



Confederate General William "Extra Billy" Smith: From Virginia's Statehouse to Gettysburg Scapegoat

Scott Mingus

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WINNER, 2013 JAMES I. ROBERTSON JR. LITERARY AWARD FOR CONFEDERATE HISTORY
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William "Extra Billy" Smith, the oldest and one of the most controversial Confederate generals on the field at Gettysburg, was also one of the most colorful and charismatic characters of the Civil War and the antebellum Old South. Despite a life full of drama, politics, and adventure, until now very few books have been written on Smith since a biased account in the 19th century by his brother-in-law. Scott L. Mingus Sr. has ably filled this historical void with Confederate General William "Extra Billy" Smith: From Virginia's Statehouse to Gettysburg Scapegoat.

Known nationally as "Extra Billy" because of his prewar penchant for finding loopholes in government postal contracts to gain extra money for his stagecoach lines, Smith served as Virginia's governor during both the War with Mexico and the Civil War, served five terms in the U.S. Congress, and was one of Virginia's leading spokesmen for slavery and States' Rights. Extra Billy's extra-long speeches and wry sense of humor were legendary among his peers. A lawyer during the heady Gold Rush days, Smith made a fortune in California and, like his income earned from stagecoaches, quickly lost it.

Despite his advanced age Smith took the field and fought well at First Manassas, was wounded at Seven Pines and again at Sharpsburg, and marched with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia into Pennsylvania. There, on the first day at Gettysburg, Smith's frantic messages about a possible Union flanking attack remain a matter of controversy to this day. Did his aging eyes see distant fence-lines that he interpreted as approaching enemy soldiers--mere phantoms of his imagination?--or did his prompt action stave off a looming Confederate disaster? What we do know is that his calls for support diverted limited Confederate manpower away from attacks against Cemetery Hill and Culp's Hill that might have turned the tide of Southern fortunes in Pennsylvania.

Mingus's biography draws upon a wide array of newspapers, diaries, letters, and other firsthand accounts to paint a broad, deep, and colorful portrait of one of the South's most interesting leaders and devoted sons. Complete with original maps and photos, Extra Billy Smith will satisfy anyone who loves politics, war, and a story well told.

REVIEWS "The life of William "Extra Billy" Smith is just as interesting as many better-known Civil War personalities, but the man who served as Virginia's governor and a Confederate senator has been ignored by history. Scott Mingus, one of today's most talented authors, remedies this oversight with an engaging and often humorous biography of one of the oldest generals in the Confederate army. This deeply-researched and well written study will elevate Smith's memory and place in history to the prominence it deserves." - J. David Petrucci, author of The Complete Gettysburg Guide

"An outstanding work on one of the little known but much maligned generals in the Army of Northern

Virginia. Scott Mingus's research on the Gettysburg controversy and Smith's performance is the best. He has also brought together the most information on an excellent brigade of Virginia regiments who fought from Bull Run to Appomattox." - Robert J. Driver, Jr, author of 52nd Virginia Infantry

"Scott Mingus has written an engaging and well researched biography of a colorful character of the Confederacy. This book is sure to be a classic." - Ted Alexander, Chief Historian, Antietam National Battlefield and the author of The Battle of Antietam: The Bloodiest Day

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