Changing History Narrative

The bitter, unwelcoming winter of 1863 was the first time I met General William McKutchen. He preferred to be called Bill. He was a towering, intimidating figure with a massive beard with thick grey hair that had been neatly combed. His piercing green eyes induced fear into his enemies. His uniform was pressed to perfection—unlike the rags of the infantry—and decorated with several luxurious medals. He resembled our great General Lee, but his future was brighter, much brighter indeed…

I was a young officer in Alabama’s 23rd regiment. I was placed under the command of the war tyrant General McKutchen. He wasn’t as well-known as General Lee, Stonewall Jackson, or P.G.T. Beauregard, but he still had time to prove himself. The only thing McKutchen thought of was victory: It was as if it were embedded into every fiber of his body.

The day I walked into his quarters at camp I knew I was going to be a part of something extraordinary. I walked in and introduced myself: “I am Lieutenant Abel, the transfer, pleased to meet you.” Taking a long hard look at me, he told me this: “Prepare yourself. This is hell on Earth, and you’re at the front lines.” That comment startled me, but I kept a straight, confident look on my face to let him know that I meant business. There was a long moment of silence— then McKutchen spoke: “Well, gentleman, let’s get started.”

The training and duties of the officers and soldiers was long and grueling. But it was imperative that the army of the great South would be ready to spill Yankee blood. My duty was to train the soldiers—more or less volunteers—how to march. It was preposterous. Some of the illiterates did not know their right from their left! General McKutchen saw the frustration on my face and came out of his quarters to assist me. He did more than assist; he took control and worked the men to the point of exhaustion. By nightfall that platoon learned how to march. As a matter of fact, the 9th platoon has the finest marching in the whole regiment, if you ask me. I now instruct just as McKutchen did, but it just isn’t the same as him. There is just something about that man that makes other men shudder in fear and give in to his booming voice.

General William McKutchen was a strategic mastermind. He graduated from the military academy at the top of his class. He could think of all sorts of ways to subdue the enemy at hand. Especially Yankees. Born and raised in Montgomery, Alabama, he was bred to be a Southern gentleman with an extreme distaste for Yankees. His war plan consisted of maximum enemy casualties. No survivors. It’s odd because he is a gentleman, but also one of the harshest men I’ve had to deal with on the battlefield. He would do anything for a Southern victory, and I would follow him to the end…

I awoke to the trampling of hooves on the chilly morning of April 10, 1865. It was a messenger from the war front. The messenger had brought news of a humiliating defeat to the North near the small town of Appomattox, Virginia. The loss devastated us. Lee’s forces were cornered by the North’s Ulysses Grant to the town’s petite courthouse and were nearly forced to surrender. Luckily, there were approaching Southern reinforcements that thwarted Grant and his army.

General McKutchen called a meeting amongst his officers and advisors on that shameful night. Tensions were high in the room and all were filled with anxiety. There was a gentleman next to the general with an arm filled with documents which he continually passed to him to have signed. The gentleman fit the picture of the government type. McKutchen called for everyone’s attention and all fell as silent as mice in a church house. The gentleman next to the general started to speak: “I am a representative from Richmond. My name is Charles Turner. I was sent here by our magnificent President Jefferson Davis to inform you that General Robert E. Lee has been removed from command as the leader of the Southern forces.