

Letter to Confederate Sen. Louis Wigfall from Gen. James Jones

Note at top:

Col. Gist was appointed on the recommendation of the Council, he being the first named of two. Col. Jones not named. Genl Lee recommended Col. Gist. There is no right of promotion to the grade of Brig Genl. I could have no wish to wound Col. Jones and regret that he should feel injured. JD [Jefferson Davis]

Columbia Mar. 29 1862

Dear Wigfall,

I have been forced by the action of the President of the Confederacy, in appointing Gist a Brigadier General, to resign my command of the 14th Regiment SC Volunteers. The regiment is "for the war" and I have laboured hard to make it a good one. I think I have succeeded and that it will compare favourably with any in the service. I look upon it as the work of my own hands, I am attached to it and the officers and men are strongly attached to me. For the first three or four months after the organization, my stringent discipline and stern requirements of duty from every officer and man rendered me what is called unpopular with a large portion of the Regiment disposed to shirk duty and upon whom the wholesome restraints of discipline were unpalatable. I did not care the snap of my fingers for such discontent and did not allow it to have the slightest effect upon the fearless discharge of what I regarded my duty. The discontented now admit that my measures were right and are now my devoted friends and admirers. They all think and say, that they "belong to the best Regiment and have the best Colonel in the service." I have, in defence of my military honor, been driven from this regiment by President Davis in this dark period of our history. It has been a bitter trial to me, but submission was dishonor and there was no alternative left me but to resign and leave the service.

The rule, understood here, to be adopted by the President in making appointments to military positions, was to appoint no one who had not either a military education or had shown military ability in previous service. Gen. Gist is a young man, without either qualification. He is like myself a graduate of the So Ca College. He "never set a squadron in the field," he never commanded even in the Militia in the field on an ordinary "Muster Day" or turnout of the militia either a Company or Battalion or Brigade. He was elected a Brigadier of militia at a time of profound peace, being made eligible under the State Militia Law by an appointment as Aid-de-Camp by Governor Adams. He was elected Adjutant General of the State last December, when all who had

any military aspiration, and desired to serve the Country in that capacity were seeking service in the Field, and supposed that to accept a State Bureau Office was to be "laid upon the shelf." Does he satisfy President Davis' rule in any particular? Has he any claims whatever to the appointment? I served my first Campaign in the Field as Captain of a Company in the Seminole War, when Gist was in his mother's arms and had never worn breeches. I have passed through every grade in the militia from Orderly Sergeant to Brigadier General. As Adjutant and Inspector General of the State, I think I can say to you without the imputation of vanity, that I brought the militia of the State to a perfection unequalled before or since. When the General Assembly of the State by its legislation destroyed the usefulness of the Adj[utant] and Insp[ector's] office, I resigned that position and was soon afterwards appointed Chairman of the Permanent Board of Visitors of the State Military Academy [the Citadel].

It was mainly by my labours that that Academy was organized, put into operation and brought up to its present state of perfection. I think that the graduates of this State Institution will compare favourably with those of West Point who have seen no more of actual service in the Field. Thus I have been in military service in one capacity or another for thirty-seven years. I still retain the position of Chairman of the Board of Visitors of the State Military Academy.

I submitted cheerfully to the appointment of [Gen. Maxcy] Gregg, because he was the first man in the Field, had laboured hard to keep himself in the service, is a gallant and meritorious officer that deserved the distinction. To any appointment whatever from another State I would have submitted without a murmur, because such an appointment would not have affected my position as a South Carolina officer. But when an appointment is to be made for So Carolina do I ask too much when I demand that my claims should be compared with others?

If I had supposed myself wholly unknown at Richmond, though I might have regarded my fate as a hard one, yet I could have had no reason to complain of the action of the President. But I have been told that last December the question was asked from Richmond "What appointment of Brigadier General from South Carolina will be satisfactory to the people of that State?" The gentlemen called together to confer upon it (Gist amongst them) answered unanimously that I was the man. I was not aware of this transaction until after the appointment of Gen. Gregg and was in no way privy to it.

I am now near fifty seven years old. I offered my sword to the defense of the Country and the principles I have held through life. A regiment of this State raised to serve "during the war" tendered, unanimously, the command of it to me without my asking

it to do so; I accepted the compliment so agreeably paid me, trained it and led it to the Field. It may be, that in the opinion of the President I am too old for active duty. He may be right, but I was with my Regiment immediately upon quitting my camp of instruction, thrown into an advanced position on the coast of South Carolina and required to watch and defend, with that single regiment, a line ten miles long in front of and in plain view of the enemy, our advanced sentinels being within speaking distance of each other, separated by a river entirely under the control of the enemy. On the 1st day of January the enemy (admitted by themselves to be 6500 strong) supported by five gun boats crossed the river and attacked me. With a force less than 800 I repelled them and drove them back across the river. I presume this action was considered by the General who placed me in that position as a very trifling affair as no official notice was ever taken of it that I am aware of. Yet if I am too old for a General officer, I am surely too old for the active and exposed duties of a Colonel of Infantry, and my resignation in that view must be regarded as beneficial to the service.

I have, My Dear Louis, contrary to my habit written to you a long and egotistical letter. I intended when I commenced to write only a short note explaining the facts and vindicating to you my resignation and retirement from the military service of the Country in consequence of the gross insult to my military honor by the appointment of a young man without either military education or experience and wholly without the confidence of the troops or citizens of this State, over me, I presume through the influence of some miserable political trickster over the President. I have been assured by two members of the Executive Council that it is not the work of the Council, and that every member of the Council was as much surprised by the appointment as the people of this State were.

I confide to you the vindication of my course to the authorities at Richmond and ask the favour of you to interpose to prevent any unnecessary delay in the acceptance of the resignation. In obedience to orders, the resignation was forwarded through Gen. Cooper Adj. General to the Governor of So. Carolina from whom I hold my commission. It may be unnecessarily detained in Richmond. I am now on leave at Columbia.

Truly yours
James Jones