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Stonewall Jackson: A Life Portrait

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How does someone attain the status of hero? Kostyal, an editor with National Geographic Traveler, examines the life of General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson to determine what traits led him to become a legend during his two-year tenure as a leader in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.

This ten-chapter book starts with details of Jackson's family history beginning with John Jackson and Elizabeth Cummins, who met as indentured servants sent to the Americas in the mid-1700s as punishment for various transgressions.

The Virginian-born Jackson knew loss early. Orphaned by the age of seven, he was raised by a variety of relatives, including a group of bachelor uncles. The future general, who received his first schooling at age twelve, realized education was key to any success he might ever claim. Overcoming many obstacles, he managed to enter West Point in 1842. Many of the men he would later fight with and against he knew as classmates.

Jackson kept a notebook in which he wrote words of wisdom—little rules that he chose to guide his life by. A very and secretive man, he prayed several times a day while colleagues were sometimes left in the dark as to much needed information regarding military plans. This rigidness of character may have led to his own premature death at age thirty-nine, the result of accidental shooting by some of his own soldiers during the Battle of Chancellorsville in May, 1863.

Jackson was given his nickname during the First Battle of Bull Run when another general, inspired by Jackson's show of leadership, told his troops: "Look, men, there stands Jackson like a stone wall. Rally behind the Virginians!"

A primer of Jackson's life—more in depth information can be found in the many other works published about him—this book serves to explain the "why" behind the man. A bibliography of twenty-eight references is listed including books by his wife and official biographer. Short, boxed informational paragraphs covering a range of interrelated topics close each chapter.

Robin Farrell Edmunds