

History 225

Re: Characterization of Jeff Davis

Source: Davis, Government of Our Own(Chpt. 7)

Political/administrative biography: He was twice Senator from Mississippi. He served as Secretary of War under Pierce.

Military experience: He was a Mexican War hero. In fact, he was the most celebrated military hero in the South. Davis as an officer in the Mexican War was feated for his heroism and courage displayed at the battle for Buena Vista. His actions here were very risky and he could have lost his command except that the Mexican general was even more inept than Davis was.

Davis prided himself on his military capabilities. He was a graduate of West Point. Although his record at the Point was not exemplary. He was brought to court martial twice and narrowly avoided dismissal from the Academy.

Davis had blind faith in his friends. He could not see through their faults. If he made pledged his support to a general (like Bragg)he would not break that pledge.

Once he made up his mind there was no changing him. He found it difficult to explain his actions. Once he decided he was right about a matter he stood immutable. Those who then questioned his position or judgment he interpreted these actions as perverse and malignant in their purpose.

He had great intelligence and application. He could master any topic with iron-assed application. He simply would hunker down and study the issue until he had mastered the matter. While he could master the facts and spit them out. . . he could not think creatively. He had a splendid intellect but a closed mind. Compromise was not part of his nature.

He was not a likeable person.

For all his flaws and foibles he was still a logical choice to head up the CSA. He had administrative skills. (presumably as secretary of war/of course there was no war when he held that post for four years). And he was the South's most preeminent military hero.

His politics were one of moderation. He was not a fire-eater. This was a factor in his choice by the secessionist Congress meeting in Montgomery because they did not want to alienate the border states during that critical period. CSA was trolling for the other slave-holding states to join the Confederacy.