

Confederate General D. H. HILL

A Military Life

Chris J. Hartley

Unedited Excerpt



Savas Beatie
California

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First edition, first printing

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hartley, Chris J. author

Title: Confederate General D. H. Hill : A Military Life / by Chris J. Hartley.

Description: El Dorado Hills, CA : Savas Beatie, 2026. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "A devoutly religious man with an unrelenting disdain for Yankees, Daniel Harvey Hill was among the fiercest warriors to ever stride a battlefield. Controversy trailed him relentlessly, as inescapable as his own shadow. In this groundbreaking cradle-to-grave biography-the first of its kind-award-winning author Chris J. Hartley delivers a compelling reassessment of one of the Confederacy's most enigmatic figures, illuminating the complex legacy of a soldier in gray whose life demands fresh exploration. A flawed yet captivating figure, Hill's influence on Civil War history remains undeniable-and unforgettable"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2025024854 | ISBN 9781611217599 hardcover | ISBN 9781611217605 ebook

Subjects: LCSH: Hill, D. H. (Daniel Harvey), 1821-1889 | Generals--Confederate States of America--Biography | United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Biography | LCGFT: Biographies

Classification: LCC E467.1.H563 H37 2025

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025024854>



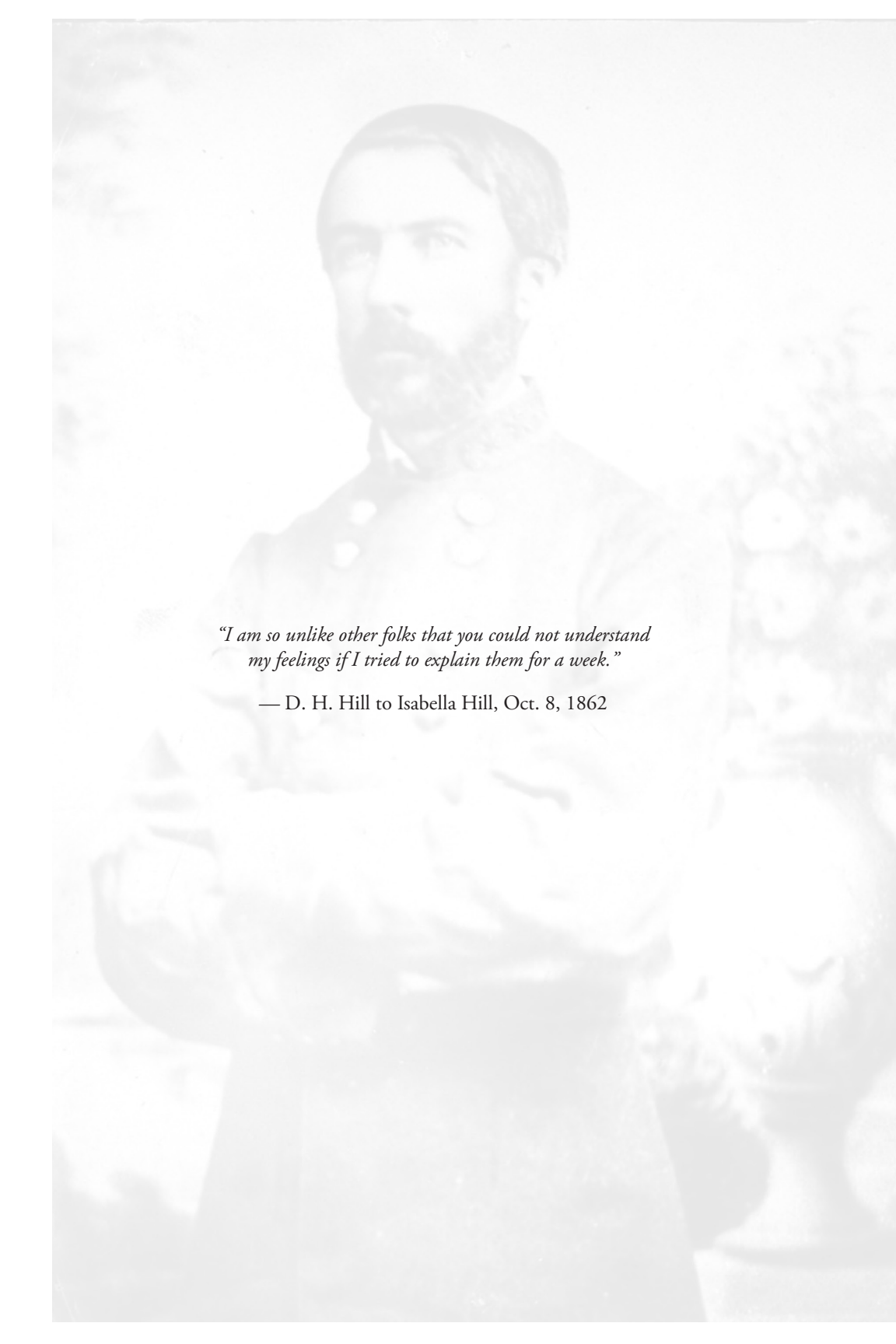
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*"I am so unlike other folks that you could not understand
my feelings if I tried to explain them for a week."*

— D. H. Hill to Isabella Hill, Oct. 8, 1862

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Acknowledgments

Good heavens, this has been a long journey. I never expected to spend more than a decade in the company of Daniel Harvey Hill, a fascinating, controversial, capable, and flawed human being, but here we are. Once I dove in, it was impossible to veer off the path. I am humbled and honored by the gracious assistance rendered by so many along the way. A biography from this deliberate researcher and writer would not have been possible without such help, so I would like to offer my acknowledgments here with the sincere hope that I do not overlook anyone.

Let's begin with Ted Savas. He encouraged me to tackle this project over dinner at a California restaurant way back in the spring of 2009. Now, his fine company is publishing this book. I'm thankful and hope it justifies the faith he put in my abilities, whatever they may be.

Several fine historians, authors, aficionados, experts, and friends lent a willing and gracious hand by sharing encouragement, sources, wisdom, and support. These include Gene Adcock, Ted Alexander, Doug Batson, Thomas G. Clemens, Michael Hardy, Charlie Knight, Robert E. L. Krick, Horace Mewborn, Hampton Newsome, Frank O'Reilly, Johnnie Pearson, David A. Powell, Lisa Putnam, Alex Rossino, Douglas R. Schanz, Bryce Suderow, Wade Sokolosky, Eric Wittenberg, and John Woodard. I'm especially grateful to Michael, Bobby, Tom, Frank, and Wade, each of whom took time out of their busy schedules to read and comment on my manuscript and provide invaluable suggestions and source ideas. Bobby and Wade even took me on informative battlefield tours. Doug Schanz, an intrepid collector, pointed me to rare Hill letters up for auction, and Tom shared accounts from his monumental Maryland campaign research.

By the same token, I am grateful to Martha Daniels, Hill's great-great-granddaughter, who hosted me at the family's lovely Mulberry Plantation and shared her family's files and lore.

I am equally the beneficiary of the hard work of the entire Savas Beatie team, including Ryan Quint, Veronica Kane, Sarah Closson, and Sarah Keeney. All helped bring this lovely book to life in a creative and professional manner. Edward Alexander deserves a heap of gratitude as well. He created the fine maps that grace this volume and offered wise counsel. I also thank Derrick Lindow for preparing the excellent index.

There are also many individuals at numerous institutions who graciously assisted: Lauren Jarvis of the Arkansas State Archives; the staff of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, including Cody Besett and Laura McClellan; the staff of the Chicago Historical Society, including Vix Brown; the staff of the archives at E. H. Little Library, Davidson College, including Jan Blodgett, Sharon Byrd, Caitlin Christian-Lamb, Molly Kunkel, Emily Pivot, Debbie Lee Landi, and also Dr. Larry Cain; Dale

Sauter, East Carolina University; Jennie Cole, The Filson Historical Society; the staff of the Jones Memorial Library; Teresa Roane, Museum of the Confederacy; Erin Weinman, Mariam Touba, and Patricia D. Klingenstein, The New-York Historical Society; Tal Nadal, New York Public Library; Kent Thompson, North Carolina Museum of History; Andrew Duppstadt, North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites and Properties; Carissa Pfeiffer, Pack Memorial Library; Sarah Leckie and Hal Milam, Presbyterian College Archives; Kay McKnight, Salem College; Molly Silliman, The South Carolina Historical Society; Graham Duncan and Beth Bilderback, South Caroliniana Library; Madison Evans, Southern Historical Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill; Grace L. Abele Major, Stonewall Jackson House; Dr. Paula Skreslet and Ryan Douthat, William Smith Morton Library, Union Presbyterian Seminary; Suzanne Christoff, Suzanne Lintelmann, Casey Madrick, and Alicia Mauldin-Ware, United States Military Academy Library; Matthew Guillen, Virginia Museum of History and Culture; Tom Camden and Lisa McCown, Washington and Lee; Benjamin Bromley and Meghan Bryant, Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William & Mary; Andrew Johnston, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop; Gayle Martinson, Wisconsin Historical Society; and Denise Jensen and Michael Scoggins, Historical Center of York.

Through this long project, my family has been incredibly supportive, as I researched at distant archives or wrote with our little dog Brutus at my side (and sometimes atop my desk). I am blessed beyond measure to be a part of an amazing family. My father-in-law, to whom this book is dedicated, taught us all to R.U.W. while enduring so much in his life with grace and strength, and his wife Joan took care of him and all of us. My late grandparents and late parents set the example of love, family, and heritage, so it is no surprise that I continue to enjoy tremendous love from my sister Rebecca's family as well as aunts, uncles, nephews, cousins, and in-laws on both sides of my family, all of whom are regrettably too numerous to name. Above all, there is my beautiful and incredible wife, Laurie, with whom I enjoy a fulfilling life and love more than anything. During my journey with Gen. Hill, she listened to many stories and shared her insights. Our daughters also cheered for me in their unique ways, which, of course, usually meant giving me a hard time. We are so proud of them: Caroline is an amazing, gifted, and accomplished teacher with a heart of gold, and Taylor Ann is a funny, bright, and talented business professional who surprises us every day. I love you all.

Soli Deo gloria.

Chris J. Hartley
Pfafftown, NC

Introduction

WHAT IS HISTORY WORTH?

The year was 1942. In Europe and the Pacific, World War II raged. In Richmond, Virginia, 56-year-old newspaper editor and author Douglas Southall Freeman wrote a letter to the son of a Confederate general. Already a Pulitzer Prize winner for his biography of Robert E. Lee, Freeman had just published the first volume of *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*. The book included detailed portraits of the leading officers of the Army of Northern Virginia. None of them challenged Freeman more than Daniel Harvey Hill.¹

“Former professional soldier, educator, text-book author and distinguished Presbyterian layman, age 40, who has an accidental spine injury and an exceedingly sharp tongue,” Freeman had written of Hill. “In looks he is cadaverous and has haunting eyes. He is in combat as capable as in camp he is critical. Off duty he is unpretending. His judgment of men always runs to extreme. Ere this part of the military drama in Virginia closes, there are vague indications that he lacks some quality of leadership, but wherein he may fail to realize promise is not clear.” Later in that volume Freeman added, “There is every reason to believe that Harvey Hill’s criticisms sprang from his chronic dyspepsia and not from jealousy or any sense of superiority.”²

On this fall day, Freeman had more to say in his letter to Hill’s son Joseph. “Your father intrigued me greatly and presented those sharp contrasts that delight the historical writer,” he wrote. He considered Hill “one of the most magnificent combat officers of the whole army,” but admitted that other factors had held Hill

1 Stuart W. Smith, ed., *Douglas Southall Freeman on Leadership* (Shippensburg, PA, 1993), 6-8; Douglas S. Freeman to Joseph M. Hill, Nov. 17, 1942, DHH Papers, NCSA.

2 Douglas S. Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. (New York, 1942-1944), 1:xxxvi, 631.

back. “As you doubtless know, General Lee concluded regretfully that General Hill was not an administrator, and that General Hill disliked both the responsibility of departmental command and the irksome detail. I have to set this forth, of course, but I explain that this was primarily because General Hill’s ardent patriotism made him wish at all times to be a combat officer. His health was very bad at times during the war and influenced his outlook.” Freeman hoped that the family understood that he had tried to paint the general accurately.³

Freeman was not alone. In the years before and since, many have tried to understand that complex man.

Just about everyone called him D. H. Hill. Almost no one used his middle name, Harvey, except for family members and very close friends, although if his letters are any indication, few of his friends did as well. He was one of only 21 men the Confederacy appointed to the rank of lieutenant general, although President Jefferson Davis never submitted Hill’s promotion to the legislature for confirmation. He was also one of only two men to reach that rank who entered the service from North Carolina. In a sense, he was North Carolina’s first Confederate soldier. Thanks to his efforts to raise and train the state’s first troops, he left a lasting stamp on their performance, and he helped groom several men for larger roles.⁴

As an individual, Hill was like a magnet. He attracted some people but repelled others. He was also a magnet for controversy, and had a key role in three of them: the loss of Special Orders No. 191 during the Maryland Campaign, a debate over reinforcements for the Army of Northern Virginia for the Gettysburg Campaign, and the fall 1863 generals’ revolt against Braxton Bragg in the Army of Tennessee. As a result, opinions about him run the gamut.

Here’s what some leading historians had to say. In *Lee’s Lieutenants*, Freeman added, “Hill’s strategic sense had been excellent, his tactics sound.” However, Freeman also said that Hill had a bad habit of being “ceaselessly critical” of every person around him, “high or low.”⁵

Bruce Catton called him “a carping dyspeptic” who attacked with “cold fury.” James I. Robertson described Hill as “small, rather bent, sharp-tongued, but brave

3 Douglas S. Freeman to Joseph M. Hill, Nov. 17, 1942, DHH Papers, NCSA.

4 Charles C. Jones, *A Roster of General Officers, Heads of Departments, Senators, Representatives, Military Organizations, &c. &c., in Confederate Service during the War Between the States*. Richmond, 1876; <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2001.05.0144%3Achapter%3D11>, accessed July 18, 2024; Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-’65, Written by Members of the Respective Commands*, 5 vols. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901), 1:xi-xii, hereafter cited as *NCR*; “Lieutenant-General D. H. Hill,” 9, *NCC*. There were other North Carolinians who reached the rank of lieutenant general or higher, but Theophilus Holmes was the only other man who entered the service from North Carolina to do so.

5 Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 1:630-631.

under fire. ‘Old Rawhide’ his men called him, for good reason. Harvey Hill loved his God as fiercely as he hated Yankees.”⁶

Joseph Glatthaar called Hill “a cantankerous if talented general” and “acerbic.” John W. Thomason labeled him one of the Confederacy’s finest generals.⁷

Shelby Foote waxed at length about Hill. “A forty-year-old North Carolinian, a West Point professional turned schoolmaster as a result of ill health, he was a caustic hater of all things northern and an avid critic of whatever displeased him anywhere at all,” Foote wrote. “Dyspeptic as Stonewall Jackson, his brother-in-law, he suffered also from a spinal ailment, which gave him an unmilitary bearing whether mounted or afoot ... A hungry-looking man with haunted eyes and a close-cropped scraggly beard, he took a fierce delight in combat.”⁸

Historians Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr. and Timothy D. Johnson described Hill as an “extraordinary but controversial Southerner” and decided that Hill’s spinal affliction colored his outlook. “He perceived himself to be a sufferer and had for as long as he could remember. This pain that pursued him, mixed with bedrock Calvinism, led this man of principle, the ultimate nonconformist, to live each day as though it were his last.”⁹

The general feeling among historians might be summed up this way: D. H. Hill was an excellent combat officer and a headache. Some senior leaders simply did not want him around.¹⁰

What did Hill’s contemporaries think? Their comments are all over the place.

“I fear General Hill is not entirely equal to his present position,” Robert E. Lee told President Davis when Hill served as a department commander. Lee also informed Davis that Hill was not a good administrator. He meant something else.

6 Bruce Catton, *The Army of the Potomac Trilogy*, ed. Gary Gallagher (New York, 2022), 209; James I. Robertson, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, The Soldier, The Legend* (New York, 1997), 462-463. For the magnet concept, I credit historian Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (New York, 2017), 37.

7 Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee’s Army: From Victory to Collapse* (New York, 2008), 105, 133; John W. Thomason, *Jeb Stuart* (New York, 1930), 165.

8 Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, 3 vols. (New York, 1986), 1:447.

9 Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr., and Timothy D. Johnson, *A Fighter from Way Back: The Mexican War Diary of Lt. Daniel Harvey Hill, 4th Artillery, USA* (Kent & London, 2002), xii, x.

10 Gary W. Gallagher, “Presidents and Generals: Command Relationships During the Civil War,” Lecture for the John Marshall International Center for the Study of Statesmanship 2011-2012 Lecture Series, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, Richmond, Va., Nov. 4, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8BjCu5hsqs>. Accessed December 20, 2022.

In an interview after the war, Lee explained that “D. H. Hill had such a queer temperament he could never tell what to expect from him, & that he croaked.”¹¹

James Longstreet had a different opinion. He knew of no man more tenacious in battle than Hill. “He was the hero of Bethel, Seven Pines, South Mountain, and the hardest fighter at Sharpsburg. His record was as good as that of ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, but, not being a Virginian, he was not so well advertised.” Joseph E. Johnston said that he considered Hill the best corps or division commander in the entire Confederate army. Another Confederate general, Lafayette McLaws, described Hill as “a very determined officer” who “stands high as a gentleman of pure character and great honesty of purpose.”¹²

Opinions were even more mixed in the ranks. Moxley Sorrel, a staff officer under Longstreet, painted Hill as “a small, delicate man, rather bent, and cursed with dyspepsia, which seemed to give color to his whole being,” he wrote. Sorrel also considered Hill “a capable, well-read soldier, and positively about the bravest man ever seen” because Hill “seemed not to know peril and was utterly indifferent to bullets and shell, but with all these qualities was not successful.” According to Sorrel, Hill’s lack of success came from somewhere else. “His backbone seemed a trifle weak. He would take his men into battle, fight furiously for some time, and then something weakened about him. Unless there was some strong character near by, like Longstreet, for instance, on whom he leaned, his attack would be apt to fail and his first efforts go unrewarded. His speech was bitter, although a most devout Presbyterian . . . But Hill had brains, and rose,” Sorrel concluded. “He was really a good man, but of sharp prejudice and intemperate language.”¹³

Other men harbored quite negative views of Hill, including Jedediah Hotchkiss, Stonewall Jackson’s cartographer, and Josiah Gorgas, the Confederacy’s

11 Joseph L. Harsh, *Taken at the Flood: Robert E. Lee and Confederate Strategy in the Maryland Campaign of 1862* (Kent, Ohio and London, 1999), 135; *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. 128 vols. Washington, D.C., 1880-1901, Series 1, vol. 51, pt. 2, 1075; vol. 12, pt. 3, 938-939, hereafter cited as *OR*, all references to Series I unless otherwise noted; DHH to James Longstreet, Aug. 29, 1879, James Longstreet Papers, DU; “Memda of a conversation with Gen. R.E. Lee, held Feb. 15, 1868,” William Allan Papers, SHC.

12 James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America*, reprint (Secaucus, New Jersey, not dated), 139, 332 note; Untitled Sketch of the Life of D. H. Hill, Undated, DHH Papers, NCSA; J. W. Ratchford to D. H. Hill, Jr., DHH Papers, NCSA; Archer Anderson, “General Daniel Harvey Hill,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* (Dec. 1966), 39; John C. Oeffinger, ed. *A Soldier’s General: The Civil War Letters of Major-General Lafayette McLaws* (Chapel Hill and London, 2002), 138-139.

13 G. Moxley Sorrel, *Recollections of a Staff Officer* (New York and Washington, 1905), 63-64.

chief of ordnance. "He was essentially a narrow-minded man," Hotchkiss said, while Gorgas described Hill as "short witted."¹⁴

Those two men were not alone in their opinions. "General D. H. Hill the commander of our division is no general at all," wrote one soldier. Another described him as "superior in rank but inferior in sense." Yet another man explained that the general "has the reputation of being cross, impulsive, and often gives offence." Two Confederate officers loathed him so much that they tried to duel with him.¹⁵

On the other hand, many soldiers held Hill in high regard. "General Hill was the bravest man I ever knew," wrote Capt. James Dinkins. "He had a power, self-centered, self-assurance, that could not be matched." John Cheves Haskell, a staff officer and artilleryman, had this to say: "He was a man of considerable capacity and always seemed to go from choice into the most dangerous place he could find on the field." Haskell added, "He had a high and well-deserved reputation as a fighter." Another veteran soldier called Hill "a good tactician and a superb fighter." Yet another claimed, "There was never a better soldier, or a man better qualified to judge the merits of one. The clash of battle was not a confusing din to him, but an exciting scene that awakened his spirit and his genius." In part, such positive sentiments came from soldiers who had felt Hill cared about them, even if it was accompanied by stern discipline. As one man recalled, "no officer in our armies was more anxious about the health, happiness and safety of his soldiers." Another soldier echoed, "He was well worthy to have attained his high rank in the Confederate army." Those soldiers closest to Hill, his staff officers, even revered him. "No more able and gallant soldier or Christian gentleman and scholar sheathed his sword and submitted to the decrees of Providence," James W. Ratchford wrote.¹⁶

Contemporaries have also noted that Hill was a devoted family man. He often said that if he had the love of his family, servants, and students, he did not care what others said or thought about him. Ratchford melted when he saw Hill with

14 Jedediah Hotchkiss to G. F. R. Henderson, March 14, 1895, LC; Frank E. Vandiver, *The Civil War Diary of General Josiah Gorgas* (University, Alabama, 1947), 33.

15 A. M. Burnside to My Dear Mother, Jul. 8, 1862, Addison M. Burnside Civil War Letters, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Morrow, Ga.; Turnwold *Countryman*, Aug. 16, 1862; Jeremy F. Gilmer to My dear Louie, Aug. 17, 1862, Jeremy F. Gilmer Papers, SHC; *OR* 51, pt. 2, 513.

16 James Dinkins, "Lieut. Gen. D. H. Hill," *CV* 38 (Jun. 1930), 220-221; John Cheves Haskell, *The Haskell Memoirs*, eds. Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood (New York, 1960), 40; W. A. Smith, *The Anson Guards: Company C, Fourteenth Regiment North Carolina Volunteers 1861-1865* (Charlotte, NC, 1914), 94-95; *NCR* 1:166; A. C. Avery, *Memorial Address of Life and Character of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill, May 10th, 1893* (Raleigh, NC 1893), 9-10; "Address Delivered at Davidson College, N.C., 11th of June, 1890," *Davidson Monthly* 6 (Feb. 1891), 133; J. W. Ratchford to D. H. Hill, Jr., DHH Papers, NCSA.

his family. The sight “made me love him more than ever, for it showed me that he was as helpless in the affections of his wife and children as other mortals.” Hill’s family loved him back, although a daughter sometimes shrank in his intimidating presence. The children were everything to him. He harbored no greater fear than the loss of a child, but he suffered the loss of four in his lifetime—a terrible thing that had as much impact on him as anything in his life. “I have never witnessed more intense anguish than his death caused to his Father,” a friend observed after the death of one Hill child.¹⁷

Observers also recognized that Hill held deep, fervent, and austere religious beliefs. “His religion was a part of himself, and I never knew anyone to doubt his sincerity either at College or in the army,” Ratchford wrote. “I never knew such a faith as his.” An inflexible Calvinist, he served the Presbyterian church as an elder, church clerk, and Bible teacher, and by writing probing exegeses of scripture. He even introduced his brother-in-law, Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson, to the denomination. In the army, Hill was counted among those Confederate officers who, a Confederate chaplain wrote, “was well known for their devotion to the shrine of Christianity” and ready “to stand up for Jesus.” Even so, his religious beliefs evolved during his lifetime, and for all his faith, Hill was in no position to throw stones. He harbored an almost visceral, unchristian hatred of various groups, including Mexican War volunteers, Yankees, and Civil War “exempts,” or those who avoided the draft. He also held racist views and owned slaves.¹⁸

So just who was D. H. Hill? One of the Confederacy’s greatest generals, or a croaker? A beloved, superb battle leader, or a poor administrator? A Christian family man or a scathing, hated critic thanks to physical ailments? Or must we throw up our hands and label him the kind of man Walt Whitman had in mind when he wrote, “I am large. I contain multitudes”?¹⁹

As this book will show, some of these views are accurate. Some miss the mark. Others are downright wrong. All of them demonstrate what a firebrand he was and how difficult it is to grasp the true nature of the man. Hill would not have been

17 Isabel Arnold’s Untitled Response, January 6, 1970, to Claude M. Morgan, “Daniel Harvey Hill’s Contribution,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* 32 (Oct. 1969) 10:18, 26-35, Jackson-Arnold Collection, PC; DHH to Dear Little Nan, Mar. 8, 1862, DHH Papers, USAHEC; Clement Fishburne’s Recollections, Feb. 8, 1890, D. H. Hill Jr. Papers, NCSA; J. W. Ratchford to D. H. Hill, Jr., and Untitled Sketch of the Life of D. H. Hill, DHH Papers, NCSA.

18 J. W. Ratchford to D. H. Hill, Jr., DHH Papers, NCSA; Rev. J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp, or Religion in the Confederate Army* (Atlanta, 1887), 105-106, 277; DHH to Dear Wife, Jun. 16, 1862, DHH Papers, USAHEC; Bridges, *Lee’s Maverick General*, 273.

19 Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* (East Aurora, NY, 1904), 69.

surprised. “I am so unlike other folks that you could not understand my feelings if I tried to explain them for a week,” he wrote.²⁰

* * *

Until now, no full-length, cradle-to-grave critical biography of D. H. Hill has ever appeared, but there have been attempts. The first began in 1913 with Dr. Henry E. Shepherd, who seemed the perfect choice. He had studied under Hill at Davidson College and the North Carolina Military Institute, served under Hill during the war, and went on to become a college president and an author. He was even an ardent Presbyterian. By the late summer of 1914, after a year of writing, he thought his book nearly complete. Shepherd planned to share a draft with Hill’s family and then publish it. “I have devoted my very heart to it,” he told Hill’s son-in-law.²¹

Unfortunately, the family did not like it. The manuscript “has been a great disappointment to me and it hurts me very much to have to protest against its publication,” Joseph Hill wrote. “It is pitched in radically the wrong key; he misses the spirit entirely.” The family wanted to see a factual narrative of their father’s achievements from Bethel to Bentonville. “Father’s iron discipline, his splendid command of his men, his achievements with them against overwhelming odds, his readiness (when others were unready) should be set forth as they were,” Hill wrote. The family asked Shepherd to make some changes. Grudgingly, Shepherd agreed to some edits but resisted others. In 1915, when the author and the family reached an impasse, Shepherd abandoned the project. “If the dead hero cannot be presented in his true greatness, let his story remain unwritten,” he moaned.²²

Since then, only a handful of book-length studies about Hill have appeared. In 1961, a college professor named Hal Bridges published *Lee’s Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill*. The book is excellent, but by Bridges’ own admission it “is not a biography but a study, with some biographical background” of Hill’s Civil War

20 DHH to Isabella Hill, Oct. 8, 1862, DHH Papers, USAHEC.

21 Ernest J. Arnold to Chalmers Davidson, Oct. 14, 1989, DHH File, DA; C. Sylvester Green, “Shepherd, Henry Elliot,” *NCPedia*, <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/shepherd-henry-elliott>, accessed Nov. 8, 2021; Henry E. Shepherd to Thomas J. Arnold, Aug. 24, 1914, Jackson-Arnold Collection, PC.

22 Joseph M. Hill to Daniel Harvey Hill, Jr., Mar. 6, 1915, and Henry E. Shepherd to Thomas J. Arnold, Jan. 30, May 4, 1915, and Oct. 28, 1915, Jackson-Arnold Collection, PC; Joseph M. Hill to Daniel Harvey Hill, Jr., Mar. 6, 1915, DHH Papers, NCSA; Ernest J. Arnold to Chalmers Davidson, Oct. 14, 1989, DHH File, DA.

career. Bridges had originally set out to write a complete life but changed his mind after seeing the mountain of material available.²³

The next book about Hill was the 2002 publication of *A Fighter from Way Back: The Mexican War Diary of Lt. Daniel Harvey Hill, 4th Artillery, USA*. Ably edited by Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr. and Timothy D. Johnson, *A Fighter from Way Back* is a superb contribution that made Hill's fascinating journal of June 8, 1846, to June 24, 1848, broadly available. A friend had urged the family to publish the diary as early as 1938 since it offers such valuable insights into both the Mexican War and Hill himself. However, as this biography will show, the diary does not tell the complete story of Hill's Mexican War adventure.²⁴

Only two other books about D. H. Hill's life have been released. A family member, Dr. D. R. Hill, released *D. H. Hill: The Confederate Angel of Death*, a self-published volume that the author described as "written for study at secondary education level." In 2021, a 268-page book by H. Roundel Rumburg entitled *Daniel Harvey Hill: Lee's Conscientious Commander* appeared. Although it covered Hill's life, the author described his work as an "introductory biography" that "takes exception to the disparagement" of Hill that some have offered.²⁵

Other studies deserve mention, especially the excellent body of work by Kimberly Brit Erslev. She wrote an insightful thesis (2007) and dissertation (2011) about Hill's influence on Confederate memory, as well as a perceptive book entitled *Taming the Tar Heel Department: D. H. Hill and the Challenges of Operational Command During the Civil War*. Much earlier, Gen. Hill's son, D. H. Hill, Jr., made his own contribution. An educator and author who rose to become president of North Carolina State University, Hill wrote the volume on North Carolina for Clement Evans's twelve-volume series, *Confederate Military History*, published in 1899. In 1916, at the invitation of the North Carolina Historical Commission, Hill's son began a two-volume study called *Bethel to Sharpsburg: North Carolina in the War Between the States*. He completed twenty chapters before his death in 1924, but only included information about his father where it fit into the narrative.²⁶

For biographical data on Hill, one must otherwise look to the handful of addresses and articles that his contemporaries produced, as well as the excellent

23 Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill* (New York, 1961), vii; *Charlotte Observer*, Dec. 3, 1961.

24 Charleston Dabney to Joseph Hill, Oct. 31, 1938, DHH Papers, NCSA.

25 D. R. Hill, *D. H. Hill—The Confederate Angel of Death* (CreateSpace, 2013), 8; H. Rondel Rumburg, *Daniel Harvey Hill: Lee's Conscientious Commander* (Spout Spring, VA, 2021), 7, 11.

26 Daniel Harvey Hill, Jr., *Bethel to Sharpsburg*, 2 vols. (Raleigh, NC, 1926, Reprint, Wilmington, NC, 1992), x, xii, xvi; I. T. Littlejohn, "Hill, Daniel Harvey, Jr.," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/hill-daniel-harvey-jr>, accessed Nov. 17, 2021.

online article, “Daniel Harvey Hill: The Pre-Civil War Years” that Dr. Dan L. Morrill wrote for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. Finally, James I. Robertson wrote a master’s thesis on Hill, but it is not widely available.²⁷

It seems clear that nobody quite knows what to do with Hill. Even his fellow Southerners failed to accord him much honor after the Civil War. Unlike some Confederate officers, Hill never had a statue erected in his memory. His boyhood home is long gone. Where several large military bases were once named for prominent Confederate leaders, only a few things have been named for Hill, including a U.S. Army Reserve Training Center in Charlotte and one of the 2,700 Liberty ships built during World War II. Otherwise, his only lasting memorial, besides the one that marks his grave, are the scars in the earth left from the fortifications he built.²⁸

Why is D. H. Hill so hard to figure out? Admittedly, he is a daunting subject, if for no other reason than the fact that he wrote millions of words. Many appeared in newspapers and magazines that remain accessible today. Collections of personal letters are scattered in multiple repositories nationwide. The personality that shines through makes him more challenging to understand. He was an impatient, reserved man, disinclined to intimacy, and sometimes cold and indifferent. He did not easily accept new friends—but when he did consider you a friend, it was intensely so, even if you wore a different uniform.²⁹

What makes Hill even more complex is the fact that he was a gadfly who fired jabs and jeremiads with abandon. He was good at it. He possessed a hangman’s wit and used it as a rapier, but it makes one wonder about him. There was always somebody to blame. On paper or in person, he nettled everybody: presidents, congressmen, generals, admirals, colonels, corporals, privates, surgeons, ordnance officers, quartermasters, friends, and even family members. He did not shrink from accusing people of crimes if he thought it warranted. He chalked it up to a different outlook on life that stemmed from a clear moral sense. “Those who heard me express my views thought me a croaking fool,” he once told his wife. “It is unfortunate to have views different from the rest of mankind.” He believed that his mother had instilled in him such a strong perception of right and wrong that it gave him a long memory for anyone who slighted or criticized him or

27 Dan L. Morrill, “Daniel Harvey Hill: The Pre-Civil War Years,” <http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Daniel-Harvey-Hill.pdf>, accessed Jul. 5, 2020.

28 *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 27, 1987; Noah Andre Trudeau, “Rebel Armada,” *The Civil War Monitor* 11 (Spring 2021), 49, 56, 69; “North Carolina Shipbuilding, Wilmington, NC,” <http://shipbuildinghistory.com/shipyards/emergencylarge/northcarolina.htm>, accessed Mar. 21, 2021.

29 Untitled Sketch of the Life of D. H. Hill, Undated, DHH Papers, NCSA; Anderson, “General Daniel Harvey Hill,” 40; J. W. Ratchford to D. H. Hill, Jr., DHH Papers, NCSA.

did something he disagreed with. Whatever the reason, the general's adamantine points of view made him enemies and curbed the role he played in the war.³⁰

* * *

If he were alive today, Hill might even question the need for a biography of his life. One spring day in 1862, frustrated with inaccurate media coverage, he moaned to his wife, "What is history worth?" He would also be baffled by his reputation as a croaker among Civil War students.³¹

However important the headlines of his life might be, if we only remember those, we miss the rich detail—from his boyhood, when he was raised on the exploits of his grandfathers, to his gallant service in the Mexican War, and from his antebellum work as an author and educator to his long, hard-fighting Confederate military service and his postwar publishing and college leadership ventures. On the battlefield, he made mistakes but was sometimes brilliant. Off the battlefield, he personified the Southern nationalism that helped spark the Civil War and led to much handwringing after. He even helped shape Confederate memory.³²

It is past time for an in-depth study of D. H. Hill—especially in a day and age where Americans still grapple with the legacy of the Confederacy. A new history allows for a reappraisal of a man around whom many questions still linger. To study him is to relive a troubled time in American history. To study him is to search for fresh perspectives on life and war in a bygone world, and to take a fresh look at his generalship as well. To reconsider him is to reconsider one of the most controversial of Civil War soldiers amid some of the most controversial Civil War events. Along the way, we will see that D. H. Hill, warts and all, is not who many thought he was. This book will even skewer a few tropes about him.

Our story begins in turn of the century South Carolina.

30 DHH to My Dear Wife, Mar. 19, 1862, DHH Papers, USAHEC; Joseph M. Hill to Douglas Southall Freeman, Nov. 23, 1942, and Joseph M. Hill to Marguerite Gilstrap, Apr. 12, 1943, Jackson-Arnold Collection, PC; Avery, *Life and Character of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill*, 6-7; Untitled Sketch of the Life of D. H. Hill, DHH Papers, NCSA; Jeffry D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier* (New York, 1993), 93.

31 DHH to My Dear Wife, May 22, 1862, DHH Papers, USAHEC; DHH to Jubal A. Early, Jan. 15, 1884, Jubal Anderson Early Papers, LC.

32 Cornelia Rebekah Shaw, *Davidson College: Intimate Facts* (New York, 1923), 80.

Chapter 1

IRON MEN

A Southern Family

Standing on a makeshift altar on the threshold of a new century, a young couple pledged their love to each other.

It was January 1, 1800, in the backcountry of South Carolina, where the sandy midlands gave way to gently rolling hills. Once, only Native American tribes lived here, but as of late settlers had traveled down the Great Wagon Road, fleeing victorious French and Indian forces on the Ohio frontier. Presbyterian in faith, these newcomers possessed deep-seated roots in Northern Ireland.¹

A marriage on a Wednesday in the dead of winter surprised no one. In those days, January was a popular month for weddings thanks to lighter farm obligations. Wednesday was considered the best day to wed. Details are lost to time, but the ceremony was surely just as typical: a morning affair that started when the wedding party, clad in their finest, assembled in the parlor of the bride's parents. The bride was perhaps dressed in white with a blue band at the hem, or in a multi-colored dress after another custom of the time. When all was ready, the minister led a procession of bride, groom, parents, bridesmaids, groomsmen, and probably a fiddler down an improvised aisle. Family members and friends, invited verbally or by posted banns, watched the ceremony unfold. After the bride's father gave his daughter away, the couple exchanged vows and rings and the minister made

1 Michael C. Scoggins, *The Day It Rained Militia: Huck's Defeat and the Revolution in the South Carolina Backcountry, May-July 1780* (Charleston, SC, 2005), 19. Today, the region is more commonly known as the upcountry. In those days, backcountry was the more common usage.

his pronouncements. With that, Solomon Hill and Nancy Cabeen were bound together forever before God and man.²

The wedding party celebrated with food, drink, dancing, and games. The partygoers also enjoyed a closer look at the newlyweds. Solomon Hill, a 24-year-old ironmaster, was a catch. A respected planter, slaveholder, and elder in the Presbyterian church, Hill was a man of means who enjoyed the esteem of his neighbors, largely because iron flowed in his blood. He had learned the business from his father and now superintended the Berwick Ironworks in the Spartanburg district.³

The bride, 20-year-old Nancy Cabeen, was desirable in her own right. She was noted widely for her beauty, and her family boasted an equally distinguished Scottish lineage. All knew the Cabeens for their wealth, influence, and strict Presbyterianism. The latter meant the most to young Nancy. The Presbyterian Church would be a source of strength to her in the days ahead. Only the value of education would come close to—but not supersede—her Calvinist views.⁴

Elsewhere in the wedding party, Thomas Cabeen, the proud father of the bride and the host, chatted in the thick brogue of his native Scotland. Everybody knew Cabeen as a hero of the Revolution. During the dark days of war with the mother country, Brig. Gen. Thomas Sumter called him the bravest man in his command. The 48-year-old Cabeen had less than two years to live. His wife Effie, 41, stood by her husband and beamed at her daughter.⁵

2 “Courtship and Marriage in the Eighteenth Century,” <https://tinyurl.com/34p8tpaj>, accessed June 3, 2025; “18th Century Marriage,” <https://hammondharwoodhouse.org/18th-century-marriage/>, accessed June 3, 2025; “14 Wedding Traditions,” <https://www.jwu.edu/news/2021/07/wedding-traditions.html>, accessed June 3, 2025; “18th Century Marriage Customs,” <https://tinyurl.com/ysd34fdn>, accessed June 3, 2025; Solomon Hill Family Bible, MP.

3 “Courtship and Marriage in the Eighteenth Century,” Colonial Williamsburg website, <https://tinyurl.com/34p8tpaj>, accessed June 3, 2025; William Boyce White, Jr., *Genealogy of Col. William Hill of York County, S.C.* (York, SC, 1993), 9; *History of Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Crawford, Franklin, and Sebastian Counties, Arkansas* (Chicago, 1889), 955; Joseph Hill, *Biography of Daniel Harvey Hill*, 8, NCC. Solomon Hill was born in 1776. Solomon Hill Family Bible, MP.

4 *History of Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Crawford, Franklin, and Sebastian Counties, Arkansas*, 955; Hill Appendices, Vol. 1, MP; Lineage of William Hill, DHH Papers, 2035-z, folder 3b, SHC; Joseph Hill, *Biography of Daniel Harvey Hill*, 8, NCC. Nancy was born on Oct. 22, 1779.

5 Affidavit of Joseph Morrison Hill, Jackson-Arnold Collection, PC; *Hill Family Genealogy*, Jackson-Arnold Collection, PC; *History of Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Crawford, Franklin, and Sebastian Counties, Arkansas*, 955; DHH to Lyman C. Draper, Sept. 18, 1869, Lyman Draper Manuscript Collection, WHS; Hill, *Biography of Daniel Harvey Hill*, 8, NCC; A. C. Avery, *Life and Character of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill, May 10th, 1893* (Raleigh, NC, 1893), 5; White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 8; Hill Appendices, MP; *The State*, Oct. 12, 1917(?); “Lieutenant-General D. H. Hill,” NCC.

The esteemed father of the groom, William Hill, dominated the room. He, too, was an iron man in both personality and occupation. A fastidious dresser and taller than average at about 5'9", Hill had a large nose and round face that seemed out of place on his thin, spare body. In conversation, he spoke slowly, as if to ensure nobody missed what he had to say. Born in Ireland in 1741, Hill came to America with a flood of other Scotch-Irish immigrants. He set up housekeeping in York, Pennsylvania, but in 1768 moved to the sunnier climes of South Carolina and set about obtaining land grants.⁶

Hill had chosen to settle in an unsettled land. The provincial governments of North and South Carolina debated the exact course of their shared border. North Carolina claimed parts of upper South Carolina as its own. So did some Native Americans and the bandits who ravaged the area. In 1772, new surveys clarified the path of the border, and North Carolina gave up its assertions on a sliver of land between the Catawba and Broad Rivers called the New Acquisition. William Hill planted his roots there.⁷

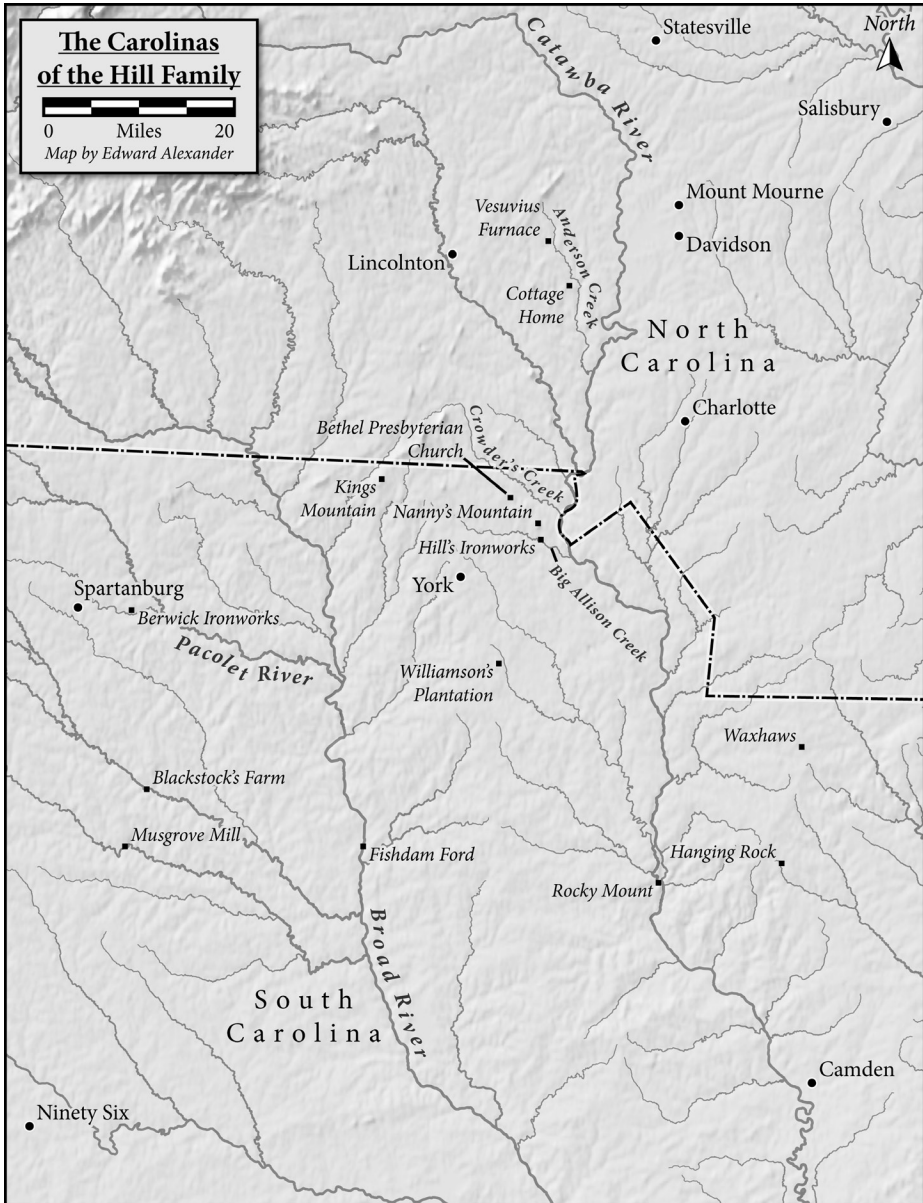
On the banks of Big Allison Creek, about 24 miles southwest of Charlotte, North Carolina, Hill raised his family and launched his business. It was a perfect spot. The creek meandered through piedmont land covered with pines, oaks, and maples. A short distance away, the creek joined with the muddy Catawba River, and the Buster Boyd Bridge Road connected Charlotte and York, South Carolina. A knob stood two miles to the west. At 981 feet above sea level, it was one of the highest points in York County, yet it was modest enough in height that folds of land often hid it. They called the knob Nanny's Mountain, after William's beloved wife.⁸

Economic possibilities made the spot even more desirable. At the time, most Americans made a living through agriculture, but Hill had a different idea. Iron ore deposits and timber dotted Nanny's Mountain. Long ago, men had discovered that iron, a metal stronger than bronze and ideal for use in tools and weapons, could be fashioned by submitting natural iron ore to a process of hammering, heating,

6 "Lieutenant-General D. H. Hill," NCC; "Descendants of Edward Hill," Hart Collection, YM; White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 1; Scoggins, 60; Avery, *Life and Character of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill*, 5-6; *The State*, Oct. 12, 1917(?); *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1927; White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 3, 6; Hill, *Biography of Daniel Harvey Hill*, 7, NCC; Scoggins, 59; Hill Family Genealogy, Jackson-Arnold Collection, PC; Data Concerning Col. William Hill, SCHS; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York, 2007), 473.

7 Scoggins, 20-22, 243; White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 1.

8 *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1927; Scoggins, 59; "A Mountain Full of History," *Lake Wylie Living*, Summer 2005, lake-wylie.com, copy in author's possession; Data Concerning Col. William Hill, SCHS.



and cooling. Early colonists brought ironworking to America, where wood was plentiful and cheap, and iron ore deposits available.⁹

⁹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 31; *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1927; Brooke C. Stoddard, *Steel: From Mine to Mill, The Metal That Made America* (Minneapolis, 2015), 18; White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 1; *The State*, Oct. 12, 1917(?).

Thus, William Hill trudged up Nanny's Mountain to mine iron ore and harvest hardwood to make charcoal, but he lacked the money to build a furnace. He found the solution in Big Allison Creek. Once he built dams on the Catawba to increase water flow, he could fashion iron with forge hammers. Soon he was selling goods like nails, sickles, scythes, plows, wagon wheels, and kitchenware to a frontier community that had little access to such goods. Yet his aspirations were higher, so he secured funding from Isaac Hayne, a Charleston businessman and planter, and the provincial legislature to build a furnace. He named it Aera Furnace, but most just called it Hill's Ironworks. As the only ironworks south of Richmond, it was something of a destination. Andrew Jackson, the future president, spent some of his boyhood there.¹⁰

For his home, Hill built a tasteful two-story brick residence atop a hill on the south bank of Big Allison Creek. From there he could survey his empire. To the south sat the mills and ironworks. To the east he could see his enslaved workers cultivating his farmland. To the west, Nanny's Mountain and some adjoining hills offered resources and shelter from winter winds.¹¹

The clergy for Solomon Hill's wedding came from Bethel Presbyterian Church. Founded in 1764, Bethel remains York County's oldest church. The Hills were active members of the church, which sat on Crowder's Creek about ten miles from Hill's Ironworks. The Scotch-Irish Presbyterians that started the church had, "like the patriarch Jacob . . . set up their altar in what was then a vast wilderness," a church historian wrote. "The wild woods rang with their 'songs of praise' and 'hymns of lofty cheer.'" William Hill was an elder who espoused the beliefs preached from Bethel's pulpit and inculcated those same beliefs in his children

10 Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "The Iron Industry in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," *The Journal of Southern History* 20, No. 3 (Aug. 1954), 348; Thomas Cowan, "William Hill and the Aera Ironworks," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 13 (Nov. 1987), 1, 3-5, 6, 8, 12, 23; *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1927; *The State*, Oct. 12, 1917(?); Stoddard, *Steel*, 33; Nathan Vernon Madison, *Tredegear Iron Works: Richmond's Foundry on the James* (Charleston, SC, 2015), 19; White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 1; Avery, *Life and Character of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill*, 5; Scoggins, 59; John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas* (New York, 1997), 113; Hampton McNeely Jarrell, "To Make a Nation Great and Free: Colonel William Hill," Hampton McNeely Jarrell Papers, Louise Pettus Archives & Special Collections, Winthrop University; DHH to Lyman C. Draper, Aug. 19, 1869, Lyman Draper Manuscript Collection, WHS.

11 William D. Martin, *A Journey from South Carolina to Connecticut in the Year 1809*, Reprint (Charlotte, 1959); Cowan, "William Hill and the Aera Ironworks," 5; White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 1; *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1927; "A Schedule of the Lands, Negroes, and Other Property Jointly and equally to William Hill Senior and William Edward Haye," *The Western Circuit Equity Journal* 8 (Winter 1980) 18-19. According to the 1789 schedule of Hill's lands cited here, Hill owned 17,527 acres and 88 enslaved individuals.

and grandchildren. The importance of the Presbyterian Church to the Hill family cannot be overstated.¹²

Hill's Revolutionary War record was the stuff of legend. Not only had his ironworks made implements of war for the Patriots, but Hill had also fought with distinction on many battlefields. Hill had many postwar achievements too, including York County justice of the peace and multiple stints in the South Carolina senate. He was also a driving force in the creation of both York County and York—the town sat on land he donated—and a delegate to South Carolina's constitutional convention. One observer said that Hill was a man of sound judgment with an engaging personality, but another said it better when he credited Hill with such a forceful nature that he dominated everyone. That included his rival, Col. William Bratton, whom he battled at the Court House over many issues, for William Hill loved a good fight.¹³ The bar for young Solomon was a high one, and it was made of iron.

Nearby in the wedding throng stood Nanny, William's wife and Solomon's mother, now 60 years old. She and William had been married for 36 years, and her pride in their son was evident. So was her love for their other children, who also milled in the crowd.¹⁴

When the time came for bride and groom to depart, tradition called for tying a boot to the back of their carriage to signify a long and happy marriage. As Solomon and Nancy rode off to start their new life together, they surely wondered if the boot truly promised happiness and longevity. The same question might have been asked of the new century: what did it hold for this South Carolina family and for the young American nation?¹⁵

12 White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 4; Hill, *Biography of Daniel Harvey Hill*, 8, NCC; George Howe, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina* (Columbia, 1870) 1:336-337.

13 *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1927; Avery, *Life and Character of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill*, 5; *The State*, Oct. 12, 1917(?); Cowan, "William Hill and the Aera Ironworks," 6; White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 2-3; *History of Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Crawford, Franklin, and Sebastian Counties, Arkansas*, 955; Scoggins, 59, 150-151; Hill, *Biography of Daniel Harvey Hill*, 8, NCC; *Col. William Hill's Memoirs of the Revolution*, 29; DHH to Lyman C. Draper, Aug. 19, 1869, Lyman Draper Manuscript Collection, WHS.

14 White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 3, 4-17; "Descendants of Edward Hill," Hart Collection, YM; Lineage of William Hill, DHH Papers, 2035-z, SHC; "A Mountain Full of History," *Lake Wylie Living*, Summer 2005, lake-wylie.com, printed copy in author's possession; Data Concerning Col. William Hill, SCHS. There is some disagreement around the Hill children, but they included Ann (1765-1851), Elizabeth (Betsy) (1766-1805), William (1768-1838), Andrew (1774-1840), Solomon (1776-1825), and Rachel (1779-1821).

15 "Courtship and Marriage in the Eighteenth Century," Colonial Williamsburg website, <https://tinyurl.com/34p8tpaj>, accessed June 3, 2025.

* * *

Solomon and Nancy started a family at once. On November 24, 1800, the cries of their first child sounded in the halls of Berwick Ironworks. They named him William Randolph. A daughter, Paulina, followed on July 14, 1802. Thomas Jefferson, the Hill's third child, was born on August 20, 1804.¹⁶

Poor Thomas did not live a year. Little Paulina proved just as fragile. She made it to her eighth birthday but died on December 13, 1810. Her passing struck the Hills especially hard, and they etched their grief on her tombstone in the Bethel cemetery. Her death, the stone reads, "rent her parents' breast when they beheld the lovely rose sink to the grave." The couple responded to this tragic loss by producing more children, including Elizabeth Olivia, Jane Elmira, Amanda Adelaide, Thomas William, Effy Paulina, John Alexander, and Albert Potts. According to family tradition, Solomon Hill also served in the War of 1812, but no record verifies his service.¹⁷

* * *

When the chill winds of February 1815 blew across York County, inspiration seized William Hill. He turned 74 that year, and he wanted to write his memoirs. Solomon did not like the idea. His father was in no condition to write anything. "He was in his dotage at the time," a grandson wrote years later. "Col. Hill had a great prejudice against the low-country people of South Carolina & he always claimed that the up-country did the fighting & that the low-country furnished the historians." But William Hill would not be dissuaded.¹⁸

The old man dictated his fading memories to William, Solomon's firstborn son. He also enlisted a neighbor as an amanuensis. "For near 30 years, I have been waiting with hopes that some person fitly qualified both in abilities and knowledge of facts, would have undertaken to rectify some great mistakes, which have been made by the historians who have wrote on the revolution in So-Ca [South Carolina]," Hill began. "It is the design of the author to rectify the mistakes that have unhappily been made." As William Hill continued his story, Solomon's

16 White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 9; "Descendants of Edward Hill," Hart Collection, YM.

17 White, *Genealogy of Col. William Hill*, 3, 9-10; "Descendants of Edward Hill," Hart Collection, YM; Hill Family Genealogy, Jackson-Arnold Collection, PC.

18 Scoggins, 58; William T. Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary: James Williams (1740-1780) with Source Documents* (Lugoff, SC, 2012), 90-91; DHH to Lyman C. Draper, Aug. 19, 1869, Lyman Draper Manuscript Collection, WHS.

And what of William Hill? Some accounts say that he avoided the enemy by hiding in a pile of leaves. Other accounts say that he was absent when Huck attacked. His grandson wrote that Hill was at home and narrowly escaped. Whatever the truth, everything he had worked for went up in flames. Huck's treatment of Nanny was equally outrageous. "They would not permit Mrs. Hill to save any of her wearing apparel, and even took the wedding ring on her finger," grandson Hill wrote. This terrible day sparked a hatred so visceral that William Hill compared Huck and his minions to the blasphemous foes of ancient Israel. Across the New Acquisition, the burning sparked a new prayer: "Good Lord, if ye hadna suffered the cruel Tories to burn Belly Hell's Iron Works, we would na have asked any moir favors at Thy hands." Most of all, the fires created in the Hill family a hatred for invaders of any stripe.²³

End of Unedited Excerpt

23 Avery, *Life and Character of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill*, 5; *The State*, Oct. 12, 1917(?); *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1927; Scoggins, 83, 88-89; *Col. William Hill's Memoirs of the Revolution*, 9; Hill, "Battle of Kings Mountain," 396; Data Concerning Col. William Hill, SCHS.

24 Buchanan, 115, 124, 132-136, 226-241; *Col. William Hill's Memoirs of the Revolution*, 9-13, 22; *The State*, Oct. 12, 1917(?); Scoggins, 13, 101, 103-105, 109-110, 113-119, 140-141; *History of Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, Crawford, Franklin, and Sebastian Counties, Arkansas*, 955; *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1927; Draper, *King's Mountain and its Heroes*, 264-309, 464; Joseph Hill, *Biography of Daniel Harvey Hill*, 7-8, NCC; *The State*, October 12, 1917(?); Avery, *Life and Character of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill*, 5; Hill, "Battle of Kings Mountain," 396, 399; Data Concerning Col. William Hill, SCHS; DHH to Lyman C. Draper, Aug. 19, 1869, Lyman Draper Manuscript Collection, WHS; Liston Pope, *Millhands & Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven, 1942), 34.