General S. B. Buckner  
Confederate Army  

Sir: Yours of this date, proposing armistice and appointment of Commissioners to settle terms of capitulation, is just received. No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works.

I am, sir, very respectfully,  
Your ob't se'v't  
U.S. Grant, Brig. Gen.
To Brig. Gen’l. U.S. Grant
U.S. Army

Sir: The distribution of the forces under my command, incident to an unexpected change of commanders, and the overwhelming force under your command, compel me, notwithstanding the brilliant success of the Confederate arms yesterday, to accept the ungenerous and unchivalrous terms which you propose.

I am, sir,
Your very ob’t se’vt,
S.B. Buckner
Brig. Gen. C. S. A.
The paths of Union General Ulysses S. Grant and Confederate General Simon Bolivar Buckner crossed several times during their lives, beginning at West Point and ending at Grant’s funeral. The following article, “A Blue and Gray Friendship” by John R. Procter, published in the April 1897 issue of The Century Magazine, describes some of the interaction between the two generals throughout their lives, as well as their poignant meeting at Mount McGregor just before Grant’s death.

About fifteen years ago I visited Lookout Mountain with a party of gentlemen, and stood with them on the pinnacle overlooking the beautiful valley of east Tennessee, and range after range of mountains visible from our point of vantage, from the Great Smokies of North Carolina to the Cumberland of Kentucky. The battle-field of Missionary Ridge formed the immediate foregound of this vast panorama. In our party were men who had served with distinction as officers in the opposing armies in that battle, and naturally the incidents of the conflict formed an interesting subject of conversation between them, with much good-humored badinage and friendly interchange of views. Mr. Thomas Hughes, the author of Tom Brown, who had listened with an expression of surprised interest to the conversation between these friendly foes, turning to me, said: “Why, this is extraordinary—most extraordinary!” “What?” I asked. “Why, that these men, standing in full view of the field where, only a few years ago, they were trying to slay each other, should be discussing the incidents of that battle, calmly, kindly, – I might almost say in a brotherly spirit, – with no trace of bitterness or ill feeling. Now, I doubt if we in England could discuss the Wars of the Roses, or the Cromwellian wars, with such an entire freedom from antagonism.”

Could Mr. Hughes have witnessed, a few years later, the funeral cortège of the great general who had hurled the successful columns against the Southern lines along the crest of Missionary Ridge, and who had brought final defeat to the Southern arms in Virginia, his astonishment would have been greater, and his pride in the “kin beyond sea” would have increased, on seeing that there were no more sincere mourners than the Southern generals who came from far away homes to pay a last tribute of friendship to the memory of Grant.

One of these Southern generals who served as a pall-bearer at the funeral was General Simon Bolivar Buckner of Kentucky: and I have had the opportunity of learning the story of the friendship between these two soldiers.

The two men had many characteristics in common—faithfulness to duty, loyalty to friends, gentle, dignified, unostentatious simplicity of manner, directness of purpose, and firm persistence. They were together for three years at West Point, and served in the same division through the Mexican war, where they were much associated. They were in most of the battles of that war, and both were promoted for gallantry. Grant resigned from the regular army in 1854, and Buckner in 1855.

Then came our Civil War, and the two met again for the first time at Fort Donelson, as generals on opposing sides. The capture of Donelson laid the foundation of Grant’s subsequent success, culminating in the command of the largest armies of modern times and his election as President of the United States. The surrender of Donelson consigned
General Buckner to months of inactivity as a prisoner of war, at a time when others less able were winning promotion in the field. But Buckner was the hero of Donelson on the Southern side. He was in no wise responsible for the blunders of his two superior officers in command—blunders made against his repeated protests, as is well shown by the official records. He advised against allowing the army to be cooped up in the trenches, and took his command there under protest. On the morning of February 14, before the investment was complete and before expected reinforcements had joined the Union forces, it was decided upon the advice of Buckner and Floyd, to force a way out through the then weak right flank of the Union army, General Buckner making disposition to form the rear-guard and cover the movement. Before the orders were put in execution they were countermanded at the insistence of General Pillow. On the night of the 14th it was again decided to make a sortie in force on the Union right early the next morning. Buckner's force to form the left wing and to protect the rear on the retreat. The movement on the morning of the 15th was successful: the Federal right wing was doubled back and the road to Nashville was open. General Grant was absent from the field, having been summoned to a consultation with Commodore Foote and his gunboat beyond the extreme Federal left. Pillow had halted twenty pieces of artillery that had been ordered up by Buckner. There remained nothing to do but to begin the march toward Nashville, which Buckner was expected to cover, when he received an order from Pillow to withdraw to his former position within the works. While hesitating to obey an order which did not come from the first in command, and which was so at variance with the agreed plan, a second order to withdraw at once was received. Buckner sought Floyd as he began the execution of the orders, and protested that its execution meant the loss of the army. Floyd ordered him to hold his position while he hastened to consult Pillow. He yielded to the arguments of Pillow, who had lost his head by the success of the morning, and, thinking the works could be held, had sent a grandiloquent dispatch claiming a great victory. Buckner was again ordered to resume his former position, and the wise plan, so gallantly executed, was abandoned. The Union right was reinforced, their former position reoccupied, and the chance to save the Southern forces thrown away.

General Grant, in his Memoirs, says that General Floyd "was no soldier, and, possibly, did not possess the elements of one". And shows that he held General Pillow's ability as a soldier in light esteem. He adds: "I had been at West Point three years with Buckner, and afterward served with him in the army so that we were quite well acquainted. In the course of our conversation, which was very friendly, he said to me that if he had been in command I would not have got up to Donelson as easily as I did. I told him that if he had been in command I should not have tried in the way I did." One of General Grant's first questions on meeting General Buckner was: "Where is Pillow? Why didn't he stay to surrender his command?" "He thought you were too anxious to capture him personally." "Why," he answered, with a humorous smile, "if I had captured him I would have turned him loose. I would rather have him in command of your fellows than as a prisoner." It was not, at this early stage of the war, known what course the Federal government would take with regard to prominent officers who should be captured, and Generals Floyd and Pillow were not willing to take the risk. Turning the command over to Buckner, they escaped on the only transport available, Buckner informing them that he considered it his duty to stay with his men and share their fate.

During the Washington Centennial in New York in 1889, when Buckner, as governor of his State, rode up Broadway as the head of the Kentucky troops, as he passed a line of the Grand Army of the Republic the veterans broke ranks and crowded about him to shake
the hand of the gray-haired soldier who, years before, had chosen to stay with his men at
Donelson and share their fate.

It was one of General Grant’s peculiarities that he never forgot a favor. Some years
before the war it had come in Buckner’s way to do him a kindness. After the surrender,
and when General Buckner had gone aboard the transport that was to convey him North,
General Grant took him aside and said, in his gentle, half-diffldent way: “Buckner, you
may be going among strangers, and I hope you will allow me to share my purse with
you.” Buckner thanked him for his kindness, and told him that he had made provisions
so that he would not require financial assistance.

The war over, the Union restored, Grant was hailed as the successful general, and was
twice chosen President. Then came his triumphant journey around the world, in which he
was received everywhere with distinguished marks of homage. Then the clouds gathered.
Defeated for renomination for a third term, he suffered political vituperation from
his own people and financial disaster. Stricken with an incurable malady, long and patient
suffering followed. Was the great general’s life to pass away in gloom? His calm
endurance, and his heroic struggle to complete his Memoirs before his death, touched
the nation’s heart. From the South, remembering his magnanimity in his hour of victory,
came expressions of sorrow and sympathy.

General Buckner, who had chosen the life of a country gentleman after the war, honored
and beloved by the people of his native State, who fondly called him the “gray eagle of
Glen Lily,” after the name of his picturesque country home, and recently married to a
beautiful and accomplished woman, was traveling in Canada when he learned that
General Grant had been carried to Mount McGregor, and that the end was approaching.
Wishing to carry to him a message of kindly remembrance from Southern soldiers, he
telegraphed to Colonel Frederick Grant his desire to visit his father. Colonel Grant met
him at Saratoga, and accompanied General and Mrs. Buckner to Mount McGregor.
General Buckner found General Grant is his sitting-room, in the adjustable chair,
furnished with wheels, which served him as a bed. Though pale and somewhat
emaciated, he preserved the calm courage that was his most marked characteristic.
General Grant, who was unable to articulate, replied to General Buckner’s cordial
greeting by writing on a small pad of paper, from which he removed the slips after
writing on them. He wrote: “I appreciate your calling very highly.” And: “You look
very natural, except that your hair has whitened, and you have grown stouter.”

General Buckner said that, aside from the gratification of a feeling of personal friendship,
he had a special object in view in paying this visit. It was to assure General Grant that
every Confederate soldier held him in kindly remembrance, not only for his magnanimity
at the close of the war, but for his just and friendly conduct afterward in interposing to
prevent the violation by his own government of the terms of the military convention
which he had entered into, at the surrender, with the Southern soldiers, which secured
them from molestation so long as they complied with the terms of their parole. To this
General Grant wrote an answer which is a last message of friendship to the South and to
the whole country, and part of which is published in facsimile in this article for the first
time:

“I have witnessed since my sickness just what I have wished to see ever since the war:
harmony and good feeling between the sections. I have always contended that if there had
been nobody left but the soldiers we would have had peace in a year. Jubal Early and
Hill are the only two that I know of who do not seem to be satisfied on the Southern side. We have some on ours who failed to accomplish as much as they wished, or who did not get warmed up to the fight until it was all over, who have not had quite full satisfaction. The great majority of those who did not go into the war have long since grown tired of the long controversy. We may now well look forward to a perpetual peace at home, and a national strength that will secure us against any foreign complication. I believe myself that the war was worth all it cost us, fearful as that was. Since it was over I have visited every state in Europe and a number in the East. I know, as I did not before, the value of our inheritance. 

General Buckner expressed himself as fully in accord with the views in regard to the friendly feelings of the actual combatants, and said that if the chief political promoters of the war on both sides could have been assembled between the lines of the two armies, with instructions to arrange all differences in a few hours, or else to fight out the differences to a finish among themselves in sight of both armies, the result would have been an arrangement satisfactory to all sections in a short space of time. This suggestion seemed to amuse General Grant. After some further remarks by General Buckner, he said that he was unwilling to credit the newspaper accounts of the serious character of General Grant’s illness; that he could no more abandon hope in his case than he could in that of Captain W.H.T. Walker of the Sixth Infantry, who was desperately wounded at Molino del Rey, and who, though abandoned by his physicians, had completely recovered his health. General Grant wrote in reply: “I remember Walker’s condition well. He was, as I remember, many months unable to help himself. In my case I have not been confined to bed a single day; but there cannot well be a cure in my case.”

After talking for some time, General Buckner proposed taking his leave, fearing a longer interview might prove fatiguing to General Grant, who then wrote:

“I am very glad to see you indeed; and allow me to congratulate you. I still read the papers, and saw a full account of your recent marriage.” And: “Is Mrs. Buckner here at the house with you?” To which an affirmative reply being given, he added: “I would be very glad to see Mrs. Buckner, if she can come in and see me as I am now. Where you see me has been my bed for more than four months.”

After greeting Mrs. Buckner, he wrote:

“I knew your husband long before you did. We were at West Point together, and served together in the Mexican war. I was with him on a visit to the top of Popocatepeti, the highest mountain in North America. Your husband wrote an account of that trip for publication at the time. I have just written my account, which will be published in my forthcoming book.”

The conversation lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes longer, and the friends separated, to meet no more. They had met in battle as worthy foemen; they met for a last farewell as loving friends. A few days later General Buckner was summoned by telegram to attend as a pall-bearer at the funeral of General Grant in New York.
I never seem to be
longer in controversy, my
wife well content for to
be out, I break my
word and my strength.

Strength that will answer in
against any foreign
expedition. I believe my
self that the war was hardly
doing at last as fearful as
that was time it was

And I have visited the
cliffs in Camus the
mountain on the east I knew
as I did not before
these of our intimate
GRANT AND THE FREEDMEN

The Freedmen's Bureau, officially known as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, was established by Congress at the end of the Civil War to help former slaves and their families improve their condition. The following excerpts from Grant's Memoirs and John Eaton's book, Grant Lincoln and the Freedmen, provide accounts concerning the origins of the Bureau, as well as testimony to Grant's insight and compassion.

GRANT:

The campaign against Vicksburg commenced on the 2nd of November as indicated in a dispatch to the general-in-chief in the following words: "I have commenced a movement on Grand Junction, with three divisions from Corinth and two from Bolivar. Will leave here [Jackson, Tennessee] tomorrow, and take command in person. If found practicable, I will go to Holly Springs, and, maybe, Grenada, completing the railroad and telegraph as I go."

On the 8th we occupied Grand Junction and La Grange, throwing a considerable force seven or eight miles south, along the line of the railroad. The road from Bolivar forward was repaired and put in running order as the troops advanced.

Up to this time it had been regarded as an axiom in war that large bodies of troops must operate from a base of supplies which they always covered and guarded in all forward movements. There was delay therefore in repairing the road back, and in gathering and forwarding supplies to the front.

By my orders, and in accordance with previous instructions from Washington, all the forage within reach was collected under the supervision of the chief quartermaster and the provisions under the chief commissary, receipts being given when there was any one to take them; the supplies in any event to be accounted for as government stores. The stock was bountiful, but still it gave me no idea of the possibility of supplying a moving column in an enemy's country from the country itself.

It was at this point, probably, where the first idea of a "Freedmen's Bureau" took its origin. Orders of the government prohibited the expulsion of the Negroes from the protection of the army, when they came in voluntarily. Humanity forbade allowing them to starve. With such an army of them, of all ages and both sexes, as had congregated about Grand Junction, amounting to many thousands, it was impossible to advance. There was no special authority for feeding them unless they were employed as teamsters, cooks and pioneers with the army; but only able-bodied young men were suitable for such work. This labor would support but a very limited percentage of them. The plantations were all deserted; the cotton and corn were ripe: men, women and children above ten years of age could be employed in saving these crops. To do this work with contrabands, or to have it done, organization under a competent chief was necessary. On inquiring for such a man Chaplain [John] Eaton, now and for many years the very able United States Commissioner of Education, was suggested. He proved as efficient in that field as he has since done in his present one. I gave him all the assistants and guards he called for. We together fixed the prices to be paid for the Negro labor, whether rendered to the government or to individuals. The cotton was to be picked from abandoned plantations, the laborers to receive the stipulated price (my recollection is twelve and a
half cents per pound for picking and ginning) from the quartermaster, he shipping the cotton north to be sold for the benefit of the government. Citizens remaining on their plantations were allowed the privilege of having their crops saved by freedmen on the same terms.

At once the freedmen became self-sustaining. The money was not paid to them directly, but was expended judiciously and for their benefit. They gave me no trouble afterwards.

Later the freedmen were engaged in cutting wood along the Mississippi River to supply the large number of steamers on that stream. A good price was paid for chopping wood used for the supply of government steamers (steamers chartered and which the government had to supply with fuel). Those supplying their own fuel paid a much higher price. In this way a fund was created not only sufficient to feed and clothe all, old and young, male and female, but to build them comfortable cabins, hospitals for the sick, and to supply them with many comforts they had never known before.

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EATON:

Some time after Grant’s departure [for Vicksburg] I was obliged to follow him down the river to consult with him and receive his further directions. I found him with his headquarters on a river boat above Vicksburg. He was exerting himself at the time to devise means of approaching or surrounding the city, and among other efforts the attempt was then being made to widen and deepen a canal already cut under General Williams’ supervision, from the neighborhood of Young’s Point to the river below, in order to make this waterway navigable for our transports and gunboats, the hope being thus to evade the most destructive of the batteries defending Vicksburg against our approach. Grant, as he says in his “Memoirs,” never had much faith in the success of the scheme, but he set four thousand men at work upon it – mostly Negroes – until the enemy established a new series of batteries which effectually put a stop to this particular enterprise. I refer to it because on my arrival Grant requested me to make a careful observation of the conditions provided for the comfort of the Negroes engaged on the work. I found them fairly well supplied with food and blankets, and so reported the matter to General Grant. The incident has always remained with me as one more illustration of the fact that Grant was never too anxious, never too preoccupied with the great problems that beset him, to take a sincere and humane interest in the welfare of the most subordinate laborer dependent upon him.

One cannot properly appreciate an incident of that sort, unless it be borne in mind that comparatively few of those in authority cared for the welfare of their subordinates, – especially if the subordinate happened to be a Negro. I remember on one occasion, for instance, meeting Governor Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, and filled with enthusiasm as I was for our work among the freedmen, I talked with him quite fully of the important work I supposed him to be engaged with preparatory to the future prosperity of the reconstructed State. Johnson, it will be remembered, was fond of referring to himself as the “Tribune of the people,” but when I spoke of the opportunity for establishing schools and organizing new industries for farmers and mechanics, he was quite obviously bored, and all that might have been said on the subject had no more inclination to stay by him than has water to stay on a duck’s back. After experiences with men of this type there was no room for doubt as to the value and rarity of Grant’s sympathy and foresight.