

Lieutenant General A.P. Hill



Ambrose Powell Hill, was born November 9, 1825 in Culpeper Virginia. The son of merchant parents with ties to President James Madison, A.P. Hill never owned slaves and he never approved of the institution. In 1842 Hill entered the United States Military Academy at West Point and became strong friends with future generals George McClellan, Ambrose Burnside, George Pickett, Cadmus Wilcox, and Harry Heth. After West Point, Hill served in the Mexican-American War and then with distinction in the Seminole Wars. From 1855 to 1860 A.P. Hill worked on the United States' coastal survey, and was at one time engaged to Ms. Ellen Marcy, who would instead marry Hill's West Point roommate and close friend, George McClellan. On July 18, 1859, Hill married Kitty "Dolly" Morgan McClung. Robert E. Lee would be the godfather to their children.

Like Robert E. Lee and many other Virginians, Hill did not favor secession, and had absolutely no desire to perpetuate the institution of slavery; however, due to his abundant loyalty to his "Native State," when Virginia seceded in 1861, Hill risked everything, resigned his United States Army commission, and accepted a commission as colonel of the 13th Virginia Infantry, which mustered near his home in Culpeper.

Hill was a Major General by the conclusion of Peninsula Campaign of 1862, and performed with distinction at the Battle of Williamsburg, Mechanicsville, Gaines Mill, and Glendale. During the Seven Days Battles, Hill accepted command of the famous "Light Division," which was the largest division in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia and was renowned for its lightning fast marches and aggression. Despite quarrels with both Generals Longstreet and Jackson, Hill revered Robert E. Lee and was absolutely beloved by the men of his command; the Light Division gave their commander the moniker, "Little Powell" due to his diminutive size and stature—Hill only stood 5'9" and was rail thin.

During the War Between the States, the phrase, "and then Hill came up" was a common aphorism known throughout the Army of Northern Virginia to denote the turning point of a battle. For example, at the Battle of Cedar Mountain, Hill launched a massive counterattack to stabilize Jackson's line and proved to be the turning point of the Battle.

A.P. Hill's greatest day was September 17, 1863 at the Battle of Sharpsburg (Antietam). In the days immediately preceding the battle, Hill and Jackson captured the Union Garrison at Harpers Ferry—the largest single Union force to surrender during the War. Initially, Jackson left Hill and the Light Division at Harpers Ferry to parole Union prisoners and gather supplies. When the fighting starting, Hill marched his men 17 miles at a grueling pace to support the rest of the Army. Hill arrived at the critical moment when the Confederate right flank was about to collapse. Hill immediately led a brilliant counterattack against his old friend Ambrose Burnside that would stabilize the Confederate line and save the Army of Northern Virginia. This was without question, A.P. Hill's "Opus Dei."

Following Sharpsburg, the Union Army attempted to pursue the Confederates at Shepherdstown, Virginia (now West Virginia). Once again, "Hill Came Up" and drove the Union Army back to the north side of the Potomac, allowing Lee's Army to return to the Virginia heartland to refuel and refit for the next campaign.

Despite chronic illness, Hill would serve with distinction throughout the remainder of the War, and after the death of Stonewall Jackson, Hill was promoted to Corps Command with the rank of Lieutenant General. Hill was killed defending the Confederate line in Petersburg, Virginia on April 2, 1865, only eight days before the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse.

A final testament to A.P. Hill's legacy is both Generals Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee on their own deathbeds called for A.P. Hill. Ambrose "Little" Powell Hill is a Confederate Hero.