the brigadier was not one of his supporters. The diaries of soldiers under Vaughan's command or of nearby units in combat occasionally offer comments about his actions, but they rarely seem to question them or cast disparaging remarks about them or his personality. Amazingly, no one appears to have had a grudge against him. Was he really that remarkable?

As a short note on military identification, Union units were designated by numbers, such as the First Brigade of the Second Division; these were proper names and thus capitalized. Yet for ease of identification, I have often used the unit commander's name in lieu of a numeral. In Confederate service the various units were commonly identified by the permanent commander's name. The unit commanded by Brigadier General Vaughan officially would be designated as "Vaughan's Brigade." If mentioned as General Alfred Vaughan's brigade, note that the "b" is not capitalized. Also note that, according to the Official Records Union corps were not at this time designated as by Roman numerals; likewise, the modern abbreviations of rank were not yet present. To remain as authentic as possible, I have adhered to Civil War–era conventions.

As a final note, concerning the author, I have held a fascination with the Civil War since early childhood and have studied it ever since. A brief career as a National Park Service ranger whetted my appetite to explore the many Civil War battlefields and sites scattered across the nation.

But my particular interest in the life and career of Alfred J. Vaughan Jr. may be explained by the "coincidence" that Vaughan's daughter Lucy was my great-grandmother, making General Vaughan my great-great grandfather. Realizing that it is common for ancestors to think of their former kin in the highest of terms, I have striven to present an unbiased view of General Vaughan. Where possible, using the words of others was a primary choice, and, again when possible, Vaughan's comments are offset by the statements of others. But at the time few after-action reports had negative things to say about anyone; the fact that one was left out of a report was very telling. Likewise, comments from friends and employers seldom contain negatives, especially obituaries.

Note on Sources

This account of Alfred Vaughan's life utilizes many works but relies on three major sources of material, two primary and one secondary, on the general. First, in November 1896 Vaughan compiled and published a short pamphlet for his children and grandchildren entitled *A Brief Biographical Sketch, Gen. Alfred Jefferson Vaughan and His Family,* published (presumably) by S. C. Toof and Company of Memphis. This twenty-three-page account concisely covers his exploits and describes his various family members, focusing on his life before and after the Civil War and his forebearers and children. Nicely complementing this work, in 1897 he privately published (five hundred copies) a short book entitled *Personal Record of the Thirteenth Regiment, Tennessee Infantry, C.S.A.* While only ninety-five pages long, it contains information concerning his actions during the Civil War with regard to this regiment, his connection with it, and eventually Vaughan's Brigade. It is occasionally available in a reprint version and is often quoted in the many books about the Civil War battles in which he participated.

A third major source of information is a privately published series of books by Alfred Vaughan's grandson, Jack C. Vaughan (1912–91). This series of volumes, entitled *Vaughan's American Histories,* covers in great detail most of the general's actions during the Civil War as well his life prior to and following the conflict. The books are very biased toward the Southern cause and initially contained few footnotes, unfortunately. Nonetheless, they appear to be excellent sources, which I have corroborated, wherever possible, with other primary and secondary sources. This multivolume work, totaling several thousand pages, was privately published in very small quantities (often only twenty-five

copies) and remains extremely rare—and expensive—although copies do reside in a few major libraries.

Any personal papers of General Vaughan held by Jack Vaughan are either incorporated in the Vaughan histories or are, in a few instances, preserved at a select number of major libraries. Despite the author's vigorous pursuit, Alfred Vaughan's other personal papers, records, and documents have apparently disappeared. At this time any papers and records Jack Vaughan may have had in his possession apparently are no longer available. It might be appropriate to consider his series as more along the lines of a very lengthy diary in which some actions may be corroborated, but unfortunately we have no choice but to rely on his books for much of the personal information on the Vaughan family.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have happened without the help of many people and institutions. First, I greatly appreciate the help of the staff of the Library of Congress. The National Park Service was also very helpful, especially rangers and historians Edwin C. Bearss, historian emeritus of the NPS; Park Ranger Jim Lewis of Stones River National Battlefield; Chief Park Ranger Stacy Allen and Dr. Tim Smith (formerly) of Shiloh National Military Park; Historian Jim Ogden of Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park; Historian Willie Johnson of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park; Terry Winschel of Vicksburg National Battlefield Park; and Scott Pawlowski and Michelle Schneider of the Technical Information Center in Denver. Also, Cris Calkins, former chief of interpretation at Petersburg National Battlefield Park, was most helpful in locating the old Vaughan plantation.

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In Tennessee I thank the staff and librarians of the Tennessee State Library and Archives, especially Darla Brock. My gratitude also goes out to Jamie Evans of the Ames Plantation, and Fran Catmur, Corey

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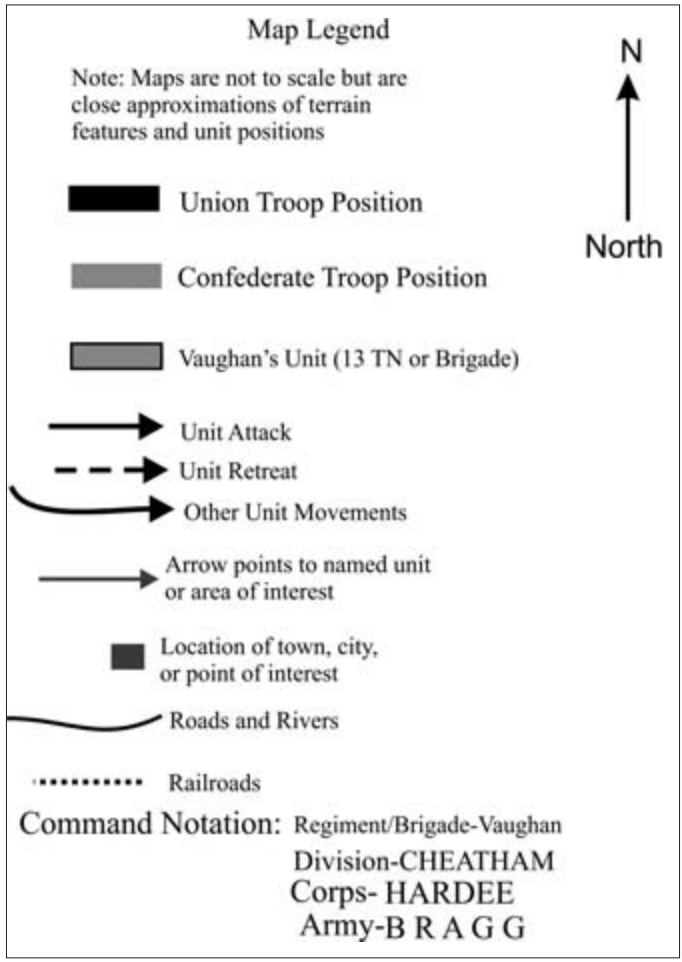
James Lighthizer, David Duncan, and the staff of the Civil War Trust (www.civilwar.org), via many annual conferences and color-bearer weekends, have provided me the means to meet with and learn from many expert historians about the Civil War in general and more specifically about General Vaughan.

And I must mention Scot Danforth, director of the University of Tennessee Press, and his staff, among whom are Gene Adair, Cheryl Carson, Tom Post, Stephanie Thompson, and Thomas Wells. Special thanks to Kevin Brock for his excellent copyediting of the manuscript. This biography would not have happened without their encouragement and continued support.

Thanks also to my family for its support. My Aunt Marian and Uncle John Gaskill have been encouraging since the beginning. My wife, Kathleen, not only has endured many expeditions to various battlefields and locations but also did this all the time trying to tell me who won the war; she is the computer expert who was consistently able to clean up the many problems inflicted on me by technology. Lastly, thanks to cats Deemy and Martha, who spent many, many hours keeping an eye on me as I worked on the manuscript.

To all the many people with whom I came into contact whose names are not mentioned here, unintentionally or simply unknowingly, I thank you for helping this project come to fruition.


Map Legend
Note: Maps are not to scale but are close approximations of terrain features and unit positions
N
North
Union Troop Position
Confederate Troop Position
Vaughan's Unit (13 TN or Brigade)
Unit Attack
Unit Retreat
Other Unit Movements
Arrow points to named unit or area of interest
Location of town, city, or point of interest
Roads and Rivers
Railroads
Command Notation: Regiment/Brigade-Vaughan
Division-CHEATHAM
Corps- HARDEE
Army-B R A G G

1

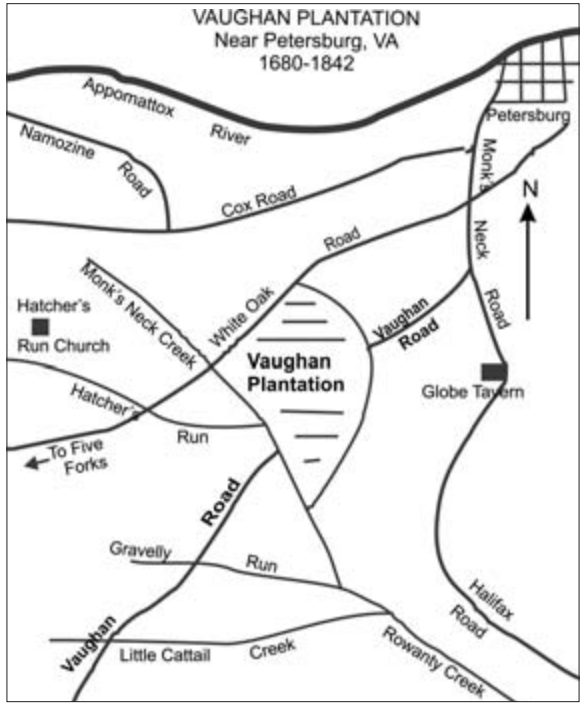
Offering Myself as a Candidate

The remarkable life of Alfred Jefferson Vaughan Jr. began on May 10, 1830, in Dinwiddie County, Virginia. He was born into the well-to-do Vaughan family, which had held land in Dinwiddie County or its predecessor jurisdictions since 1680. By the time of his birth, the Vaughan plantation had grown to approximately 1,200 acres. It was located southwest of Petersburg and the Appomattox River, bounded north and east by the Arthur's Swamp drainage, on the southwest by Monk's Neck Creek, and on the northwest by White Oak Road (today's Squirrel Level Road). The plantation was bisected by the Vaughan Road (still in existence), which ran south from Petersburg to the Carolinas and Georgia. While the land was no longer in the family's possession during the Civil War, a U.S. Military Railroad "Y" was located approximately where the plantation home was believed to have been located, north of today's Plantation Road (County Road 742); Plantation Road connects Vaughan Road with Squirrel Level Road and travels through a beautiful, level part of the property.[1]

The Vaughan family has been traced back to Golden Grove, of Carmarthenshire, Wales. The Vaughan "family" at the time of the English Civil War (1641–49) collectively owned more than 75,000 acres of land, six castles, and at least twenty-seven manors, lordships, and estates. William Vaughan (1577–1641) in 1616 purchased from John Guy's "Company of Adventurers and Planters of the Citie of London, and Bristoll, for the Colony or Plantation in Newfoundland" much of the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland. Shortly afterward he moved there,

setting up his headquarters at Trepassey. Later he sold the northern part of his holdings to Lord Baltimore, also known as George Calvert. Lord Baltimore, tiring of the severe winters there, eventually went south to the Colony of Virginia, where he explored the Chesapeake Bay area. Calvert later returned to England and eventually obtained his grant for the Colony of Maryland.[2]

Another Vaughan was involved in a major survey of the American east coast. Queen Elizabeth I decided by 1585 that it might be, from a military standpoint, an excellent idea to locate a naval base somewhere in that region to interfere with Spanish ships bringing treasure back to Spain from Mexico and Peru. Sir Walter Raleigh organized an expedition of seven vessels and assembled a reconnaissance team. The head of the two companies of troops was a Captain John Vaughan, related to the Vaughan family of Golden Grove. Under the leadership of Lieutenant General Ralph Lane, this expedition explored and named such places as Pamlico Sound, Albemarle Sound, and Roanoke Island, the latter reported to Queen Elizabeth as a site for possible settlement. After spending the winter dealing with the local Indians and fighting to stay alive, the expedition returned to England on July 27, 1586.[3]



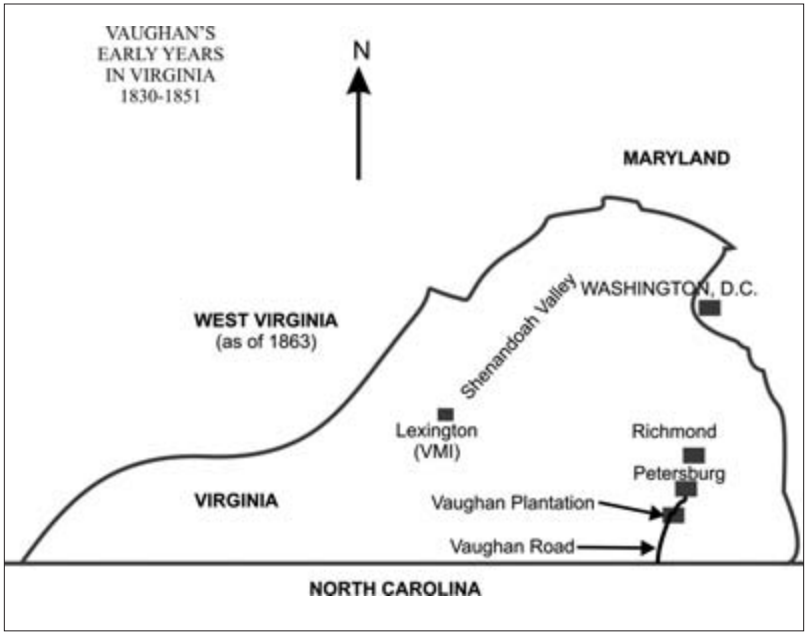
Yet another John Vaughan (1596–1664) moved from Golden Grove to Virginia in 1619 and established a 1,200-acre tobacco plantation on the south side of the Potomac River. By 1643 he owned the plantation outright. John's son William (died 1698) apparently sold this operation and by 1680 had purchased a plantation of equal size southwest of Petersburg on both sides of what would eventually be called Vaughan Road. After William died in 1698, this land was held in succession by his son, yet another William (who died about 1735), and then by his son, also named William. When this last William died about 1750, the plantation became the property of his son Salathiel (1715–78) and then his son Peter (who also would serve for a time as sheriff of Dinwiddie County). By the time of Peter's death in 1817, the plantation had grown to about 1,770 acres.[4]

As is often true in history, those who are first in line often become the beneficiaries of future financial success. The Vaughans were early arrivals in this new country and quickly established themselves in the business of land ownership. They were able to purchase large acreages early on and to foster large plantations within a fairly short period of time. Many Europeans heard of the great wealth that could be gained on this new continent and wished to become a part of it. Some were able to pay for their passage across the Atlantic Ocean, while others simply could not pay their way. As a result, many of these new immigrants to what was to become the United States arrived as indentured servants, promising to give seven or more working years of their lives to a master who paid for their passage. The Vaughans seemed able to take advantage of this practice and, using such workers, became even wealthier over the years. Thus the family was a significant presence in the newly established United States.[5]

Peter Vaughan had three children by his first wife, Mary. After she died, he married her younger sister, Martha Goodwyn Boisseau. This second marriage resulted in two more children, Alfred Jefferson Vaughan and Benjamin Joseph Vaughan. Alfred would become the father of the subject of this biography.[6]

Alfred Vaughan Sr. was born July 28, 1800. He grew up on the plantation south of Petersburg. In 1824, at the age of twenty-three, he married Dorothy Vaughan, the daughter of Robert Vaughan (a possible cousin) and Lucy (Hunt) Vaughan of Amelia County, Virginia. Together they had four children: Leonidas Augustus, Mary Virginia, Alfred Jefferson (Jr.), and Benjamin Joseph.[7]

Alfred Jr. was the only child to survive past early adulthood. Leonidas Augustus (1826[?]–51) was brought up on the Vaughan Plantation.



He briefly attended the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), then went west and settled near St. Joseph, Missouri. While returning to Virginia to visit relatives, he died of cholera on the Ohio River near Wheeling, Virginia, in 1851 at the age of twenty-five. Mary Virginia (1826–43), the only daughter and reportedly a beautiful girl, died at age seventeen. Benjamin Joseph (1834–35) died at the age of only one year.[8]

The younger Alfred also grew up on the large family estate near Petersburg. While providing a means of income to provide for the family, for a young boy the plantation was also a safe haven filled with things to see and do (even today, the former Vaughan Plantation remains a beautiful, scenic location). It would be very typical of those times for his father to teach him how to hunt and fish. Then young Alfred, along with his playmates, undoubtedly hunted and fished in the nearby fields, woods, and streams. His rambling experiences would have provided the beginnings of a foundation of experience to cope with living outdoors. This would prove valuable to him in the future. Also typical of those times, as the boy grew older, he would have become involved with the plantation lifestyle, learning many of the facets of its operation both from his father and others, which would give him the confidence to pursue operating his own estate in the future.

Alfred Sr. was a very successful farmer. Unfortunately his wife, Dorothy (1804–1834), died in her early thirties when Alfred Jr. was only four years old. After her death the elder Vaughan went into politics and ultimately became a Virginia state legislator. Even though he was a Democrat in Whig country, he was able to defeat the Whig candidate for the general assembly, Edward Johnson, in the election of 1837. But in 1839 Vaughan lost to another Whig, Thomas Whitworth, though he defeated Whitworth in the following election of 1841. Thomas Richie, the father of Virginia democracy, characterized Vaughan as "bold and vigorous."[9]

Life seemed to be going well for Alfred Sr. and his children until the Panic of 1837, which would have a profound effect on both him and his family. The Panic of 1837 occurred in part because President Andrew Jackson, a firm believer in states' rights, successfully eliminated the Second Bank of the United States, which had served as a storehouse for federal funds from the Treasury. Its absence, as predicted by many legislators, resulted in a cash-liquidity crisis, which imperiled many small banks. Ironically, on Alfred Jr.'s seventh birthday, May 10, 1837, banks in New York failed due to the lack of funds available. This event, coupled with rampant expansion and overextended credit, eventually caused hundreds more banks to fail throughout the country. In turn, this caused hundreds of small businesses and farmers who relied on these institutions for fiscal support to likewise fail; Vaughan was among them.[10]

Because of his wealth, Alfred Sr. had consented to endorse the papers (guarantee the loans) of many of his friends. When the panic hit, many of these friends were unable to cover or pay off their various debts, resulting in him having to take over these debts. While he could have opted to likewise default, he apparently was not that kind of a man. His character was such that he insisted on covering these debts. This forced Vaughan to eventually sell all of his land to pay his creditors.[11]

For Vaughan Sr., one of the benefits of being in politics was that he had made friends with many influential men. Now virtually penniless, Vaughan's friends and political connections petitioned President John Tyler to appoint him as an Indian agent in order to provide him with a means to support himself and his family. He was placed in the Indian service with the rank of major and in 1845 was put in charge of the Osage River Subagency at Paola, Kansas Territory, southwest of Kansas City, Missouri. In 1848 he was promoted to colonel and placed in charge of the Great Nemaha Subagency. This would have a profound effect on the future not only of Alfred Sr. but also on that of his son.[12]

Alfred Vaughan Jr. was twelve years old when his father lost the family plantation and all of its lands. When his father left and went west to become an Indian agent, Alfred Jr. was sent to nearby Petersburg to live with his remarried grandmother, Martha Goodwyn (Boisseau) Aldridge. He then was reared by his aunt, Sarah P. Harwell, the wife of his mother's half brother, Mark. M. Harwell, who had purchased the Vaughan land to help move the colonel out from under his debts. Sarah would become the young Alfred's surrogate mother; he later had very fond memories of her.[13]

Starting at age fourteen, Alfred Jr. boarded with his uncle, Benjamin Joseph Vaughan, also residing in Petersburg, for the next four years. During his last eighteen months or so in the city, he was intensely and successfully schooled by educators William Maghee and William M. Nelson. This time spent in educational activity would quickly be rewarded. The boy's free time would have been spent exploring and relaxing in areas that would later become battlefields and entrenchments during the siege of Petersburg in 1864–65.[14]

Little else is known of Alfred's childhood. We can conclude that his father set for him a very strong precedent that a man was true to his word and did not seek to avoid responsibility for his debts. The consequences of the elder Vaughan's handling of his affairs manifested themselves to young Alfred in several ways. Raised in a wealthy household, the boy was used to having all the conveniences of life readily available to him. While some children of wealthy men were (and are) content to simply live off their father's wealth, Alfred wanted to duplicate his father's success and stand on his own two feet. He must have been conflicted in observing his father lose the long-held family estate, yet he came to understand that his father was, indeed, a man of his word. This trait, common among "gentlemen" of that time, would have impressed young Alfred and certainly have given him added impetus to become a gentleman of means, for whom his word was a true bond.

In December 1846 Alfred may have decided to enlist in the army in order to fight in the Mexican War. On December 21, 1846, an Alfred Vaughan enlisted in a company commanded by Captain William Murray Robinson. But this appears to be a different person as the age of this Vaughan was given as twenty-three years old; Alfred Vaughan Jr. turned eighteen years old on May 10, 1848. By 1848, though, the young Vaughan must have begun considering what his future as an adult might be. With his father out west, it might have been an enticing thought to go join him, as had his older brother Leonidas, but in what real capacity? Much closer to home another possibility existed: the Virginia Mili-

tary Institute, located at Lexington in the Shenandoah Valley and one of the top military schools in the country. But it should be noted that VMI was and still is a civilian institution with the goal of preparing its students for positions of leadership in the civilian as well as the military world. The system of military training was (and is) the means of developing the leadership abilities of its cadets. It was very common for the more promising and privileged youth of the South to attend either the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, which provided an essentially free education, or VMI, which was closer to home.[15]

The tiebreaker for young Alfred might have been the fact that Leonidas had entered VMI on July 5, 1842, as a member of the Class of 1845. Unfortunately for his brother, though, he was able to attend there for only seven months before being forced to resign on February 10, 1843 (effective February 5), due to academic deficiencies. Leonidas, influenced by his father (to whom he was very close), settled with him near St. Joseph, Missouri, among the Pottawattomie Indians as a trader. He was appointed to the position of "issuing commissary of substance" by his father on November 9, 1846.[16]

Because of his familiarity with his brother's experience at VMI (and perhaps motivated by sibling competition), Alfred would see if he could be accepted and complete the required courses of study while surviving the military discipline of that school. Graduation, and succeeding where his brother had not, would allow him to pursue his goals as an adult. This desire likely spurred the extensive education he gained during his last months in Petersburg, further negating the likelihood of his enlisting in the 1st Virginia Volunteer Regiment in 1846.

To gain admittance to VMI, like any prospective cadet, Alfred was required to be accepted by the Board of Visitors, a process that began with a nomination, usually by the prospective cadet's father or another relative. Additionally, several letters of recommendation would usually be part of the nomination process. In Alfred's case it appears that he nominated himself. He started writing letters to various people asking them to help secure his admission to VMI. On May 4, 1848, he wrote to Colonel Francis Smith, superintendent of VMI:

> Although not personally acquainted with you, I have taken the liberty of addressing a few lines to you on a subject of much importance to me.
>
> I am anxious to enter the Institute as a pay cadet next July, and knowing you to be the Principel [*sic*], I now ask permission of you to take me in. If you will, will you please

> let me know as soon as it is practical, and I will be on July or August with the requisite recommendations.
>
> It was through the advice of Mr. William M. Nelson that I have made this application to you. He says he will give me any recommendation that I may need.
>
> If you wish to know anything relative to me, you can make inquiries of Charles Denby of that Institute, as I went to school with him. . . .
>
> Alfred J. Vaughan, Jr.
>
> N.B. From my name you will recognize who I am immediately[.] I know that my brother [Leonidas] having gone to that institute and returned so unfavorably will afford a little against my entering, but sir I warrant that it never will be the case with me.[17]

After sending this letter, he then wrote to the VMI Board of Visitors, which also served as the admissions committee:

> Most respected Gentlemen: Having come to the determination of trying to enter the Virginia Military Institute, if it meets with your approbation, I now most humbly submit myself to your consideration as a candidate to enter the said Institute.
>
> And Gentlemen in offering myself as a candidate and should I have the honour to be selected, I pledge myself to obey, and conform strictly and punctually to every rule and regulation that is set forth in your by-laws, to the best of my ability.[18]

His relative Benjamin Boisseau Vaughan also wrote a most eloquent recommendation to the Board of Visitors: "I hereby comply, with a great deal of pleasure, with Mr. Vaughan's request, and I am the more gratified because I can truly say—as cannot be said by every writer of certificates of character—that I am able to do so without the least fear that whatever I may say of him in this respect will be gainsaid by anyone who is now, or who may hearafter [*sic*] become acquainted with him."[19]

Two other letters of recommendation are much shorter. Both Professors Maghee and Nelson, who had been the candidate's instructors, wrote to the Board of Visitors on his behalf. A final letter of recommendation came from his Uncle Benjamin, dated May 23, 1848.[20]

Alfred Vaughan Jr. was admitted to VMI on July 17, 1848, as a pay cadet (that is, one paying his own way, not one on scholarship). As a reward for his eighteen months of academic preparation, he was placed in the third class (second, or sophomore, year), skipping the first year academically. Nevertheless, he became part of the "Rat Line" his first year and was treated like any other fourth classman. A typical cadet's expenses per year were about $250. It is unclear whether his uncle, his father, or someone else made the necessary payments.[21]

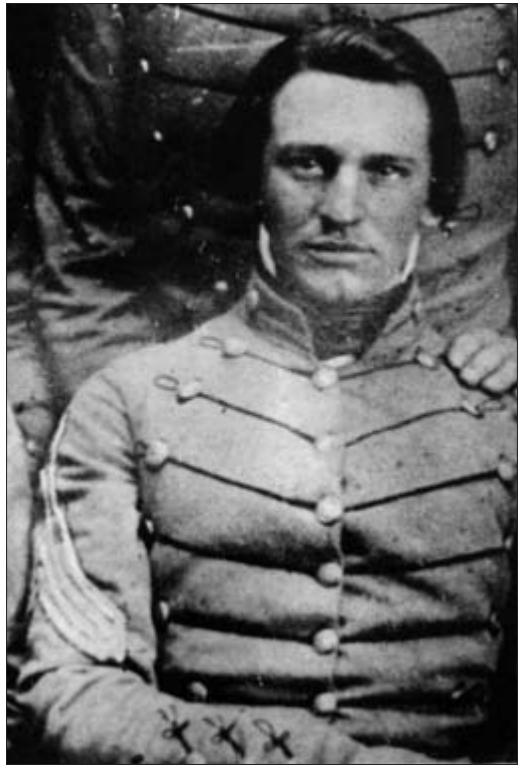
During the three years Vaughan spent at VMI, he studied a wide range of topics, from geometry and calculus to grammar, French, geography, chemistry, surveying, and drawing as well as military topics such as military and civil engineering and tactics for infantry and artillery. A typical day started with reveille and breakfast, then guard mount at 8:00 A.M. Classes were held from 8:30 A.M. until 1:00 P.M. and again from 2:00 P.M. until 3:30 P.M. After 4:00 P.M. came military duties, including drill, inspection, and parade.[22]

VMI set very high academic and physical standards. Its attrition rate, while not excessive for a nineteenth-century college, was nonetheless fairly high. For instance, out of the 978 cadets who entered VMI in the twenty-one classes from 1842 through 1862, only 455 (46.5 percent) actually graduated. This was attributable to several factors, including rigorous academics, strict military discipline, occasional financial hardship, poor health, and for some, dismissal for violation of regulations.[23]

The military aspect of VMI was consistent with most military schools. There it started with the summer encampment for all new cadets (including Vaughan), which was boot camp. Older cadets acted as drill instructors and taught the manual of arms and basic unit drill, providing them experience in the training and leadership of men. (Indeed, this proved so valuable that, at the beginning of the Civil War, VMI cadets were called upon to drill the newly recruited Confederate troops.) Daily and weekly inspections were the norm, with a parade usually held weekly. Each school year the cadet noncommissioned officers were appointed from the ranks of the second classmen (juniors), while the cadet officers were selected from the ranks of the first classmen (seniors). The first captain, the highest-ranking student, was in command of the cadet battalion. During Vaughan's attendance at VMI, there were two companies of cadets.[24]

Vaughan took to the military system and the associated discipline as well as to the wide range of academics. After his first year, he placed

eighth out of forty-three; he placed fifth out of twenty-eight as a second classman; and at graduation (first classman) he placed fifteenth of twenty-nine (it is unknown where the "extra" cadet came from to join his graduating class). While his academic performance placed him in the middle of his class, his military performance dominated his time at VMI. As a second classman he attained the position of first orderly sergeant, while as a first classman he was appointed the first captain, or cadet commander. Although his was a fairly small first class, it was the dream of most cadets to eventually attain the position of cadet commander. In 1851 VMI had 17 cadets in the fourth class, 37 in the third class, 33 in the second class, and 29 in the first class for a total of 116 cadets. From 1845 until 1859, the Corps of Cadets was organized into two companies, A and B. As first captain, Vaughan was the captain of Company A. As a company commander, he wore four chevrons, while



Senior Cadet Captain Alfred J. Vaughan Jr. VMI.
Virginia Military Institute

cadet lieutenants wore three, cadet sergeants two, and cadet corporals one. (This was true until about 1930, when the body of cadets expanded to regimental size.)[25]

One interesting event during Vaughan's tenure as first captain was the "Rebellion of 1851," one of several over the years at VMI. The acting superintendent, Major John Preston, had allowed the cadet corps to attend a highly publicized murder trial taking place in Lexington. The closing arguments were supposed to end on a Saturday but were carried over into the next week. The first class petitioned Preston to allow them to attend as apparently they had become emotionally invested in the outcome after spending several days in the courtroom. Preston denied the request, stating that too much time had been spent away from regular duties. The first class ignored his directive and attended court anyway on April 21. When Superintendent Smith, returned later in the week, Preston explained what had happened, and the colonel dismissed the entire class. The cadets appealed to the Board of Visitors and were reinstated with heavy restrictions for the rest of the academic year. While information is limited concerning this rebellion's instigators, Vaughan as first captain would surely have been involved. This provides an interesting deviation from his generally strict compliance with military and civilian directives throughout his life. Perhaps this was due to youthful indiscretion, in desiring to learn of the conclusion of the trial, or perhaps he simply went along with the wishes of his fellow first classmen. Another possibility is that he demonstrated leadership in what he believed was the correct or deserved course of action for the cadets. The fear of dismissal and partially throwing away three years of his life would have certainly given him pause for reflection and a renewed desire to complete his education.[26]

Looking more closely at Vaughan's graduating class, there were a total of forty-four cadets officially members at one time or another. Thirty-five of them served in the Civil War, virtually all on the Confederate side. Of these, one, William Y. C. Humes, was nominated for major general but never officially confirmed by the Confederate Congress; one (Vaughan) became a brigadier general; seven others were colonels; six were lieutenant colonels; one was a major; seven were captains; four were lieutenants; six served as surgeons; and two apparently remained as enlisted men. Other than Humes and Vaughan, none apparently went on to garner fame outside of their respective units. VMI's most famous instructor, Thomas J. ("Stonewall") Jackson, did not begin teaching there until the fall of 1851, immediately after Vaughan had graduated.

Interestingly, one classmate, James B. Hamilton, worked for the U.S. government as a civil engineer and was arrested in 1863 in North Carolina while mapmaking. He died in military prison in 1864.[27]

Vaughan graduated on July 4, 1851. It was a most rewarding personal moment as he led the battalion of cadets at the graduation ceremony and parade (as first captain he would lead the parade and review the cadets, his executive officer commanding Company A in his place). His graduation placed him in an elite circle, which would become apparent in about twelve years. Plus, he was now in a position to enter one of many potential career fields. VMI is different from the various U.S. military academies, even today, in that its mission is to produce citizen-soldiers, in contrast with the soldier-only focus of the U.S. military academies. Approximately half of the institute's graduates join the various branches of the military, while the rest assume nonmilitary roles in society. Vaughan chose the latter route.[28]

After graduation as a pay cadet, Vaughan owed VMI some money for tuition and other expenses. In a letter to Colonel Smith, he expressed his regret that he could not "procure a draft either for love or money. Both father and myself have spared no pain to procure one. I have the amount in hand but know of no way by which I can forward it to you. If you do not feel [illegible] to wait till I can procure a draft I will send the amount to you by letter providing you are willing to run the risk of getting it." He closed by expressing how he could "never . . . forget the interest you manifested in getting me released from teaching school." Although it remains unresolved how this issue was handled, in 1870, when the law firm of Letcher, Maury, and Letcher was retained by VMI to attempt to collect any outstanding debts owed by former students, Vaughan's name was not on their list.[29]

In a 1938 letter to VMI, Vaughan's grandson, Ben C. Vaughan, wrote: "His [Alfred Vaughan's] diploma from the Virginia Military Institute was kept in the family until the year 1927, when it was destroyed by flood waters. We deeply regretted its loss as the signatures on the parchment, held names of officers of the institute." So, unfortunately, that official recognition of his accomplishment is no longer extant.[30]

Whether or not Vaughan had actually enlisted in the 1st Virginia Volunteer Regiment and had been exposed to military life during the Mexican War, his tenure at VMI proved, not only to the faculty and cadets but also to himself, that he had obtained a solid grasp of military discipline, tactics, and operations. This exposure, as many military men and women of all ages and times would vouch, provided a strong

foundation upon which Vaughan would be able to build as he faced new life experiences. The professionalism instilled in him would come to bear in the years ahead. Although he, of course, would not realize it for years to come, the military training that he received at VMI would prove to be an enormous asset to both him and his country as well as his adopted country. In the meantime, his academic training would prove immediately valuable.