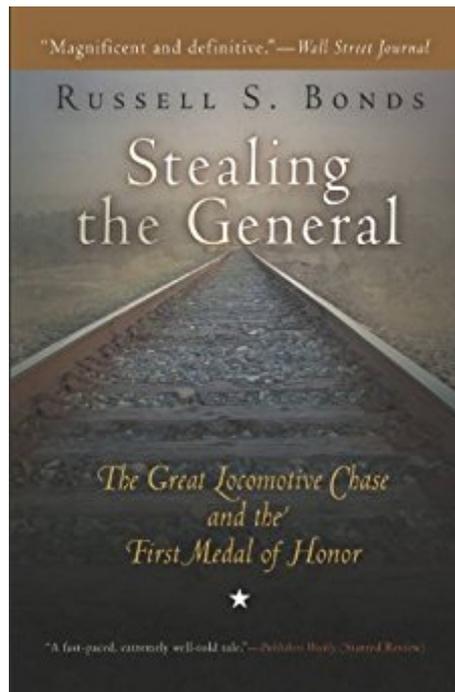


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# Stealing The General: The Great Locomotive Chase And The First Medal Of Honor



## Synopsis

Selected by Civil War Interactive as One of the Top Civil War Books of All Time "The definitive book about the Great Locomotive Chase." "Charlotte Observer" "Magnificent and definitive." "Wall Street Journal" "The Great Locomotive Chase has been the stuff of legend and the darling of Hollywood. Now we have a solid history of the Andrews Raid. Russell S. Bonds' stirring account makes clear why the raid failed and what happened to the raiders." "James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize" "In this gripping, smooth-running account, Bonds zooms effortlessly from broad-stroke overviews of Civil War strategy to minute-by-minute scrutiny of unfolding events on the ground. He sets up the story with a quick, punchy outline of the first year of the war. What follows is a fast-paced, extremely well-told tale of espionage, capture, trial and escape." "Publishers Weekly (starred review)" "Phenomenally well written, organized, and presented." "Civil War Books and Authors" "On April 12, 1862— one year to the day after Confederate guns opened on Fort Sumter and started the Civil War— a tall, mysterious smuggler and self-appointed Union spy named James J. Andrews and nineteen infantry volunteers infiltrated north Georgia and stole a steam engine called the General. Racing northward at speeds approaching sixty miles an hour, cutting telegraph lines and destroying track along the way, Andrews planned to open East Tennessee to the Union army, cutting off men and material from the Confederate forces in Virginia. If they succeeded, Andrews and his raiders could change the course of the war. But the General's young conductor, William A. Fuller, chased the stolen train first on foot, then by handcar, and finally aboard another engine, the Texas. He pursued the General until, running out of wood and water, Andrews and his men abandoned the doomed locomotive, ending the adventure that would soon be famous as The Great Locomotive Chase. But the ordeal of the soldiers involved was just beginning. In the days that followed, the "engine thieves" were hunted down and captured. Eight were tried and executed as spies, including Andrews. Eight others made a daring escape to freedom, including two assisted by a network of slaves and Union sympathizers. For their actions, before a personal audience with President Abraham Lincoln, six of the raiders became the first men in American history to be awarded the Medal of Honor— the nation's highest decoration for gallantry. Americans north and south, both at the time and ever since, have been astounded and fascinated by this daring raid. But until now, there has not been a complete history of the entire episode and the fates of all those involved. Based on eyewitness accounts, as well as correspondence, diaries, military records, newspaper reports, deposition testimony and other primary sources, *Stealing the General: The Great Locomotive Chase and the First Medal of Honor* by Russell S. Bonds is a blend of meticulous research and compelling narrative that is now

considered to be the definitive history of "the boldest adventure of the war."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Detailed coverage of one of the Civil War's lesser known and stranger episodes. Includes informed speculation on why the endeavour was undertaken, thorough recital of the events of the raid itself, and extensive coverage of the raiders in the following days, as they were moved between prisons and, eventually, returned to the North. This latter portion is an aspect of the story which has not previously been told, and is fully as interesting as the events of the raid itself. In no part of this book did I find myself wanting further detail, or wondering what events had been omitted or compressed for brevity. It is rare to find a book which is so complete in its story.

After reading Mr. Bonds' second book, *War Like The Thunderbolt*, I went back to read *Stealing The General*. As with *Thunderbolt*, I found *Stealing The General* to be well-written and thoroughly researched. Mr. Bonds has organized the varied, sometimes inconsistent stories concerning the theft of *The General* into a cohesive, "here's how it really happened" account of this historic event. This story has been handed down through generations, celebrated in a museum and featured

in movies. Mr. Bonds' greatest contribution to the story may be that he reminds us that this was a war mission that resulted in the deaths of many of its participants. As is often the case in war, a group of men entrusted their lives to the supposed skills and intellect of a single, charismatic leader and paid harshly for it. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is that it follows until the end the lives of many of those involved on both sides in the story of *The General*. In some cases, those who were adversaries in the story became friends and attended reunions into the early 1900's. Mr. Bonds' version of the story of *The General* held my interest from the beginning. As with *Thunderbolt*, I finished this book with a greater understanding of and appreciation for the people and events described within. I highly recommend this book.

This book is a welcome addition to Raiders lore. This is the first effort at compiling all the sources on Andrews Raiders since Charles O'Niell's "Wild Train". The footnotes are a treasure trove of insight. "Stealing" is more than the story of a train chase. Bonds describes in detail the effect of the raid on Atlanta, the Confederate Army and the captured Raiders themselves. The additional account of the first Medals of Honor hopefully is a prelude to his next book.

In "Stealing the General" Russell Bonds presents a minutely detailed account of an 1862 raid that sent a party of Union soldiers (and two civilians) behind Confederate lines to steal a locomotive and then burn railroad bridges between Atlanta and Chattanooga to isolate the latter city in advance of a proposed Federal movement. The Union raiding party captured the locomotive (the "General" of the title) but because of close pursuit they were unable to carry out the main part of their mission, the destruction of the bridges. The entire raiding party was subsequently captured and about a third of them were executed as spies (the survivors and their dead military comrades were awarded Medals of Honor). Bonds delves into the backgrounds of the raiders (and their foes), creating three-dimensional portraits of real men, with flaws as well as commendable virtues. The incident resulted in many postwar articles and books, including several by participants, and eventually provided seeds for not only the 1956 film, "The Great Locomotive Chase," but also an earlier Buster Keaton classic, "The General." But for the past half century, the raid has been largely neglected as a subject for serious study; Bonds's book corrects this lack. Although not a story of a great battle or a famous military leader, this is nonetheless a book that provides compelling, vivid reading about heroes who may have been less than perfect, and all the more real because of that.

*Stealing the General* is a great book--full of adventure, suspense, and terrific characters (very well

drawn by the author)--and a bittersweet story, one that shows in wonderful prose how a single event--in this case the hijacking of a Confederate locomotive--can be used to explain the emotional and strategic story of the Civil War. I found this book to be one of the best I've read all year. I enjoyed learning about General Ormsby Mitchel, for instance, who authorized the raid--he was an internationally renowned astronomer before the war--and had he not died of typhoid fever early on, was well on his way to becoming a household name. The author's accounts of the executions of some of the Raiders is brilliantly done--not morbid, just moments where you feel the doom of the condemned--and his description of how eight of the Raiders ultimately broke out of prison and escaped to freedom makes for wonderful page-turning reading. Although I did not know much about the history of Georgia before reading this book, the author's snapshot of northern Georgian history is both fascinating and contains some of the best passages in the book.

I saw the Disney movie when I was young and then read the book .This book filled in all that was missing from both the movie and the other book . I was lucky to see the Texas in Atlanta and this sparked my interest in the story . I enjoy this book very much . Very fast reading .I would recommend this book to every body interested in Civil war history. As a side note I bought the movie to compare

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