CHAIN OF COMMAND: AN ANALYSIS OF ROBERT E. LEE AND HIS CORPS COMMANDERS IN THE CIVIL WAR

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

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Robert E. Lee remains a mythical figure within the culture of the southern United States. Proponents of the Southern “Lost Cause of the Confederacy” argued that he embodied the idea of Southern morality and toughness. Lee’s accomplishments on the battlefield are what brought him such admiration in the south. The Confederate cause of “freedom,” Southerners believed, was still attainable as long as Marse Robert commanded the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee frequently led his undersized and under-equipped army to victory over the Union armies of the Eastern Theatre during the first half of the Civil War.

Using a wide variety of primary sources, from the *Official Records* to the personal letters and memoirs of Civil War commanders, I argue that Lee directly benefitted from the abilities of Stonewall Jackson, and once he died, Lee’s ability to win on the battlefield greatly diminished. Victories at Antietam and Chancellorsville were the product of Lee’s quick-thinking, boldness, and a clear explanation of what he expected of his commanders, as well as the incompetence of the Union commanders he faced. Lee’s defeat at Gettysburg, however, is the product of poor clarification by Lee as to what he expected of his commanders, and his inability to consider the input of his subordinates.
This thesis is dedicated to all of those who helped me on this journey. I could not have written this thesis without the loving support of my parents and my fiancée, Victoria.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thesis would not have been made possible without the help of my three committee members; Drs. Greene, Brooks, and Beggs helped me prepare a long list of secondary sources and many ideas of what primary sources to look for. They also spent countless hours reading and editing drafts and considering my ideas.

There is no way to properly thank the staff at the Gettysburg National Military Park, especially John Heiser, who helped me find many primary sources in the Gettysburg Reading Room. I also received invaluable assistance from some of the Gettysburg Rangers, as well as D. Scott Hartwig, all of whom offered suggestions about what sources to look for.

A large amount of my research came through the OhioLink system and I am grateful for the work the staff does to ensure books are delivered in a timely manner.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my family. Their constant support kept me going when I became overwhelmed with the research and writing process.

Finally, I owe everything in this thesis to my fiancée, Victoria. Her constant support and assistance in finding sources, archives, and extra information made all of this possible. Her loving support kept my dream alive to achieve my Masters and to go on to a PhD program. I will never be able to thank her enough.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT E. LEE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: ORDER LOST: LEE, SOUTH MOUNTAIN, AND ANTIETAM CREEK</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historiography of Lee and the Battle of Antietam</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Invasion of Maryland and Lee’s Lost Order</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Battle of South Mountain</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Battle of Antietam: September 16 – September 16</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Battle of Antietam: September 17 and its Aftermath</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: ROBERT E. LEE AND HIS HIGH-WATER MARK: THE BATTLE OF</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHANCELLORSVILLE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of April 26 – April 30, 1863: The Army of the Potomac</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of April 26 – April 30, 1863: The Army of Northern Virginia</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2, 1863: The Eleventh Corps and Jackson’s Greatest Victory</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between Lee and Jackson</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV: ROBERT E. LEE AND THE GETTYSBURG CONTROVERSY</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historiography of Lee and the Battle of Gettysburg</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Day 1 at Gettysburg</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Day 2 at Gettysburg</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Day 3 at Gettysburg</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longstreet’s Role in the Loss at Gettysburg</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee’s Failure to Properly Clarify Commander’s Intent</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Following the end of the Civil War, Robert E. Lee ascended his reputation as a military commander and entered into the realm of sainthood. Proponents of the Southern “Lost Cause of the Confederacy” argued that he embodied the idea of Southern morality and toughness. Never one to shy away from a fight, post-Civil War Southerners looked to Lee as a symbol of an opportunity and a lifestyle that was stolen away from them by the tyranny of the Lincoln Administration. However valid these beliefs were, the legacy of Robert E. Lee in the homes of proud Southerners continued throughout the Nineteenth Century and continue today. Lee’s accomplishments on the battlefield are what brought him such admiration in the south. The Confederate cause of “freedom,” Southerners believed, was still attainable as long as Marse Robert commanded the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee frequently led his undersized and under-equipped army to victory over the Union armies of the Eastern Theatre. It was this, combined with his grandfatherly demeanor that inspired many in the South to consider him a hero both during and after the war.

As with many historical figures, the historiography and scholarship about Lee is skewed in terms of his supporters, detractors, and those choose to portray him in a neutral light. Initially, historians were very sympathetic toward Lee for the losses incurred by him during the latter half of the Civil War, including the Battle of Gettysburg. Seldom was Lee attacked for his failures at Gettysburg or Petersburg. During this era, blame for the Confederate loss in the war was laid on Lee’s corps commanders, most notably James Longstreet, who some scholars believed had deliberately defied Lee’s orders at Gettysburg which allowed the Union time to regroup and win the battle. It was only after several decades that Lee is examined on a more neutral level. During this era, Lee’s successes are scrutinized and his failures are highlighted.
In the decades immediately following the Civil War and into the Twentieth Century, the study of Lee as a person and his character off the battlefield seemed just as important as the study of his tactics. In these years, Lee was described in various ways. William A. Anderson remarked that Lee was “the greatest man of the century which gave him to mankind,” while also arguing that Lee was a man even the descendants of his enemies came to respect while also being the “incarnation” of the Confederate cause.¹ Lee was truly one-of-a-kind in Southern eyes:

He was a foe without hate; a friend without treachery; a soldier without cruelty; a victor without oppression; and a victim without murmuring. He was a public officer without vices; a private citizen without wrong; a neighbor without reproach; a Christian without hypocrisy, and a man without guile. He was a Caesar, without his ambition; Frederick, without his tyranny; Napoleon, without his selfishness, and Washington, without his reward.²

He also exhibited “modesty without diffidence, and supreme dignity without self-assertion,” and after the war, dedicated his life to the “education of [the South’s] children.”³ While these are strong words of praise, one must also remember that Lee’s stature was completely unassailable in that era and he was revered almost as a prophet within Southern homes.

However, not all historians and orators are kind to Lee. Alan T. Nolan is one historian who is quick to counter the aura of Lee as both a person and a general. Specifically, he criticizes historians and authors who felt the need to write about second- and third-hand accounts of Lee, many of which were brought to light long after they had occurred. These stories, along with the willingness of the authors to print them, only solidified the myth of Lee as superhuman:

Lee rescuing a baby bird under enemy fire, Lee succoring a wounded Federal soldier, Lee carrying a child from a burning building, Lee playing with children during the war, Lee...

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² From an address to the Southern Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia, February 18, 1874, from Benjamin H. Hill, Jr., Senator Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia; His Life, Speeches and Writings (Atlanta: H. C. Hudgins & co., 1891), 406.
³ Anderson, “Tribute to General Lee as a Man,” 199.
stopping to pray with soldiers in the face of Federal artillery fire, Lee’s godlike physical appearance. ⁴

Nolan does not stop there, as he also cautions that Lee was scarcely the man which people portray. Rather, Lee was a member an aristocracy that seceded in order to protect slavery, a military leader with skill but whose aggressiveness cost his army greatly, and a Southern man who held conventional attitudes before, during, and after the war. ⁵

Some historians refute the claim that Lee’s aggressiveness cost the Confederacy the war. Gary Gallagher asserts that it was Lee’s aggressiveness which kept the hopes of the Confederacy alive. Lee’s aggressiveness was him “taking the fight to the Union” in an effort to please the expectations of the Southern people and government officials like Jefferson Davis and influence policy makers in the Union and Europe. As long as Lee’s army was in the field and fighting to win, victory was possible. Indeed, “only his capitulation extinguished such hope and essentially ended the war.” ⁶ Although he could not likely defeat the northern armies, Lee could win enough battles here and there to break the Union’s will to fight. This is reinforced by Lincoln’s transfer of Ulysses S. Grant to the East in order to defeat Lee at all costs. ⁷

Lee did not always have success in what he was ordered to accomplish. Upon his appointment as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee’s main order from Jefferson Davis was to protect both Virginia and Richmond from Union invasions. While Lee did successfully keep the Army of the Potomac out of Richmond, Virginia was a torn-up mess following several campaigns in the early years of the Civil War. Granted, Lee was faced with very tough odds when tasked with defending Virginia against overwhelming numbers while

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simultaneously trying to find a way to win the Civil War. Historians such as Charles P. Roland argued that Lee fulfilled his duties against “the heaviest odds ever faced by an American commander.” Lee was also faced with a Northern “war machine” that was able to outwork the Confederate manufacturing, which contributed to his defeat. As Roland argued, Lee was a masterful tactician, along the lines of Hannibal and Napoleon. Through several factors out of his control, he happened to be on the losing side. This argument brings about the question: How does one define success in a war? Does it matter if a general wins many battles but loses the war? Indeed, this is the problem many historians are forced to tackle when considering Lee’s prowess on the battlefield, coupled with his legacy in American military command.

One must also consider Lee’s subordinates and their roles in creating victories against the Army of the Potomac. Thomas Jackson was Lee’s most trusted commander and was arguably his strongest in terms of the type of warfare Lee conducted. Jackson was an absolute hammer, and one who was willing to storm the Gates of Hell if it meant victory. Once Lee lost Jackson, some of the fire his army had died, as well. James Longstreet, Richard Ewell, and Ambrose Powell Hill were tasked with sustaining the aggressive actions of Jackson’s corps and, for the most part, they failed. Each of these men had their “worst moments” in trying to emulate Jackson, most notably Longstreet seemingly uninterested in trying at Gettysburg. Indeed, Jackson’s death had an impact on Lee both on the battlefield and in his own legacy. Jackson began as the hero of the early stages of the Lost Cause, but his martyrdom is what contributed to Lee’s ascendancy.

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9 A more in-depth examination of Lee’s evolution through Civil War scholarship can be found in the next chapter, which focuses on the historiography of Lee.
10 A more detailed discussion and analysis of Jackson’s battlefield tactics can be found in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
Though Jackson gave his life for the Southern cause, it was Lee who was still fighting during the “desperate” final years of the war.\textsuperscript{11}

It was because of Lee’s subordinates, notably Jackson, as well as poor decisions made by Union commanders, that he was able to achieve victory on the battlefield. The loss of Special Orders 191 should have spelled disaster for Lee’s army and should have been George McClellan’s greatest victory. However, McClellan moved too slowly and believed the orders to be a trap and was not able to crush Lee, although he did stop Lee’s invasion of Maryland. However, Jackson was also instrumental in preventing a disaster at Antietam Creek. He captured Harpers Ferry held against heavy Union assaults throughout September 17. Although it was Lee’s bold decision to split his army into three parts prior to May 2 at Chancellorsville, it was Jackson who delivered the crushing blow to the Union’s right flank. Once Jackson died, Lee’s capability of conducting an offensive plan of attack diminished greatly. With Jackson dead after Chancellorsville, it fell to Longstreet, Ewell, and Hill to take up the reigns of Jackson. A lack of proper communication and a lackadaisical effort by Longstreet on the second and third day, Lee lost all momentum he had gained after victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville and was forced to leave Pennsylvania. However, it was Lee’s responsibility to properly convey his commander’s intent to his generals and value their input in terms of alternate strategies.

Through my research, I relied heavily on several primary sources. The \textit{Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies} were easily the most crucial sources used in this project. The sheer amount of information present in these volumes is staggering, and the organization of the volumes saved me time while trying to tackle the thousands of pages of text. Several memoirs and autobiographies were also very useful in the creation of this project. Works from

\textsuperscript{11} Robert Glaze, “Saint and Sinner: Robert E. Lee, Nathan Bedford Forrest, and the Ambiguity of Southern Identity,” \textit{Tennessee Historical Quarterly} 69, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 166.
James Longstreet, Edward Porter Alexander, Abner Doubleday, and the *George B. McClellan Papers* were instrumental in obtaining the thoughts and opinions of important men in the three battles.

The first two chapters of this thesis focus on Lee’s decision-making and the tactics of his corps commanders at Antietam and Chancellorsville, respectively, and begin with a discussion of a Union commander, rather than Robert E. Lee. Although this thesis is very much a study of Lee’s command decisions and tactics, I feel that it is important to understand the commander opposite him on the battlefield. Finally, the third chapter on Gettysburg begins with an extended discussion of historical scholarship because it is the most controversial battle analyzed in this thesis, as well as the only chapter to feature a loss by Lee. This thesis will show that Lee is very much a capable commander on the battlefield, but “capable” is likely the highest form of praise. It will also demonstrate that Lee directly benefitted from the abilities of Stonewall Jackson, and once he died, Lee’s ability to win on the battlefield decreased. Lee’s victories at Antietam and Chancellorsville are the product of his quick-thinking, boldness, and clear explanation of his commander’s intent to very competent subordinates, in addition to incompetence of Union commanders. Lee’s defeats, however, are the product of poor delegation by Lee and his inability to consider the input of his subordinates.
CHAPTER I:
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT E. LEE

The historiography of Robert E. Lee is vast and has existed from the very end of the Civil
War to today. Historians have consistently attempted to reassess Lee as a commander and as a
person. The creation of Lee as a mythical figure of the South grew during the decades following
his death in the 1870s. It reached a pinnacle at the turn of the twentieth century. However, in
recent decades, historiography of Lee has become much more balanced in terms of his supporters
and critics. This chapter seeks to add depth to the historiography of Lee as a person and a
commander. The works discussed in this chapter were more about Lee’s personality and/or his
generalship throughout the Civil War. Although the individual chapters, except Chancellorsville,
feature their own sections of historiography, this chapter will demonstrate the general trend in
the historiography of Lee from the very end of the Civil War through the present.

It did not take long for Lee’s reputation as a general to create historical scholarship.
Almost immediately following the war, his actions on the battlefield were analyzed and studied.
James D. McCabe, Jr.’s *The Life and Campaigns of General Robert E. Lee*, published in 1866, is
the first comprehensive study of Lee as a general throughout the entire Civil War. An impressive
700 pages given its publication date, it seeks to neutrally study Lee’s actions during the war on
the battlefield. Because of its length, I have chosen to focus on Gettysburg due to its association
as a failure. McCabe argues that Lee should have pressed Cemetery Ridge on the first day before
Hancock’s Second Corps arrived to reinforce. Lee wanted to wait for Longstreet and the rest of
Ewell’s corps to arrive because the Union position was “the strongest defensive position ever
assailed by the Army of Northern Virginia.”¹ Lee did not press the attack and Lee’s “strange hesitation” was the only thing that allowed the Union to hold the ridge.² Although not specifically stated, this is likely McCabe’s version of Lee’s well-known ambiguous orders to Ewell in regard to attacking Cemetery Ridge “if practicable.”

McCabe acknowledges Longstreet’s alternate plan for the second day at Gettysburg which called for Lee’s army to displace and swing south to Frederick, Maryland, which would force the Union to abandon its secure position. It appears that McCabe unknowingly supports this idea as he discusses its potential viability, but he also acknowledges that a retreat would likely leave Lee’s army exposed during the march.³ It is interesting that Longstreet’s delay in setting up on Day 2 and his hesitation to carry out the attack on the third day is not mentioned in this book. However, the attacks against Longstreet’s military reputation would not come until after Lee died in 1870.

Published in 1906, “Reminiscences of General Lee” comes from Edward V. Valentine and discusses Lee as a person. According to Valentine, an artist, he made a bust of General Lee and observed certain traits about him. He described Lee as “A complete absence of the melodramatic in all that he said and did.”⁴ In addition, Valentine wrote that any traces of vanity were “totally lacking in General Lee.”⁵ He also wrote that Lee was just as courteous and charming while Valentine sculpted him as any other time.⁶ Lee was revered among people who knew him not because of his military prowess, but because of his personality. Valentine explains, “Those who had the privilege of [Lee’s] personal acquaintance at once recognize a character in

³ McCabe, 394-395.
⁶ Valentine, 967.
which were blended the noblest qualities of mind and heart.”7 Valentine concludes that, above all, Lee was respected because of his strong religious values.8

J. J. Bowen, in his 1914 book, *The Strategy of Robert E. Lee*, argues that Lee did not see Gettysburg as his goal to win independence for the Confederacy, although many of Lee’s generals, staff, and early biographers of Lee argue that he believed Gettysburg could and would win independence for the Confederacy. He further argues that these authors paint Lee as a failure because he was unable to win independence through this decisive battle. Furthermore, they then see this battle as the turning point. Bowen, however, argues that Lee had no real plan at Gettysburg nor did he have any previous notion of winning Confederate independence at Gettysburg.9 Instead, Bowen argues that “the campaign was not a failure, and that the battle was not a decisive battle, but a mere accidental incident of a successful campaign.”10 While Bowen is by no means alone in thinking that Gettysburg was unplanned by Lee, he is unique in his thinking that Gettysburg was an “accidental incident” of a “successful campaign.”

The late 1800s and early 1900s were a time in which Lee’s image of a Southern hero was created and amplified. Originally published in 1912, Gamaliel Bradford’s *Lee the American*, examines Lee from both a personal and military standpoint. For the purpose of this chapter, I will examine his arguments about Lee as a person, especially considering Bradford notes that he does not try to speculate too much on military matters because he is not a military man. Bradford includes a section on Lee’s views of slavery, which was relatively rare during that era’s historiography. Bradford argues that Lee “disliked and detested” slavery and he had set free his

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7 Valentine, 968.
8 Ibid., 968.
own, few slaves long before the war began.\footnote{Gamaliel Bradford, \textit{Lee the American} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), 42.} However, Lee was mostly in favor of gradual emancipation, mostly through military service. Lee firmly believed that some in the South had wanted to do away with slavery for some time, but there was no course through which the recently free slaves could live and succeed. According to Lee, “Unless some humane course, based upon wisdom and Christian principles, is adopted, you do them a great injustice in setting them free.”\footnote{Bradford, \textit{Lee the American}, 42.} In this way, Lee was technically pro-slavery simply because he felt that they should not be freed until there was legislation in place to aid recently freed slaves.

Despite this argument, Bradford is also quick to portray Lee as a tragic figure throughout the course of the war. He argues that surely Lee must have known that if the South had been victorious then slavery would have existed and perhaps grown stronger in the coming generations. In this sense, Bradford argues that this makes “Lee’s struggle so pathetic, so appealing, so irresistibly human.”\footnote{Bradford, 43.} He also finds it ironic that Lee’s fight for the independence of the Southern people would “rivet the shackles more firmly on millions of his fellow men.”\footnote{Ibid, 43.} It is this, coupled with Lee’s belief that everyone should have liberty that Bradford labels him a tragic figure.

The study and examination of Robert E. Lee as a commander is not confined to books and articles solely about him. J. F. C Fuller’s 1929 book, \textit{The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant}, focuses on Grant’s leadership from the beginning to the end of the Civil War, with some consideration of his military experiences in both the military academy and the Mexican-American War. Other than Lee, Grant is likely the most studied general of the Civil War. While the scholarship on Grant is vast, one must consider Lee when also analyzing Grant’s
accomplishments in the Civil War. Fuller recognized this and dedicated several passages to his analysis of Lee as a commander-in-chief. Fuller praised Lee as a soldier but criticizes his abilities as a commander-in-chief. According to Fuller, Lee’s movements before the Battle of Antietam were “nothing short of reckless” and his failure to entrench would have been “serviceable” to him. In addition, Fuller argued that much of Lee’s success in the first half of the war was synonymous with the failures and “inertia,” in this case extremely slow movement, of the Union commanders.

One of the more interesting works to come out of the Civil War, although printed in the 1950s, was the diary of British Colonel Arthur Fremantle of the Coldstream Guards. He traveled with the army from April through July of 1863. Contrary to popular belief, he was not sent by any commanders in Britain. Instead, he was more like a tourist than anything else. Regardless, he kept a journal in which he wrote down musings about how Lee’s army ran. He developed quite an affinity for James Longstreet and took great notice of his relationship with Lee. According to Fremantle, the relationship between Longstreet and Lee was “quite touching” and that they “are almost always together.” On June 30, 1863, Fremantle was officially introduced to Lee and he provides a detailed passage in his diary about Lee. According to Fremantle, Lee was the “handsomest man of his age” he had ever seen and his manners are “most courteous and full of dignity.” He also argues that it would be nearly impossible for Lee to have any great amount of enemies and that he is “as near perfection as a man can be.”

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19 Fremantle, 197.
Charles P. Roland sympathizes with Lee, in “The Generalship of Robert E. Lee,” and argues that Lee was put in an especially difficult position from his appointment through till his surrender and that he fulfilled his duties against “…the heaviest odds ever faced by an American commander.” Roland also starts his chapter by arguing that Lee is unfairly criticized because he has several factors playing against him: he fought against the Union and he is the only American general to lose a war (This book was published in 1964, prior to the United States’ withdrawal in Vietnam). Roland also argues that Lee is in the same company as men such as Hannibal and Napoleon as a tactician. He claims that although there are always great generals, there are also always losers in war. Lee happened to be on the losing side. However, he argues that “victory requires that one side overmatch the opposite in the sum of its generalship plus all other capabilities for waging war.” In this sense, Roland is adamant that analysis of a general’s record must also consider the resources at his command. Roland is, of course, referencing the northern “war machine” and its ability to mass-produce weaponry, rations, its expansive railroad system, wealth, and demographic advantages. Finally, Roland speculates that Lee would have accomplished much more if he had been permitted to hold the office of general-in-chief, much like Grant had. This would have given Lee an opportunity to strip troops from little-used areas of the Confederacy and turn over control of the West to Johnston. Roland argues that this scenario must remain conjecture. However, he makes the bold statement that Lee’s accomplishments were “second to none” in American history and that his abilities as a general “transcended” his faults.

21 Roland, 31.
22 Roland, 31.
23 Roland, 31.
24 Ibid, 67.
The beginning of Thomas L. Connelly’s book, The Marble Man, discussed the origins of the god-like image of Lee and several of the reasons behind its growth throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s. Connelly first addresses the “misconception” that Lee’s path toward heroism in the South began during the war. According to Connelly, “the wartime image of Lee was not what it would become during the Reconstruction era” and that the image “remained in the future for Lost Cause authors” by the time of Appomattox. Lee’s heroic image began to take shape in the years after the end of the war, when many Confederates hailed him as their greatest general. In addition, by the end of the war, Lee was “cherished as a symbol of victory by a people who discovered that the American dream of inevitable success had betrayed them.” In the decade after the war, Lee was not the only man revered in the South. Stonewall Jackson, Joseph Johnston, and P.G. T. Beauregard were also held in extremely high regard. Lee’s image also greatly benefitted from a surge in the popularity of the study of history in the late 1860s. Thanks to the Lost Cause movement in the South, Lee’s image only grew. By the turn of the twentieth century, Lee was considered a national hero. Connelly argues that Lee’s image gained a significant boost because enough time had passed that it was more acceptable to regard Confederates as war heroes. Furthermore, Lee served as an example of “the best that could be produced from a bad war.”

During the 1920s and 1930s, Lee’s image altered slightly in that he was regarded as a man who had failed in his endeavors but did so with good character. According to Connelly, Lee “was the image of anti-success, magnificent even when failing.” This appealed to many

27 Ibid., 67.
28 Ibid., 99-100.
29 Ibid., 122.
30 Ibid., 134.
Americans who were reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. This was also the time in which the question of “what if?” pervaded the minds of many Americans. In this time period, Americans distrusted the “historical inevitable,” and questioned the idea that the South had to lose the war. This, naturally, led them to gravitate towards Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. The myth of Lee came to a climax with the publication of Douglas Southall Freeman’s *R. E. Lee: A Biography* in 1934. Never before had Lee been so meticulously researched and heavily defended in historical scholarship. Because of this, Lee appealed to the middle class of the United States by doing his duty as a respectable man. While Connelly did not follow through with many of the questions he raises about Lee’s character, he certainly set the wheels in motion during the 1970s. In his last chapter, Connelly demonstrates that Lee was simply a man, not a god to be revered by the people of the United States. He exhibited many of the same fears, self-doubt, and weaknesses that the common people share.

Ethan S. Rafuse’s book, *Robert E. Lee and the Fall of the Confederacy, 1863-1865*, created a new process of examining Lee. Rafuse examined Lee from 1863 onward, and demonstrated the obstacles and challenges he faced following his victory at Chancellorsville. According to Rafuse, the “decline of Confederate fortunes” after 1863 was primarily influenced by a more confident and structured Union chain of command. Rafuse argued that “no explanation of Confederate defeat” can ignore this idea. Lee was put in several tough positions following his victory at Chancellorsville. Rafuse argued that Lee was constantly at disadvantages when it came to coordinating bold attacks. Because of the size of the attacks, it was very difficult to oversee every aspect of the assault during the Civil War. As such, Rafuse argued that the

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31 Connelly, 138.
32 Ibid., 147.
“only practically feasible way” to manage an army was for Lee to dictate his commander’s intent to his subordinates, and then “provide them with plenty of leeway to handle the details and exercise individual initiative.”

First, he was faced with the dilemma of whether or not he should press the Union corps positioned on the heights outside of Gettysburg on July 1. Rafuse argued that Lee was faced with two options, and both of them rested on decisions made by Army of the Potomac commander George Meade. According to Rafuse, if Meade decided to fight at Gettysburg, he would be sure to concentrate his entire army as quickly as possible, leaving Lee at a disadvantage numerically, and in positions of great defensive strength. On the other hand, if Meade decided not to engage Lee at Gettysburg, the two corps with which Lee had fought on July 1 would link back up with Meade’s army, which, if accomplished, “would almost certain[ly]” put Lee at an even worse disadvantage than the one he faced after the first day at Gettysburg.

34 Rafuse, Robert E. Lee and the Fall of the Confederacy, 78.
35 Rafuse, 77.
CHAPTER II: 
ORDERS LOST: LEE, SOUTH MOUNTAIN, AND ANTIETAM CREEK

The first two years of the Civil War were devastating to the cause of reunification for the Union. The Eastern armies had already been under the commands of Irvin McDowell, George B. McClellan, and John Pope. All of these men received some form of major defeat at the hands of Confederate forces under P. G. T. Beauregard, Joseph E. Johnston, and Robert E. Lee. By the time the fall of 1862 arrived, Union prospects in the Eastern Theater were looking quite grim. John Pope had just been routed by new Confederate commander Robert E. Lee, and it would not be the first time Lee put a Union general out of a job. Lincoln, desperate to provide a spark in the theater nearest to the Union capital returned, once again, to George B. McClellan to take command of a reorganized army, called the Army of the Potomac. The Army of the Potomac had existed in some form or another since the beginning of the war, but was now being fitted to be the premier fighting force for the Union in the Eastern Theater.

Following his victory at Second Manassas, Lee took his army north toward Maryland in order to refit and resupply. His objective was to do this outside of Virginia, as the last two years had nearly destroyed the northern part of the state. Lee also had another objective in mind: threaten the Union morale right before the Senatorial elections in November of that year. To properly scour the countryside for food and supplies, Lee daringly split his army into several pieces. Although a bold move, Lee hoped to rely on the secrecy of his movements, while being shielded by his cavalry. Unfortunately, a copy of his main plan for the movement north, Special Orders, No. 191, was lost and then discovered by a Union corporal who turned it in to a superior, eventually finding its way to McClellan.
There are few generals in history that have been fortuitously afforded the amount of military intelligence McClellan received from Special Orders, No. 191. It should have been the perfect time to pick apart Lee’s scattered forces, crippling or destroying his army in the process, and opening a road all the way to Richmond. However, McClellan did not act quickly and Lee was able to fight back against Union forces, although both sides took heavy casualties. Nevertheless, McClellan squandered the best chance the Union had at victory in the previous two years of war. Although Lee made a stand and escaped with his army intact, he made some very rash and poor decisions throughout the days leading up to and during the Battle of Antietam. Lee was spared disaster by the even worse decisions of McClellan, in addition to making his own decisions that were adequate. This chapter examines the decisions made by Lee, deviating from previous historiography by arguing that Lee put himself in an undesirable position during the Battle of South Mountain. Instead of surrendering the mountain gaps to the Army of the Potomac and consolidating on a good defensive position, Lee sent his troops on a forced march to fill the gaps, exhausting his men and incurring unnecessary casualties within an already divided and vulnerable army.

**Historiography of Lee and the Battle of Antietam**

Douglas Southall Freeman’s *Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, originally published during the early 1940s, is an extremely important work of Confederate historiography. This is substantiated by Stephen W. Sears, who regarded it as “the most important single work of Confederate historiography ever published.”¹ In the abridged version, Sears argued that the reason this work was so significant was because most, if not all of, the men with whom Lee

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served were virtually unknown within the Civil War historical community. The only generals, apart from Lee, who had been profiled prior to the 1940s were Jackson and Jeb Stuart. Thanks to Freeman, many of these commanders were brought to light. Freeman himself argued that without this study, many of these lieutenants might have “ridden so far toward oblivion that one could not discern the figures or hope to overtake them before they had passed over the horizon of time.”² Freeman’s lengthy study began with descriptions of the commanders Lee worked with during the course of the Civil War. There are at least twenty Confederate officers described in these beginning pages.

During the Maryland campaign, Jackson was incredibly successful in his capture of Harpers Ferry. He stationed artillery on the heights around Harpers Ferry and set his troops in positions around the town. Upon dawn of September 15th, Jackson’s artillery delivered devastating fire on Harpers Ferry. Within an hour, Union counterbattery fire had slackened. As Freeman argued, “[Jackson] had his guns precisely where he wanted them, he was firing as he desired, and he perceived ere long that he was silencing the enemy.”³ Following the fragmented fire from Union batteries, Jackson ordered General Pender to assault Harpers Ferry. Although the Union garrison fired onto Pender’s men, it was “slow and uncertain.” After A. P. Hill’s artillery countered the renewed Union cannon fire, a white flag was waived and Harpers Ferry was seized.⁴

Gary W. Gallagher, in his chapter, “The Campaign in Perspective,” argued that although Lee, Jackson, and Longstreet “directed a tactical masterpiece,” Lee made a mistake fighting the

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² Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants, 25.
³ Freeman, 356.
⁴ Freeman, 356.
battle at Sharpsburg, the Confederate name for the series of battles along Antietam Creek. Although fighting the battle itself was foolish enough, Gallagher also argued that Lee’s decision to stay on the field another day and consider a counterattack was “sheer folly.” Gallagher argued that Lee was wrong to fight at Sharpsburg and stick around another day for two main reasons. First, given that the morale among Lee’s men had begun to drop, Gallagher asked what could possibly be gained from a “potentially catastrophic defeat along the river…?” Second, Gallagher questioned how Lee could have known that McClellan would not renew an assault on September 18th. Gallagher argued that Lee had survived a “series of near disasters” and that no factors had changed that would have given Lee an idea that McClellan would not attack again. Gallagher also challenges Douglas Southall Freeman’s argument that Lee was brave and stood against “vast odds” by waiting another day along the Antietam by arguing that Lee “irresponsibly placed at peril his entire army.”

In the chapter, “General McClellan’s Bodyguard: The Army of the Potomac After Antietam,” Brooks D. Simpson argued that McClellan should not receive all of the blame for failing to destroy Lee’s army in the days following the Battle of Antietam on September 17th. Rather, the corps commanders of the Army of the Potomac should also be blamed for this failure because they so heavily reflected the same “peculiar qualities” as McClellan. In fact, a number of these commanders raised objections about attacking Lee on September 18th, no doubt exhibiting behavior similar to their army commander. Simpson emphasized his point by noting that historian T. Harry Williams considered McClellan the “problem child of the Civil War,” and,

7 Gallagher, 89.
8 Gallagher, 89.
yet, the Army of the Potomac was the “problem army of the Civil War.” Simpson also argued that this was exemplified during the Battle of Second Manassas when McClellan’s generals would not cooperate with Pope, which led to a disaster for the Union. In addition, Ulysses S. Grant’s first experiences with the Army of the Potomac following his promotion were quite similar. As one western general argued, the entire Army of the Potomac had been “McClellanized.” Although many of the generals who had served under McClellan had been removed, there was still an aura among those who remained in positions of power. As Simpson argued, to a “large extent the officer corps of the Army of the Potomac was as much a reflection as it was the creation of the army’s first commander.”

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The Invasion of Maryland and Lee’s Lost Order

The invasion of Maryland, dubbed the “Maryland campaign,” was not borne out of military necessity. Rather, the main motivation for the Maryland campaign seemed to stem from Lee’s attempts to play politician and to force the Lincoln administration into peace talks. Longstreet argued that Lee was emboldened by his victory at Second Manassas, which was a primary motivation for conducting the Maryland campaign. According to a dispatch sent to Jefferson Davis on September 8, 1862, Lee argued that it was time for the Confederate government to propose recognition of independence to the Union government as a condition for the cessation of hostilities following the victory at Second Manassas and the “present position of affairs.”

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11 Simpson, 46.
By conducting this invasion, Lee was advocating for a definitive political statement by the Confederate government. Lee argued that a proposition at this point would not be seen as a concession of peace. Instead, it would be viewed as an affirmation of independence by the Confederacy and an effort to end to the hostilities. If the Union government were to reject this proposal, Lee argued that the “country” would see that the “responsibility of the continuance of the war” would rest upon the Lincoln administration, not the Confederate government. Finally, Lee believed this would translate into the Northern populace seeing that the Lincoln administration wished to prolong the war for its own benefit, which would potentially be reflected in the “coming [Senatorial] elections.”

The invasion was not necessarily a rash decision by Lee, but there are some who argue that it would have been prudent to discuss the options of the Army of Northern Virginia first. James Longstreet was one general who argued that Lee acted prematurely and divided his forces without fully understanding the factors surrounding his invasion of Maryland. According to Longstreet,

General Lee’s confidence in the strength of his army, the situation of affairs, and the value of the moral effect upon the country, North and South, was made fully manifest by the nature of the campaign he had just entered upon, especially that portion of it directed against Harpers Ferry, which, as events were soon to prove, weakened the effectiveness of his army in the main issue, which happened to be Antietam.

Longstreet’s argument, albeit after the war, correctly noted that Lee would use his army in a manner too aggressive given its numbers. Lee’s tenacity had sprung from the blow he delivered to northern civilian and military morale at Second Manassas.

In order to achieve victory on the battlefield in Maryland, Lee sent dispatches to his top commanders known as “Special Orders, No. 191.” None of these men knew it at the time, but

these orders could have and should have led to the crushing defeat of the Army of Northern
Virginia by McClellan’s Army of the Potomac. The order in question, which will be referred to
as the “Lost Order,” detailed the movements of Lee’s army and, more importantly, informed the
reader(s) that Lee’s army would be split into several parts and the routes and destinations of each
command. These orders conveyed the following movements: Beginning on September 10,
Jackson’s command was ordered to form an advance using the Hagerstown Road, pass by
Middletown, then move toward Sharpsburg, cross the Potomac where convenient, and take
possession of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad by Friday [September 12, 1862] morning. He was
also ordered to capture whatever Union forces were stationed at Martinsburg, while also
preventing any attempt by the Union garrison to escape Harpers Ferry.  

Longstreet was ordered to “pursue the main road as far as Boonsborough,” where it was
to stop with “reserve, supply, and baggage trains of the army.” McLaws’ division and
Anderson’s division were ordered to follow Longstreet’s command. The two divisions were to
march toward Harpers Ferry and take possession of the Maryland Heights and “endeavor” to
capture the Union forces at Harpers Ferry and the surrounding areas by Friday [September 12,
1862] morning. Walker’s division was ordered to cross the Potomac at Cheek’s Ford, march
toward Lovettsville, take possession of Loudoun Heights, and situate itself so that Keys’ Ford
was on his left, and the road between the end of the mountain and the Potomac was on his right.
From there, Walker was to cooperate with McLaws and Jackson to intercept retreating Union
forces.

Daniel Harvey Hill’s division was ordered to form the rear guard of the army and follow the road taken by the main body of the army. Hill’s men were to follow the reserve artillery, ordnance, and supply trains, acting as a guard. Stuart was ordered to detach a squadron of cavalry to accompany the commands of Longstreet, Jackson, and McLaws, and Walker. The rest of his cavalry were to cover the route of the army while simultaneously bringing up the stragglers of the main body.19

The story of how the Lost Order fell into enemy hands is a mystery of the Civil War.20 The Lost Order was not even made aware to the public until the spring of 1863, when the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War published McClellan’s testimony before them. Southern journalists blamed D. H. Hill because the Lost Order was addressed to him. In their eyes, it was his responsibility to make sure the Lost Order did not fall into enemy hands. However, Hill vehemently denied any wrongdoing, arguing that the orders never even reached him, an argument that was supported by an adjutant. He did, however, receive a copy made for him by Stonewall Jackson because he was technically under Jackson’s command. The courier must have informed Lee’s staff that the order was delivered even though it was not, and that is likely why the Lost Order slipped through the cracks of the Confederate command.21

While Hill later argued that the Lost Order’s disappearance was the work of a traitor or a spy, Sears contends that,

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20 Both how the order was lost and who it was found by is a point of contention among some scholars and firsthand accounts. Stephen W. Sears only mentions Corporal Barton Mitchell and Brian Matthew Jordan argues that there was a group of 4 men, Sergeant John McKnight Bloss, Corporal Barton W. Mitchell, Private David B. Vance, and Private William H. Hostetter, who found the dispatch after taking a short break in a field near the banks of the Monocacy. Meanwhile, James Longstreet argued that Colonel Silas Colgrove found the order, when in reality, Colonel Colgrove only received the order after it had been passed through the ranks, as he was the regimental commander of Mitchell and the rest of the men. See Sears, Landscape Turned Red, Jordan, Unholy Sabbath, and Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox.
Any turncoat courier or staff officer who deliberately tossed D. H. Hill’s copy of Order 191 into a meadow near Frederick with the expectation that the Yankees might come along and somehow stumble on it, recognize it for what it was, and get it to McClellan’s headquarters must rank as the war’s most naively optimistic spy.22

Regardless of how it ended up in a field to be found by the Union army, one thing was certain: This was arguably one of the greatest pieces of military intelligence a commander had received, at the very least in a century. McClellan was so sure that he had Lee by the throat that he proclaimed that he had “a paper with which, if I cannot whip Bobby Lee, I will be willing to go home.”23 As reinforced by Longstreet, McClellan was already well informed by “cavalry, and by despatches wired him from east and west,” of Lee’s movements. Once the Lost Order was brought in, Longstreet argued that McClellan now had “more valuable information, even to a complete revelation of his adversary’s plans and purpose, such as no other commander, in the history of war…”24

McClellan first took command of his own army when he was still relatively young. At only 34 years of age, McClellan had shown tenacity during his command of the forces of Ohio and had delivered the only instances of victory in the east by mid-1861. McClellan took command of a new army of three-year volunteers following the defeat of Irvin McDowell at First Manassas. This group of volunteers would later become known as the Army of the Potomac. When McClellan first arrived in Washington, he found the regiments of men in disarray and whipped them into shape quickly. He was quick to remove incompetent officers and was a talented organizer and administrator. Although McClellan had turned this group of ragtag men into professional soldiers, he was unable to fully use them to their potential effectiveness on the

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22 Sears, Landscape Turned Red, 115.
24 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 212.
The overwhelming success at First Manassas damaged the Union psychologically, and it explains why McClellan never fully committed his entire army into battle. He harbored a great fear that the Confederate army was more powerful.

McClellan remains a curious case in Civil War historiography. Although he was seemingly born and bred to be a great leader, he faltered on several occasions throughout his tenure as commander of the Army of the Potomac. However, historians such as James McPherson argue that McClellan struggled during his tenure as commander because he had never suffered defeat or humiliation during his pre-war life, in addition to the early months of the war. In addition, he had “never learned the lessons of adversity and humility.” Once McClellan came to Washington to take command of his army, he was showered with praise and lauded as a military savior to restore the Union. Needless to say, he was heavily influenced by this attention. In a way, he was Napoleonic, and many historians have referred to him in a similar fashion, mostly as “Young Napoleon.”

McClellan’s arrogance soared in the following weeks. He found himself unable to work with Winfield Scott, the current General-in-Chief. Scott, a man held in high regard by almost everyone in the government and the American military, had performed splendidly in the Mexican-American War and became the first man to hold the rank of lieutenant-general since George Washington. It would not be an easy task to get Lincoln to remove Scott, but McClellan was certainly willing to try. McClellan put in long days to get ahead when he knew...
Scott, who was suffering from age and illness, would only be able to put in a few hours of work every day.

McClellan began to bypass Scott by corresponding directly with Lincoln. McClellan frequently complained to his wife that Scott was hampering his plans for greatness. According to several letters sent to his wife, McClellan lamented that Scott “understands nothing, appreciates nothing…” and that he did not know if Scott was “a dotard or a traitor.” Furthermore, McClellan threatened to “resign and let the admin[istration] take care of itself…The people call upon me to save the country – I must save it and cannot respect anything that it in the way.” Lincoln attempted to ease tensions between the two generals but eventually he wore down and allowed Scott to retire for “health reasons.” McClellan was then promoted to general-in-chief.

Following his promotion, McClellan endeavored to destroy the Confederate army under P. G. T. Beauregard. In October 1861, McClellan took 120,000 men against 45,000 men under Beauregard. However, McClellan believed that he was outnumbered but was prepared to attack anyway. One of McClellan’s first embarrassing moments as a commander came when the Confederates came within sight of Washington and set up batteries along the Potomac. In September, when the Confederates pulled out of their positions, the Army of the Potomac, expecting to find large cannons trained at Washington, instead found logs painted to resemble cannons. This led to derision in the Northern papers and general “wear[ing] thin” of civilian patience. Lyman Trumbull echoed the sentiments of many in the North by arguing that if “our army should go into winter quarters with the capital besieged, I very much fear the result would

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31 The quotations come from “McClellan to Ellen Marcy McClellan,” 8, 9 Aug. 1861, *McClellan Papers*. The quotations were organized and brought to my attention through McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 360.
be a recognition of the Confederates, by foreign governments, and the demoralization of our own people.”

McClellan continued to alienate those around him. Although Lincoln attempted to shield McClellan from the criticism facing the inactivity of the army, McClellan, a Democrat, also criticized Lincoln and the Republicans, stating, “I am becoming daily disgusted with this imbecile administration.” McClellan continued to stumble as he was removed as general-in-chief in March of 1862, and was relegated to commanding the Army of the Potomac. His Peninsula Campaign in the spring and summer of 1862 was marked by both success and defeat. Although McClellan succeeded against Joseph E. Johnston, he was humiliated by Robert E. Lee, who had taken command after Johnston’s severe wound left him unable to lead. Following his promotion, Lee kept McClellan from taking Richmond, eventually psychologically damaging him during Seven Days Battles. Although none of the battles during the Seven Days were outright tactical victories for Lee, the ferociousness of Lee’s assaults coupled with the emergence of Jackson’s men on McClellan’s western flank, left McClellan intimidated as he pulled his forces back to the James River.

Following this debacle, units were reorganized into a force called the Army of Virginia under John Pope. Lee and Pope met at Second Manassas and it was a complete disaster for the new Army of Virginia. McClellan had been ordered to reinforce Pope’s 50,000 men with his own 100,000 man Army of the Potomac, but McClellan dragged his feet and did not make an effort to do so. It became clear that McClellan wanted Pope to fail so that he would be seen as the only viable commander in the East. According to a letter sent to his wife on August 10, 1862,

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McClellan wrote, “Pope will be thrashed…& be disposed of [by Lee],” while also arguing “Such a villain as [Pope] is ought to bring defeat upon any cause that employs him.”\(^{37}\) Despite a clear sabotage by McClellan, the Army of Virginia was merged into the Army of the Potomac, which remained under the command of McClellan, while Pope was sent to Minnesota to deal with Indian unrest. McClellan was now faced with the task of pursuing and engaging Lee, who was on his way north.\(^{38}\) However, McClellan failed to seize the opportunity afforded him via the Lost Order. Rather than rushing to catch up to Lee’s fragmented army, he wasted precious time bragging about how we would destroy Lee.

_The Battle of South Mountain_

Now, with the Lost Order in hand, McClellan had a golden opportunity to not only destroy Lee’s army while it was in pieces, but do so from the Confederate rear. McClellan’s fortune only grew the closer he got to Lee’s forces. Lee’s optimistic timetable for taking Harpers Ferry was being delayed every hour, providing McClellan even more time to attack Lee’s separated forces. With double the number of men Lee had, McClellan did realize that he had an opportunity to capitalize on the information with which he had been presented. McClellan certainly boasted that he would make Lee pay for his mistakes and that he would do it quickly. In a dispatch to Lincoln at noon, McClellan informed him that he had the entire Confederate army in front of him and that “no time shall be lost.” He also noted that he had a “difficult task to perform” and that “with God’s blessing will accomplish it.” He promised that Lee would be “severely punished” for his “gross mistake” as the Army of the Potomac began to move. He

\(^{37}\) “McClellan to Ellen McClellan,” 10 Aug. 1862, _McClellan Papers_. A more thorough context of the events surrounding these quotes can be found in McPherson, _Battle Cry of Freedom_, 525.

\(^{38}\) James M. McPherson, _Battle Cry of Freedom_, 533-34.
noted that he had Lee’s plans and that he would achieve great victory if those plans remained unchanged.39

McClellan’s message to Henry Halleck, the new general-in-chief, was much more detailed about McClellan’s plans for dealing with Lee. He informed Halleck that he had been handed an order from Lee to D. H. Hill and that its authenticity is “unquestionable.” McClellan briefly laid out Lee’s plan for Halleck, highlighting the facts which he could confirm. He argued that part of Lee’s army had set out to take Harpers Ferry on the 9th, and confirmed that it must be true given the “heavy firing” that had been heard in the direction of Harpers Ferry that afternoon. He also stated that specific units took the roads that were outlined in the Lost Order. Ever paranoid, McClellan speculated that he “had good reasons for believing [Lee’s army] amounts to 120,000 men or more, and know to be commanded by Lee in person, intended to attempt penetrating Philadelphia.”40

There is one aspect that is interesting about McClellan’s message to Halleck. First, McClellan emphasizes the validity of the Lost Order, calling its authenticity “unquestionable.” However, despite McClellan’s emphasis on speed when catching Lee, 18 hours passed before the Army of the Potomac was on the road.41 However, dispatches in the Official Records indicate that the Army of the Potomac was entering Frederick as early as the afternoon of September 12. By that afternoon, McClellan informed Halleck that Ambrose Burnside’s Ninth Corps was between Frederick and New Market, “Bull” Sumner’s Second Corps was near Urbana, Alpheus Williams’ division of the Twelfth Corps was on Sumner’s right, William Franklin’s Sixth Corps was on Sumner’s left, Darius Couch’s Fourth Corps was at Barnesville, and Alfred Pleasonton’s cavalry was scouting enemy positions near Point of Rocks. McClellan then informed Halleck

41 Sears, Landscape Turned Red, 117.
that if Lee were to march toward Pennsylvania, he would follow him, and if Lee attempted to
“recross” the Potomac, he would attempt to cut off his “retreat.” He concluded by explaining that
his next movements would be based on information gathered during the night and that the men
had “marched to-day as far as it was possible and proper for them to move.”

In the meantime, Lee’s divided forces were underway in carrying out the instructions of
the Lost Order. Harpers Ferry continued to be under siege from Anderson and McLaws, Jackson
was capturing the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and Longstreet had been sent north to
investigate potential threat coming from Pennsylvania. However, Lee soon found out that
McClellan had discovered Lee’s plan of action and recalled Longstreet. At this point, Lee knew
he had to block the three South Mountain passes – Crampton’s Gap, Turner’s Gap, and Fox’s
Gap – in order to halt McClellan’s advance. The Confederates lacked any real strength in the
area at that time, so McClellan had a golden opportunity to seize at least one of the passes.

Although the Army of the Potomac had been moving to catch up to the Army of Northern
Virginia before the Lost Order had been found and given to McClellan, there was seemingly no
change in the speed of the army’s march after the Lost Order was in McClellan’s possession,
although McClellan argued for the contrary. McClellan arguably had time to march his army to
the foot of South Mountain by nightfall of September 13th. Instead, the only orders he gave that
day in regard to a faster march were sent to Franklin’s corps. Despite this, McClellan remained
cautious and the initiative was lost. McClellan also did not give orders to Pleasonton and his
cavalry. Earlier in the day, Pleasonton had pushed Confederate forces back into the mountains. If

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he had known that the passes were so important, he would have been able to secure at least Turner’s Pass before any Confederate infantry arrived.45

The orders Franklin received the night of the 13th were intended to be completed the next day. Franklin was ordered to move toward Crampton’s Gap, and “make all your dispositions for the attack, and commence it,” if he found the pass held by a large Confederate force. Once he gained control of Crampton’s Gap, Franklin was to “cut off, destroy, or capture” McLaws’s division and relieve the Harpers Ferry garrison. If the Harpers Ferry garrison was relieved, Franklin was ordered to take with him all disposable troops. However, McClellan also trusted Franklin enough to allow him to change any details of the plan as he saw fit.46

The plan for the next day relied on attacks by Burnside’s Ninth Corps and the First Corps. The two commands were situated on the right wing of the Army of the Potomac and were ordered to assault both Fox’s and Turner’s Gap. Then, the Second and Seventh Corps, which were massed in the center of the army, were ordered to follow the units of the right wing. Ideally, the initial attack would destroy D. H. Hill and allow four Union Corps to use the gaps and come out on the other side. At the same time, this would prevent what was left of Hill’s command and Longstreet’s command from uniting with the Confederate force that had been laying siege to Harpers Ferry. Franklin’s breaking of the Harpers Ferry siege and the seizure of Crampton’s Gap would cut off any potential retreat by the Confederates at South Mountain and would force them to “fight against tremendous odds or splash across the Potomac River in a hasty retreat.”47

In the early morning hours of September 14th, Lee finally discovered that McClellan had obtained a copy of Special Orders, No. 191. Lee now realized that his army was truly in danger.

45 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 216.
46 “McClellan to Franklin, 13 Sept. 1862, McClellan Papers. A more complete account of these orders can be found in Jordan, Unholy Sabbath, 100.
The idea that Union commanders were not capable of commanding their armies properly had been a common belief in the Confederate Eastern armies. According to Longstreet, the “hallucination that McClellan was not capable of serious work seemed to pervade our army.”

The Army of Northern Virginia was, at this point, completely unprepared to fight the Army of the Potomac.

Longstreet was summoned to Lee’s headquarters to strategize. Lee was of the opinion that the army should make its stand at Turner’s Gap. Lee believed that securing the heights would be sufficient to halt McClellan’s advance. Longstreet argued that they should abandon South Mountain and set up a defensive position on the other side of Antietam Creek at Sharpsburg. Longstreet argued that this would allow the army’s pieces to link up and buy time to establish a prepared defense. Longstreet also argued that the Confederates did not even hold Turner’s Gap, and that they would have to march to it before they could hope to defend it. Lee, however, disagreed with Longstreet and ordered his available units to march the next morning to Turner’s Gap. Longstreet was deeply disturbed by Lee’s decision to make a defensive stand at Turner’s Gap, stating that after the meeting his mind was “so disturbed that I could not rest.”

Longstreet also contended that he wrote a note to Lee that night, describing how he was feeling, but received no answer.

September 14 and September 15 are arguably the opening days of the Battle of Antietam. Although not recognized as part of the battle, the fight at South Mountain on September 14 directly influenced the battle fought several days later at Antietam. The next day, Jackson managed to force the garrison at Harpers Ferry into surrendering. Harpers Ferry fell so easily that James McPherson argued that “Miles’s defense had been so inept as to arouse suspicions of

48 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 220.
49 Jordan, Unholy Sabbath, 101; Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 220.
50 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 220.
Lee had indeed succeeded in manning the gaps prior to the assaults made by the Army of the Potomac on the 14th. Although the defenders were gravely outnumbered, they held strong defensive positions that afforded the cover of woods, rocks, and “fencelines.” The assault on Fox’s and Turner’s Gaps began in the morning and were the hardest hit, with D. H. Hill’s men bearing the brunt of the attacks. Although Longstreet and Lee put approximately 14,000 men into battle, by the end of the day, they were facing an enemy of upwards of 28,000 from the attacks of the combined four corps of the Army of the Potomac.  

During the attack on Fox’s and Turner’s Gaps, Franklin’s Sixth Corps went into action. Although Franklin had approximately 9,000 men into position to attack, the deployment of the troops took far longer than it should have. Regardless, Franklin’s men stormed Crampton’s Gap in the afternoon and smashed through a thin Confederate defensive line. The Confederate flanks had crumbled against the weight of the Union assaults. The Confederates forces at Fox’s and Turner’s Gaps had sustained between 1,900 and 2,700 casualties and the small contingency of defenders at Crampton’s Gap had sustained just under 1,000. The assaulting Union forces suffered slightly less casualties. Although not a tactical defeat, the casualties sustained that day by the Confederacy amounted to almost a quarter of all the troops available who were not participating in the siege of Harpers Ferry. Following the loss at South Mountain, Lee had no choice but to disengage and retreat. The night of September 14, he ordered that all commands would rendezvous in Sharpsburg, Maryland. The most influential factor in the outcome of the battle thus far was the Lost Order. Although not a complete Union victory, it nonetheless “made a difference in [the Confederate] Maryland campaign for better or for worse.” Moreover, Lee’s

52 McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom*, 111.
53 Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 227.
54 Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 212.
aggressiveness at the gaps of South Mountain cost him unnecessary lives. He did not have to
hold the gaps at all costs and, in hindsight, a decision to move to another defensible position
while simultaneously linking up with the other parts of Lee’s army would have, in hindsight,
been the correct call. While Lee can be criticized for giving battle against overwhelming odds at
the gaps, it is also easy to criticize him at a much later time.

The Battle of Antietam: September 15 – September 16

The decision of retreating was never easy for Lee and the retreat from South Mountain
was certainly no exception. Enduring a loss of men that proved extremely costly to the already
depleted “South Mountain half” of the Army of Northern Virginia led both Lee and McClellan to
believe that McClellan could still destroy Lee if the right decisions were made. Following the
defeat at the gaps, Lee wrote to the commanders at Harpers Ferry. He informed McLaws that the
“day has gone against us…and this army will go to Sharpsburg and cross the river. It is necessary
for you to abandon your position to-night.”55 Jackson was told the same as McLaws and was
ordered to relocate to Sharpsburg. The retreat from South Mountain was not orderly and was
instead men staggering about in the darkness. As John David Hoptak argued, these men were
“disorganized, dispirited, and demoralized.”56 It was likely one of the first times that troops of
this army had felt such dismay.

McClellan was beaming after a monumental victory, at least in his eyes. He had broken
Lee and sent him fleeing in a panic. In his report to Secretary Stanton, he proclaimed that the
enemy were retreating in the greatest haste and in disordered masses to the river…The
hasty retreat of the enemy’s forces from the mountain and the withdrawal of the

remaining troops from between Boonsborough and Hagerstown...were for a time intercepted as evidences of the enemy’s disorganization and demoralization.\textsuperscript{57}

By the 16\textsuperscript{th} of September, McClellan found the Army of Northern Virginia situated along the heights “in rear of the Antietam Creek.”\textsuperscript{58} The left and center of the Confederate line stretched along the front of the road from Sharpsburg to Hagerstown, and was protected by woods and “irregularities of the ground.” The extreme left was near a wooded area. The right flank rested on the hills to the right of Sharpsburg, which covered the crossing point on Antietam Creek as well as all approaches toward the town of Sharpsburg from the southeast. Lee, once again, made another major gamble in that the position upon which he stationed his army had only one means of retreat: a single ford across the Potomac that was three miles behind the Confederate lines.\textsuperscript{59}

McClellan also noted that the Confederate artillery was posted “on all favorable points.”\textsuperscript{60}

McClellan was also aware that “desperate fighting alone” was the only thing that would be able to drive the Confederate army out of its position and that “a great and terrible battle was at hand.”\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{The Battle of Antietam: September 17 and its Aftermath}

With the Confederates sitting comfortably on solid defensive terrain, McClellan began to work his way toward the position. In the afternoon of the 16\textsuperscript{th}, Hooker’s First Corps engaged with Longstreet’s men in a sharp skirmish that was “of little benefit and disclosed their purpose”


of surprising the men along the Confederate line. However, it took some effort by McClellan and Burnside, who was overseeing the attack, to convince Hooker to carry out his orders. Only once a member of McClellan’s staff reached Hooker and he read the order from McClellan did he begin his attack. By this time, Jackson had arrived from Harpers Ferry and was posted on Lee’s left flank, directly next to Longstreet’s position west of the Hagerstown turnpike. Longstreet later criticized the emplacement of two of Jackson’s divisions into static defensive position by the time Hooker pressed the left flank. He claims that if Jackson’s men had been allowed to counterattack Hooker’s advance, “[Hooker’s] command could have been fought out, if not crushed, before the afternoon went out.” The positions stayed the way they were when night fell on September 16th. The day that followed would turn out to be the bloodiest day of battle in American history.

McClellan’s plan of attack called for Hooker’s corps to cross the Antietam, with Joseph Mansfield’s Twelfth Corps directly behind. Sumner’s Second Corps was to support Hooker and Mansfield and overwhelm the Confederate left flank. Once that attack began, Burnside was expected to fight across the creek and the Confederate right and cut off Lee’s retreat to the Potomac ford. McClellan also planned to keep two divisions from Fitz-John Porter’s Fifth Corps and two divisions from Franklin’s Sixth Corps, which was then arriving, in reserve to exploit any breakthrough the other corps might have made or prevent against a Confederate counterattack. McClellan also kept his cavalry division in reserve in the center with “some Napoleonic notion of a grand mounted charge against broken and fleeing Confederates.”

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62 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 236.
63 D. Scott Hartwig, To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 375. Hooker claimed he was slowed down because he was conducting reconnaissance on the Confederate position, an argument Hartwig believes to be true. However, Hartwig argues that it does not excuse Hooker’s lack of communication with his superiors at “a critical time.”
64 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 237.
The plan should have worked relatively well. Although Lee consolidated in a solid
defensive position, McClellan’s plan of attack should have succeeded. However, McClellan’s
abysmal handling of the coordination and the absence of a clear statement of his commander’s
intent undermined the execution of his plans. McClellan issued no written general orders the
previous day, and did not even call a conference meeting for his corps commanders.66 The corps
commanders of the Army of the Potomac knew only what they were ordered to do. This lack of
direction handcuffed the commanders and did not allow them to make split-second decisions
regarding the other corps during the battle itself. In addition, because of the lack of
communication and coordination between corps commanders, the attack commenced a single
division at a time, rather than all at once, which likely would have overwhelmed the defenses of
the outnumbered Confederates. Because the divisions of the Army of the Potomac went in
piecemeal, Lee was able to constantly shift men to points in which the line was wearing thin.67

Although Lee had a strong defensive position, he was still at only about two-thirds his
full strength. A. P. Hill was overseeing the surrender at Harpers Ferry and McLaws, in charge of
his own division and Anderson’s, was nowhere to be found. McLaws was ordered to march
behind Jackson on his way to Sharpsburg but fatigue and hunger slowed his progress. Lee’s
couriers found the two divisions several miles from Sharpsburg the night of September 16th.
McLaws was then ordered to force-march throughout the night because Lee would need every
man available. At the end of the 16th, the Confederate line was four miles long, deployed along
the Hagerstown turnpike north of Sharpsburg and extended southward past the town. Longstreet
held the right side of the line, and Jackson held the left. The line was quite jagged as it took
advantage of the terrain. Lee also had some 200 artillery pieces available for the battle. However,

Lee would only have about 35,000 men under arms by morning on September 17, whereas the Army of the Potomac had around 80,000 men under arms.\(^6^8\)

The fighting on the 17\(^{th}\) began as early as three in the morning. The picket lines had opened up fire on each other by then and the artillery began to duel by the time light dawned on the battlefield. The first strike against Lee’s line came from a division under Hooker, commanded by Abner Doubleday. Hooker’s objective was to push south toward the Dunker church. Hooker’s 8,600 men were countered by 7,700 under Jackson but the defensive measures evened the playing field. Jackson’s position held relatively well, and he received artillery support from Jeb Stuart’s artillery commander, John Pelham. This artillery fire came from a place of high elevation called Nicodemus Hill. Although the artillery fire rained death blows upon the Union troops, the only countermeasures the Union took to silence the guns was their own artillery. Jackson was extremely fortunate that the Union commanders did not think to storm the hill. If they had, they could have rained artillery fire upon Jackson’s men and taken his position.\(^6^9\)

Artillery continued to play a major factor in the outcome of the battle. Confederate Colonel Stephen D. Lee deployed his artillery on high ground across from Dunker church. This fire from Lee’s battalion helped repel several assaults by the Union against Jackson’s lines. The Union artillery was also unable to hinder the Confederate artillery, which allowed the Confederate artillery to continue to pour fire upon the waves of Union troops. Lee’s men, however, sustained enormous casualties in terms of artillery losses. 86 men were either killed or wounded, compared to the 11 in the Union artillery reserve. Lee’s battalion was doing so well

\(^6^8\) Sears, *Landscape Turned Red*, 175-76.
\(^6^9\) Sears, *Landscape Turned Red*, 182.
that those six guns were targeted by the twenty Union guns. It was a mismatch Lee called “Artillery-Hell.”

Eventually, Union troops discovered that Confederate troops had been hiding in the cornfield near Dunker church. Frenzy erupted and both armies traded volleys and blows within the cornfield to the point that there were scarcely any stalks of corn still standing. By 7:30 that morning, the fighting had become incredibly fierce, forcing Lee to send units to reinforce Jackson on the left. Around this same time, Hill’s men began to move from Harpers Ferry to Sharpsburg. Burnside and Sumner had not yet received orders by this time and thus, Hooker remained the only command fighting the battle. This allowed Lee to begin shifting men to help stave off the incremental attack.

Any advance the Union lines had made by early morning were stymied when John Bell Hood’s division came roaring out of the woods near the Union right flank and delivered a volley that drove the Union attackers back through the cornfield. Jackson was then requested to reinforce Hood otherwise, Hood argued, he would be forced back. More Confederate reinforcements continued to hold Jackson’s line, which continually teetered on the brink of collapse. At one point, Jackson was forced to retire his divisions. Hooker was also forced to retire due to the exhaustion of his troops. The Union Twelfth Corps picked up the slack and continued to fight, although they were late getting to the fight and were forced to engage after Hooker had pulled out.

By midday, McClellan began to issue orders to the other corps commanders in the hope that he could break through Lee’s lines. He ordered Sumner’s Second Corps to cross the creek

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70 Sears, Landscape Turned Red, 190-91.
72 Sears, Landscape Turned Red, 198.
73 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 242.
and assault the West Woods. Sumner’s lead division under John Sedgwick marched into the West Woods with almost no opposition. It appeared that the Army of the Potomac had scared the Confederates and driven them off. According to one private, the rebs all began to fall back. Good said I, we have got um now…But at the same instant I heard a cry from the rear, ‘Fall Back…we are flanked on our left, the rebs are getting in our rear.’ What. Great God that can’t be possible. But I saw it was no joke, the bullets actually come from the rear.  

Sedgwick’s division had been ambushed by two Confederate divisions and his men ran frantically out of the West Woods. Sedgwick’s division saw 1,700 men killed, wounded, or captured. Concurrently, the other two divisions of Sumner’s corps engaged two Confederate divisions at Lee’s center. In a particular spot of Lee’s line, the ground dipped low, as it had been gradually worn down by wagon wheels. This was arguably the strongest position in Lee’s line because it served as a natural trench. The Union continuously sent brigade-sized attacks at this strong defensive position and was continuously beaten back. These attacks continued throughout four hours and left thousands dead on both sides. The amount of Confederate dead in the trench led some observers to nickname the spot “Bloody Lane.”

The Union attackers finally broke through Bloody Lane and smashed Lee’s center wide open. At this point, there was nothing stopping the Union advance from rolling up Lee’s army. Moreover, McClellan had 10,000 men under Franklin who had not even been in the battle. Franklin, normally a cautious general, begged McClellan to let him go in. However, Sumner advised against sending in Franklin as he was still recovering from the psychological blow that had been dealt to Sedgwick and the men of Bloody Lane. McClellan sided with Sumner,

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74 Andrew E. Ford, diary entry of 8 Oct. 1862, 15th Massachusetts File, Antietam National Battlefield Library. The quote is taken from McPherson, Crossroads of Freedom, 120.
75 McPherson, Crossroads of Freedom, 122.
76 McPherson, Crossroads of Freedom, 124.
arguing it “would not be prudent to make the attack.” This delay gave Lee and Longstreet time to prepare a new line along the Hagerstown Pike and a golden opportunity was lost by McClellan and Lee, once again, escaped due to the mistakes made by a Union commander.

On the Union left, Burnside conducted attacks similar to what was performed at Bloody Lane on his front. Burnside had a numerical advantage against Lee’s right flank but he never received orders to attack. As such, Lee was able to shift men from his right to his left to reinforce the attack that Hooker had been making. After the reinforcements had left, Burnside, with 13,000 men, was facing fewer than 4,000 Confederate troops. When the time did come for Burnside to go in, he sent his men in piecemeal and no more than regiment-sized. Burnside eventually pushed through around three in the afternoon, but the Confederates put up a fight. By 4:00 p.m., however, it appeared that the Confederate defenders could not hold any longer.

As if Lee had a guardian angel during the battle, he received reinforcements just in time to thwart Burnside’s thrust. A. P. Hill, who had been marching since the early morning, slammed into Burnside’s flank and completely crushed it. Hill’s men engineered an elaborate ruse that fooled many of the newly formed units that made up Burnside’s corps. Hill’s men, having occupied Harpers Ferry, exchanged some of their ragged uniforms for blue ones and brought with them a Union flag. These new recruits were caught off guard and held their fire, believing Hill’s men to be reinforcements, albeit for their benefit. Burnside would also have been warned about Hill’s corps had McClellan deployed his cavalry. This situation reflected a problem that pervaded the Army of the Potomac throughout September 17th: about 15 percent of the army was

78 McPherson, Crossroads of Freedom, 125-128.
79 McPherson, Crossroads of Freedom, 128.
made up of new recruits. As such, they likely hurt the Union’s chances of winning the battle due to their inadequate training.\textsuperscript{80}

As night fell on the battlefield, the losses were staggering. Sears argued that the Union toll was 2,108 dead, 9,540 wounded, and 753 missing. This amounted to 12,401 men, 25 percent of whom went into battle. The Confederates sustained 1,546 dead, 7,752 wounded, and 1,018 missing. This amounted to 10,318, which was 31 percent of the total engaged in battle. Sears also specifies that although the 22,000 total casualties is high, the 1,700 missing were likely dead and buried in unmarked graves during or immediately after the battle. That next morning, Lee’s army prepared for an assault that never came.\textsuperscript{81} Lee eventually retreated but he intended the retreat to be used as a chance to invade a different part of Maryland. However, this proved to be a difficult challenge. There were many thousands of stragglers from the previous days of marching and fighting and many of these men were completely worn out and refused to fight any longer. As such, it became clear that the Army of Northern Virginia had been wounded both in body and spirit, something to which Lee was unaccustomed.\textsuperscript{82}

And so the Army of Northern Virginia limped back home and prepared for the next Union invasion, which would come in a few short months with a new commander, Ambrose Burnside, at the helm. It would again be a situation where Lee’s success should be attributed to the incompetence of a Union commander, rather than his own abilities as a leader. At Antietam, it became clear that Lee performed ably, securing the key terrain that afforded him more easily defensible positions. However, there were a number of times in which Lee made bold decisions that could have wrecked his army. Although he did that on several occasions throughout the

\textsuperscript{81} Sears, \textit{Landscape Turned Red}, 295-97.
\textsuperscript{82} Sears, \textit{Landscape Turned Red}, 307-308.
course of the war, the risks he took at Antietam and South Mountain afforded him little to gain and much to lose. As Edward Porter Alexander\textsuperscript{83}, Longstreet’s chief-of-artillery described in his memoirs,

On two occasions, I am quite sure, he will be adjudged to have overdone it. He gave battle unnecessarily at Sharpsburg Sep. 17, 1862. The odds against him were so immense that the utmost he could have hoped to do was what he did do – to repel all assaults & finally to withdraw safely across the Potomac. And he probably only succeeded in this because McClellan kept about 20,000 men, all of Fitz John Porter’s corps, entirely out of the fight so that they did not pull the trigger. And Lee’s position was such, with a great river at his back, without a bridge & with but one difficult ford, that defeat would have meant the utter destruction of his army. So he fought where he could have avoided it, & where he had nothing to make & everything to lose – which a general should not do.\textsuperscript{84}

It seemed that Lee was fortunate in several instances during the Maryland campaign. On several occasions, McClellan made decisions that are rather unbelievable, most notably holding thousands of men in reserve during a battle in which he had several opportunities to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia.

Lee was extremely fortunate that McClellan made several strange decisions throughout the Battles of Antietam and South Mountain, as well as the days prior. Lee continued to execute the plan contained within the Lost Order because he was seemingly unaware of its disappearance. Even when not considering the Lost Order, Lee made some incredibly bold, yet dangerous moves in Maryland. He divided his forces, which were already outnumbered, and he raced to defend the gaps of South Mountain when it would have been more prudent to establish a defensive position along Antietam Creek. Lee was also spared humiliation by Jackson’s tenacity on the Confederate left flank and the almost scripted dramatic return of A. P. Hill’s men on the

\textsuperscript{83} D. Scott Hartwig argues against some of Alexander’s accusations against Lee. Alexander and Henry Kyd Douglas had argued that Lee planned to stand and fight because he did want to bring dishonor upon his army by abandoning Maryland, something both Alexander and Douglas believe to be foolhardy. Hartwig argues that this belief is likely not true and that Lee would not have risked his army for honor. For a lengthier criticism, see Hartwig, \textit{To Antietam Creek}, 518-520.

Confederate right flank just at the critical moment. Lee was extremely fortunate at Antietam.

However, it would be irresponsible to argue that he did not exhibit some quality decisions on the battlefield during the engagement at Sharpsburg. Nevertheless, the psychological aspects of the battle only reinforced the mettle of the Army of Northern Virginia and cost another Union commander his job.
CHAPTER III:  
ROBERT E. LEE AND HIS HIGH-WATER MARK: THE BATTLE OF  
CHANCELLORSVILLE

Following a crushing defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg, the Army of the Potomac parted ways with Ambrose Burnside as the commanding general and turned to the commander of the First Corps, “Fighting Joe” Hooker. He had served as a commander of a “Grand Division” under Burnside during the Battle of Fredericksburg and had earned a reputation as a hard-driving, hard-fighting general, something the Army of the Potomac desperately needed. In keeping with his aggressive nature, Hooker had a tendency to butt heads with his superiors. Hooker openly complained about both George McClellan’s and Burnside’s battlefield decisions, citing McClellan as being too slow to act and highlighting Burnside’s “follies” and “blundering sacrifice[s].”1 Hooker had a plan which, on paper, might be able to dislodge Lee from his position at Fredericksburg and allow Hooker to deliver a knockout punch. However, Hooker failed to react properly to Lee’s movements and was subsequently defeated.

On the other hand, Robert E. Lee had been able to escape Antietam with a relative stalemate, a remarkable feat considering his plans fell into Union’s hands early enough that McClellan should have been able to create a plan to destroy Lee’s army. However, McClellan took far too much time and was only able to achieve a stalemate at a time in which victory should have been much assured. Lee and his army were feeling confident following a victory at Fredericksburg. Lee had been able to seize the heights beyond Fredericksburg and simply wait for Burnside to attack his prepared defenses, which he did, sustaining grievous casualties.

1 Hooker to Stanton, War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Vol. 25, Part II, 855. For the rest of this chapter, the Official Records will be abbreviated as OR.
In April 1863, Lee was still entrenched in and around Fredericksburg and was able to play off of the movements of the Army of the Potomac. Although Hooker created a battle plan that looked like it could succeed on paper, he relied on movements he anticipated Lee would make. Lee, however, did not react in a way Hooker anticipated and divided his forces to meet the new threat. As argued by James McPherson, “…Robert E. Lee scored his greatest success in [the effort to win in the East] – followed by his greatest failure [at Gettysburg].”

In this chapter, I argue that Lee’s victory should not be credited to him. Rather, Lee should be credited for seeing through the movements of the Army of the Potomac and acting accordingly, but the victory was assured through the actions of “Stonewall” Jackson’s Second Corps and several critical errors made by Joseph Hooker.

Analysis of April 26 – April 30, 1863: The Army of the Potomac

By January 26, 1863, Burnside had been relieved of command and Joseph Hooker had been promoted to command of the Army of the Potomac. Hooker had long been an opponent of Burnside and considered him an under-achieving commanding general. After hitting a breaking point following the defeat at Fredericksburg, Hooker complained that nothing would go right with the Army of the Potomac until it had a dictator at the helm. President Lincoln discovered this comment and wrote to Hooker stating,

I had heard, in such way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the Army and the Government needed a Dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain success can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship.

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Upon Hooker’s appointment to command of the Army of the Potomac, he continued a habitual confidence in himself and his men. In a testimony before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Hooker argued that “I not only expected a victory [at what would become Chancellorsville], but I expected to get that whole [Army of Northern Virginia].”\(^4\) Despite his eventual failings as a commanding general, Hooker did manage to restore the “shattered morale” of the Army of the Potomac and reshuffled the units, abandoning Burnside’s clumsy “Grand Divisions.”\(^5\)

Hooker originally wished to push Lee out of his entrenchments before Fredericksburg but the Confederate defenses were extremely tight. As stated by one Confederate officer, the “famous lines at Torres Vedras [during the Peninsular War] could not compare with them.”\(^6\) Hooker’s plan relied on the abilities of his cavalry. Following his promotion, Hooker reorganized the cavalry into a single corps to benefit from a unified command structure. He appointed George Stoneman as the commander of the cavalry corps. Stoneman had commanded the Third Corps at Fredericksburg and had proven himself a tough soldier.\(^7\) Hooker’s basic idea was to lure Lee’s army out into the open where he could use his superior numbers to put pressure on Lee. Stoneman’s cavalry would play the first and arguably most important role in the battle. Stoneman was ordered to go far up the Rappahannock, cross over, and move south until he ran into the Virginia Central Railroad. He was then to turn east and attack Hanover Junction, which Hooker believed to be Lee’s main supply depot. Hooker figured that if Stoneman could attack

\(^6\) Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, Vol. II, 480. The Lines of Torres Vedras were a series of forts built during the Peninsular War in Portugal during 1809 and 1810. These lines were used as a defense against the invading French army under André Masséna. Hiding behind an impenetrable defensive position, the Anglo-Portuguese Army was able to forestall several attempts by Masséna to penetrate the line and gain access to Lisbon, Portugal’s capital.
the depot with a large enough force, Lee would be forced to retreat and Hooker would be able to pursue. Stoneman would essentially block Lee’s retreat to the point at which Hooker could catch up and fight Lee in the open field with a 2:1 advantage in manpower. Stoneman, however, was unable to cross the river as its levels had risen. Despite Stoneman’s helplessness at changing nature itself, Hooker never forgave Stoneman and fumed over the lost chance.

Hooker devised a new plan following the end of the rainy season that had hampered Stoneman’s attack on Lee’s supplies. This new plan would not rely heavily on cavalry and would not be hampered by the poor weather that had stalled Stoneman in the first place. Hooker’s Chief-of-Staff, Dan Butterfield provided an account of Hooker’s new plan to the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War:

As modified, the problem was to throw a sufficient infantry force to cross at Kelly’s ford, descend the Rappahannock, and knock away the enemy’s forces holding the United States and Banks’s fords by attacking them in rear, and as soon as these fords were opened to re-enforce the marching column sufficiently for them to continue the march upon the flank of the rebel army until his whole force was routed and, if successful, his retreat intercepted. Simultaneous with this movement on the right, the left were to cross the Rappahannock below Fredericksburg and threaten the enemy in that quarter, including his depot of supplies, to prevent his despatching (sic) an overwhelming force to his left.

Although Hooker originally wanted to push Lee into Richmond and force him into a siege, Butterfield later recalled that it became a matter of “destroy[ing] the army of General Lee where it then was.” As Bruce Catton summarizes, Lee would be forced to retreat across Hooker’s

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8 Catton, *Glory Road*, 174. Catton’s summary of Hooker’s original plan is slightly more detailed and is one of the best summarizations.
9 Ibid., 177.
front, allowing Hooker to surge forward and annihilate Lee whose men would, presumably, be in a panic.\footnote{Catton, \textit{Glory Road}, 177-78.}

Hooker was adamant that the element of surprise was the most important aspect in defeating Lee. In his orders to the commanders of the Fifth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Corps, Hooker demanded strict confidentiality regarding the destinations of the marches they were about to conduct. In dispatches to the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps, Oliver Otis Howard and Henry Slocum, respectively, were to “consider so much of the [orders to march] as relates to the destination of their commands as strictly confidential.”\footnote{“S. Williams to Commanding Officers, Eleventh and Twelfth Corps,” 26 April, 1863, \textit{OR}, Vol. 25, Part II, 255.} Butterfield relayed a similar message to George Meade of the Fifth Corps, stating the “destination of your command will be strictly confidential.”\footnote{“Daniel Butterfield to Commanding Officer, Fifth Corps, 27 April, 1863, \textit{OR}, Vol. 25, Part II, 262.} Although he did not tell Winfield Hancock of the Second Corps that the movements of his command were confidential, Hooker did order that no “large fires and burning camp rubbish” would be permitted in order to help conceal the movements of the army.\footnote{“S. Williams to Commanding Officer, Second Corps, 27 April, 1863, \textit{OR}, Vol. 25, Part II, 267.}

Another dispatch was sent to Hancock later in the day informing him to “establish the most rigid and strict guard along the river bank, to prevent any crossing or information, and to arrest any and all citizens within the lines if deemed necessary to prevent the enemy being informed of our movement.”\footnote{“S. Williams to Commanding Officer, Second Corps,” 27 April, 1863, \textit{OR}, Vol. 25, Part II, 267.}

Hooker even kept Lincoln relatively in the dark. After Lincoln sent a telegram to Hooker on April 27th, asking “How does [the march] look now?” Hooker replied later that day that he was “not sufficiently advanced to give an opinion. We are busy. Will tell you all soon as I can, and have it satisfactory.”\footnote{“Lincoln to Hooker” and “Hooker to Lincoln,” 27 April, 1863, \textit{OR}, Vol. 25, Part II, 263.} It is certainly ironic that Hooker’s level of extreme secrecy is quite
similar to the tactics Jackson used several days later to flank Hooker’s army. As evidenced previously, Hooker’s confidence knew no bounds in the days and weeks leading up to the Battle of Chancellorsville. In addition to his remark of “may God have mercy on General Lee, for I will have none,” Hooker was supremely confident that he had “stolen a march on Lee” and that Lee’s army “must ingloriously fly, or come out from behind his defenses and give us battle on our ground, where certain destruction awaits him.”

*Analysis of April 26 – May 1, 1863: The Army of Northern Virginia*

Prior to both the Battle of Chancellorsville and Battle of Fredericksburg, the Army of Northern Virginia had been reorganized to reflect the accomplishments of several of its generals. In a letter to President Jefferson Davis on October 2, 1862, Robert E. Lee argued for the promotion of James and Longstreet and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson to the rank of lieutenant-general, in charge of the First and Second Corps, respectively. Although Longstreet is mentioned, Lee gives Jackson much of the praise, arguing that he “has been greatly enhanced during this expedition. He is true, honest, and brave; has a single eye to the good of the service, and spares no exertion to accomplish his objective.” Lee also argued that A. P. Hill should be considered for the rank of major-general, describing him as “the best commander with me.” Hill eventually rose to the rank of lieutenant-general following the death of Jackson. These promotions were accepted by early November and the Army of Northern Virginia was reorganized.

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Longstreet, however, would not be readily available for the beginning part of the Battle of Chancellorsville. Instead, he had been ordered to take two of his divisions to help beat back a Union invasion of Norfolk, Virginia and the North Carolina coast. As such, Lee had approximately 60,000 men under arms when compared to Hooker, who had nearly double that number. As stated, the bulk of Lee’s army was still entrenched at Fredericksburg when Hooker began to move his army across the Rappahannock. Hooker had anticipated that Lee would be caught by surprise by his movements, but Lee was relatively calm and met Hooker’s plan with his own counter-march in late April. Although Lee was quick to meet Hooker’s flanking march, Lee remained under-strength as long as Longstreet remained in Norfolk.

On April 29, 1863, Longstreet received a telegram from Lee through Samuel Cooper, Adjutant and Inspector General, demanding all available units to converge on his position “as rapidly as possible by rail and otherwise,” as Lee believed he “ha[d] nothing to oppose to all [of the Union’s forces at Gordonsville] except the two brigades of cavalry under General Stuart.” Lee specifically demanded that Longstreet’s division rejoin his army “if available.” Cooper sent another message to Longstreet stating that “The Secretary [James A. Seddon]” specifically ordered the return of Longstreet’s command or “at least such portions of it as can be spared without serious risk.” Cooper also informed Longstreet that units from the commands of D. H. Hill and T. S. Rhett had already been directed to Gordonsville. Adding emphasis, Cooper closed his message by stating that “These movements are required to be made with the utmost dispatch.” While not specified in the message to Longstreet, Seddon informed Cooper that all available units must march as not to interrupt railroad transportation of supplies. In a message

22 McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 639
sent to Lee on May 1, Cooper warned Lee that “I do not look for the arrival of Longstreet’s command here before to-morrow evening…” This was caused by difficulty in finding railroads that were not being used for collecting supplies from North Carolina.

During the next day, the Confederate army began to feel the heat of the Union’s flanking march around Lee’s left flank. Orders were written to every available commander not directly within Lee’s army and sent to places as far away as Suffolk and Salem. Further, Lee expressed some worry at the thought of being without one of his able-bodied commanders. As stated in an earlier message to Jefferson Davis on April 30,

General Stuart is supposed to have crossed the Rapidan last night, to interrupt enemy’s column at Germanna…Enemy was still crossing the Rappahannock at 5 p.m. yesterday…Meade, Slocum, and Howard commanded corps. Objective evidently to turn our left. If I had Longstreet’s division, would feel safe.

In order to counter the movements of the Army of the Potomac on April 30, Lee sent out Special Orders No. 121 which specified that McLaws was to leave a brigade to reinforce Fredericksburg and Jackson was to leave a division at Pratt’s and Bernard’s farms. From there, both generals would take their remaining commands to reinforce General Anderson at the Tabernacle Church. The reinforcing units of McLaws and Jackson assisted in pushing back Meade’s corps, and the Army of the Potomac, back toward Chancellorsville.

When Lee moved to meet Hooker on May 1, he ran into advance units of the Union army several miles east of Chancellorsville. Lee would have been exposed in the open country that lay before the Union lines and artillery but, curiously, Hooker relocated to a more heavily wooded area that lowered the Union’s chances of victory. Hooker seemingly gave up too easily when pressed by a numerically weaker Army of Northern Virginia, abandoning his “Fighting Joe”

29 “Special Orders No. 121,” 30 April, 1863, OR, Vol. 25, Part II, 762.
30 McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 640.
moniker. Others in the Army of the Potomac were not impressed. Years later, General Darius Couch expressed his disbelief at Hooker’s decision to fight a “defensive battle in that nest of thicket” by stating that he “retired from [Hooker’s] presence with the belief that my commanding general was a whipped man.”

In a letter to Jefferson Davis on May 2, Lee laid out the situation he now faced with the Union army firmly entrenched at Chancellorsville. Lee predicted that Hooker would reinforce his army at Chancellorsville with units he still had stationed in front of Fredericksburg. Lee correctly instructed Early the night before to leave a guard in Fredericksburg and bring the rest of his force to Lee’s position. Lee cautioned that if the enemy came on too strong against him, he would be forced to fall back, abandoning Fredericksburg. However, a victory at Chancellorsville would allow the Army of Northern Virginia to relieve the pressure from Fredericksburg and maintain communications with Richmond. Lee then wrote that he was currently swinging around the Union left flank to “come up in his rear.” The Washington guard under Heintzelman had been pulled and this left Lee with a sense of unease. He argued that if he had all of his command with him, he would feel much better. Nevertheless, he was prepared to assault the Union left, given that it was his best option against an army twice the size of his.

May 2, 1863: The Eleventh Corps and Jackson’s Greatest Victory

On the night of May 1, Jackson and Lee conferred about how to proceed the following day. Later that night, General Stuart informed the two that the Union’s right flank was “in the air.” Anchored by the XI Corps, this flank was extremely vulnerable if Lee could find a way to attack it without alerting the Union army. One of Jackson’s staff officers found a local guide who

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could assist them in finding a little-used route that could lead them past the Union lines. They discovered a road near Catherine Furnace that acted as a relatively well-hidden route around the right flank of the Union army. Jackson’s 30,000 men and artillery began moving early on May 2, leaving Lee with only 15,000 men to face a potential attack by Hooker’s main body. However, Lee gambled that Hooker would not move from a position he felt would send Lee running and that gamble paid off. This attack was an incredible gamble and one of Lee’s most audacious of the war. Although Jackson should receive credit for accomplishing the victory, Lee should be praised for his confidence and his correct assessment of Hooker’s unwillingness to move his forces.

Hooker had withdrawn from an attack on Lee around midday on May 1 because he hoped “the enemy will be emboldened to attack me.” Needless to say, Hooker’s wish was fulfilled, albeit in a less-agreeable fashion. It must be understood that Hooker was not completely blind to the movements of Jackson’s corps on May 2. Early that morning, Union dispatches initially reported no change in the positions of the Army of Northern Virginia. T. S. C. Lowe, Chief of Aeronauts, sent several dispatches to Dan Butterfield, informing him that the enemy’s troops “remain in the same position as yesterday,” and that he could not “say that the enemy have decreased, but they do not show themselves this morning.” Although he had sent his cavalry on

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35 One of Hooker’s major mistakes leading up to the battle was stripping Henry Hunt of command of the artillery. Instead, Hunt was relegated to administrative duties because Hooker did not believe that the artillery should be reorganized into a single corps commanded by Hunt. According to Hooker, the artillery had functioned well and that the men of his old command had regarded their batteries with “a feeling of devotion.” This apparently led to greater success on the battlefield. However, when the battle of Chancellorsville commenced, the artillery had little effect thanks to Hooker’s “inert handling of his forces.” (31) Hunt fought back and argued that Hooker had “crippled” one of the arms of the army and Coddington agreed that, based on Hunt’s war record, his opinions are quite valid when considering his criticism of Hooker. (31) Hooker’s argument against a united artillery corps can be found in “Hooker to Bates,” 28 Aug. 1876, *Bates Collection*. Hunt’s criticism of Hooker can be found in “Report of Brig. Gen. Henry J. Hunt, U. S. Army, Chief of Artillery,” 1 Aug. 1863, *OR*, Vol. 25, Part I, 252-53.
a raid of Richmond, which in hindsight accomplished nothing and was unable to provide reconnaissance on Jackson’s flanking march, General Dan Sickles’ Third Corps noticed the movement and clashed with the tail end of Jackson’s corps. Although Sickles’ warnings were heard by Hooker, they were not considered to be relevant. Hooker momentarily wondered if Lee was attempting a flanking movement, but resigned himself to the belief that Lee was actually in retreat. Because of this, the Eleventh Corps remained unprepared for what lay ahead.37

In order to fully understand the situation at Chancellorsville on May 2, it is important to understand the Eleventh Corps as a unit in the Army of the Potomac.38 The Eleventh Corps was just as responsible for the defeat at Chancellorsville and was universally considered to be the weakest corps in the Army of the Potomac. According to Catton,

The army’s soft spot was the [Eleventh] Corps, Major General Oliver Otis Howard commanding. The [Eleventh] Corps was the Cinderella of the army, the unwanted orphaned child, and it was deeply aware of its own status. It seems to have felt, collectively, like a poor ignored wallflower at a high school dance.39

The Eleventh Corps contained a large number of German soldiers, referred to as “Dutchmen,” which stemmed from the belief of men in the Army of the Potomac that men with foreign accents did not have to be taken seriously. Catton argued that is “hardly going too far” to argue that this sentiment directly contributed to the Union loss at Chancellorsville. The Germans in America at the time were staunchly in favor of freedom, liberty, and democracy, and strongly believed in the abolition of slavery. Upon embracing many of the typical “American ideals,” these German men were more than willing to take up arms, citing the Union cause as their own.

38 One of the best summaries of the history and reputation of the Eleventh Corps comes from Bruce Catton’s *Glory Road*, cited previously in this chapter.
According to Catton, the German regiments of the army “welcomed and supported” the Emancipation Proclamation as much as, if not more so than, the New England regiments.\textsuperscript{40}

Much of the German soldiers’ poor reputation stemmed from incidents that were relatively out of their control in 1862. McClellan had been ordered to send a detachment of troops to western Virginia to reinforce a growing abolitionist force forming under John Charles Fremont. Although the march was supposed to be perfectly routine, the division of German troops met with disasters that caused great misery to those involved. First, a lapse in paperwork left the German division without even the most basic provisions. Then, the division got lost somewhere in the Blue Ridge Mountains and the War Department forgot about them. Given their lack of supplies and funding, the Germans were forced to requisition what they needed and, speaking poor English, appeared to be looting and thieving their way across the Shenandoah Valley.\textsuperscript{41}

This German division did not succeed in battle under Fremont and did not succeed when it fought in the Eleventh Corps under Franz Sigel. Sigel was replaced by Oliver Otis Howard who achieved a corps command after whining about Sickles, a junior officer, receiving command of the Third Corps. It became evident quickly that there was a reason Sickles was promoted and Howard was not. Howard did not endear himself to his soldiers, mostly addressing them as, “my men.” He was also known as a Christian soldier, an aspect that did not sit well with the free-thinking, anti-clerical German soldiers.\textsuperscript{42} As Catton concluded, the Eleventh Corps “had a tradition of bad luck and defeat, it was unhappy with itself and with its leadership, and, worst and most dangerous of all, it was an outcast from the spirit and affection of the army.”\textsuperscript{43} In keeping

\textsuperscript{40} Catton, \textit{Glory Road}, 189.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 190-91.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 192-93.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 193.
with the theme of bad luck, the Eleventh Corps was relegated to being placed on the right flank of the Army of the Potomac, a place that was predicted to be completely untouched by the fighting on May 2.

However, luck might not have been the only cause for the complete collapse of the Eleventh Corps. On the morning of May 2, Howard received several dispatches from Union officers, calling for caution against a possible Confederate attack. Although Howard was relatively prepared for a frontal attack, he was not in a position to resist an attack from any other direction. In a 9:30 a.m. dispatch from Hooker, Howard was advised that if “[Lee] should throw himself upon your flank…examine the ground and determine upon the position you will take in that event, in order that you may be prepared for him in whatever direction he advances.”

Hooker also added in a postscript that he “had good reason to suppose that the enemy is moving to our right. Please advance your pickets for purposes of observation as far as may be safe in order to obtain timely information of their approach.”

Although Hooker was responsible for moving his army out of an advantageous position and into a situation in which he could be flanked, it was Howard who allowed Jackson to perform such a successful strike against the flank of the Army of the Potomac. It seems as though Howard did not take the necessary precautions as Jackson’s corps easily crushed the Eleventh Corps and sent it streaming back towards Hooker’s headquarters. For the attack itself, General Robert Rodes’ troops were the first in line, numbering some 7,800 men. The second line contained some men from Rodes’ division, as well as men from General Raleigh Colston’s

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division. The third line contained two brigades from Colston’s division and Henry Heth’s division of General A. P. Hill’s corps. Heth was the only unit from Hill’s corps to be present in the attack. The rest of Hill’s corps was too far in the rear and the daylight was already beginning to fade by the time the attack could even begin.46

The total number of men in the attack numbered around 21,500, supported by 8 guns. Jackson was very meticulous in his arrangement of troops for the attack, insisting that the attack should be made with “the broadest front possible” in order to take advantage of his superior numbers against what Sears described as “a very narrow-front enemy defense.”47 Jackson instructed Rodes to continually press the Union line, using the Turnpike as a guide. Under no circumstances was Rodes to stop moving in order to keep the momentum on the retreating Union troops, inciting increasing panic. Jackson allowed the brigade commanders of Rodes’ division to call upon supporting brigades as needed. It was a dream come true and, as Sears argued, in “no previous battle had Stonewall Jackson ever had the time and opportunity to plan an assault with such care.”48 In just an hour and a half, Jackson’s corps had managed to rout the entire Eleventh Corps and sent it reeling for approximately 1.25 miles.

Lee sent another dispatch to Davis on May 3 detailing Jackson’s flanking attack the previous day. The Army of the Potomac had been driven from the Wilderness to “within 1 mile of Chancellorsville.”49 At the time of Jackson’s attack, Longstreet conducted a frontal assault of the Union line with two of his divisions. Lee once again engaged the Army of the Potomac and drove it back toward the Rappahannock, sending it into a full retreat. Early that morning, Lee had sent a message to General Stuart ordering him to continue to press the Army of the Potomac

47 Sears, Chancellorsville, 261.
48 Ibid., 261.
49 “Lee to Davis,” 3 May, 1863, OR, Vol. 25, Part II, 768.
“so that we can unite the two wings of the army.”  

Stuart was also instructed to “proceed vigorously,” and take Chancellorsville away from Union hands, which would have given Lee’s army a chance to reunite there. While Lee is credited as the architect of the victory at Chancellorsville, there is no doubt that it was Jackson who was instrumental in routing the Union forces. It is generally regarded that Lee first thought of the idea to flank the Army of the Potomac, but it was Jackson should be credited with “turn[ing] the envelopment into a thunderbolt drive with his entire corps.”

In their book, *Military Heritage of America*, R. Ernest and Trevor N. Dupuy break down the battle of Chancellorsville into four separate phases. The first phase deals with Hooker’s original plan and its execution. On paper, it was certainly strong given that his army outnumbered Lee’s 2:1. However, this phase turned sour once Hooker resolved himself to fighting defensively rather than continuing his original aggressiveness. The second phase deals with Lee’s “immediate” reaction to the shifting of Hooker’s forces, correctly predicting that Hooker was shifting around his left flank. This also includes splitting his army into three pieces and allowing Jackson to flank the Union position. The third phase is arguably the most crucial to the battle itself. Faced with an opportunity to recover from the disaster on May 1, Hooker was unable to recapture any momentum he might have gained when he began to slow Jackson’s corps on May 2. During that time, Sedgwick had broken through Early’s defenses at Fredericksburg and was threatening Lee’s right flank. Rather than countering, Hooker decided to play things even more cautiously and retreat further and set up another defensive line. As the Dupuys note, given the disparity of strength between the two armies, this sort of lackluster attitude was

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“inexcusable.” The final phase saw Hooker retreat across the Potomac. Despite his victory, Lee had lost 10,000 men from his army, as many casualties as he had inflicted on the Union army.

Despite Lee’s stellar victory, he was met with criticism in the memoirs and later writings of some of his subordinates. General Edward Porter Alexander felt that there were times in which Lee was too aggressive and risked the well-being of the army for seemingly miniscule reasons. Chancellorsville is among the battles in which Alexander felt that Lee became too reckless in his plans. His entry on Chancellorsville is as follows:

There was still another occasion when I recalled ruefully [Captain Joseph C.] Ives’s prophecy that I would see all the audacity I wanted to see, & felt that it was already overfulfilled: but when, to my intense delight, the enemy crossed the river in retreat during the night, & thus saved us from what would have been probably the bloodiest defeat of the war. It was on the 6th of May 1863 at the end of Chancellorsville, & I will tell of it in detail when we come to that battle. Here I will only say that Hooker’s entire army, some 90,000 infantry, were in the Wilderness, backed against the Rapidan, & had had nearly three days to fortify a short front, from the river above to the river below. And, in that dense forest of small wood, a timber slashing in front of a line of breastworks could in a few hours make a position absolutely impregnable to assault. But on the afternoon of the 5th Gen. Lee gave orders for a grand assault the next morning by his whole force of about 40,000 infantry & I was all night getting my artillery in position for it. And how I did thank God when in the morning the enemy was gone!

Alexander made an interesting argument about Lee’s boldness on the battlefield. Despite the fact that he had soundly beaten Hooker at Chancellorsville, there is no way to be certain that this proposed assault would be successful. However, Alexander’s argument that a few hours of work could create a defense that would be “impregnable to assault” is certainly believable. In addition, the Confederate success on May 2 should be attributed to Jackson’s flanking march and the ineptitude of Oliver Otis Howard. Despite his shortcomings, there were a number of corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac who consistently performed ably, such as John

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52 R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *Military Heritage of America*, 263. Their summary is more detailed but has been shortened for this chapter.

Reynolds and Winfield Scott Hancock. A frontal assault by Lee, on the wrong side of a 2:1 number differential, against potentially “impregnable” defenses would likely have been a disaster. Lee’s increasing belief that his army was invincible can be seen in this proposed assault cited by Alexander. This boldness would be echoed several months later at Gettysburg and would cost Lee dearly.

**Relationship between Lee and Jackson**

With Jackson’s flanking march and subsequent attack on the Union’s right flank, Lee had secured the most impressive victory of his career but had suffered the greatest casualty of the war: his beloved Jackson. It is because of this that I feel it is important to examine the relationship between Lee and Jackson to demonstrate how devastating Jackson’s death was to both Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. The history of Lee and Jackson’s relationship dates back to the Mexican-American War and their days as officers in the United States Army. Both men came from Virginia; Lee served as a well-respected member of Winfield Scott’s staff and Jackson served as an artillery officer. In 1854, Jackson was hired as a professor at the University of Virginia and was aided by Lee’s recommendation. Both were also present during John Brown’s raid at Harper’s Ferry. Jackson was considerably pleased when, in April 1861, Lee was appointed as the military commander of the Virginia Forces and regarded this move “as of more value to us than to have General [Winfield] Scott as commander… [he is] a better officer than General Scott.” These are incredibly strong words considering the respect Scott had garnered as lieutenant-general, the first man to hold the rank since George Washington.

When the Civil War broke out, Colonel Jackson was assigned to Major General Lee “to organize into regiments the volunteer forces which have been called into the service of the state, and which may be assembled in the neighborhood.” Jackson originally ranked as a major in the Virginia state militia, but resigned amidst a dispute and then joined the faculty at the Virginia Military Institute in 1851. His reputation in battle drew his students near him and marched a corps of them to Richmond once the Civil War began and Jackson received a commission as a colonel. During the first months of the war, Lee struggled to deal with all of the demands and requests with which he was bombarded. Jackson independently managed a command at Harper’s Ferry and took much of the burden from Lee with his ability to think quickly and make intelligent decisions. Jackson was loyal to Lee almost to a fault. When Joseph E. Johnston arrived in May 1861 to assume command of all forces in the area, Jackson declined to surrender his command, arguing that Johnston’s orders had come from the Confederate States of America, not from the State of Virginia. Jackson argued until he “receive[d] further instructions from Governor Letcher or General Lee, I do not feel at liberty to transfer my command to another.” Once Johnston submitted the necessary paperwork, Jackson complied.

Jackson continued to impress even after Johnston took over all commands in the area. Jackson performed admirably at First Manassas, where he earned the moniker “Stonewall” due to his securing of a strong defensive position while other Confederate commands around him retreated. Jackson was soon promoted to major general and was forced to leave his old command behind while taking control of the Valley District, still under Johnston. Over the next several months, Jackson oversaw several campaigns within the Shenandoah Valley, scoring a
partial victory in which he drove Union forces out of northwestern Virginia but was unable to
deal a serious blow. In addition, his tough ways were not well-received by troops there, and there
was nearly an insurrection. Jackson’s removal was requested by Johnston but efforts by
Governor Letcher kept him in command. Jackson learned his lesson, trained his men, and
provided them with clothing, food, and shelter from all the elements. The hostile troops were
eventually moved and disbanded in other parts of Virginia.\textsuperscript{62}

In early March 1862, Lee was asked to come to Richmond to serve alongside Jefferson
Davis with “the conduct of military operations in the armies of the Confederacy.”\textsuperscript{63} This
promotion seemingly rekindled the relationship between Lee and Jackson. Although Lee
stumbled in the first months of his defense of Richmond, Jackson and Davis stuck by his side.
The problems continued to grow throughout the next few months as Lee experienced a “Union
invasion of North Carolina, Johnston’s clumsy retreat from Manassas to the Fredericksburg area,
a substantial accumulation of manpower at the Yorktown Peninsula that signaled the first wave
of George B. McClellan’s campaign for Richmond, and a large force to the north that threatened
Johnston’s army below the Rappahannock River…”\textsuperscript{64} Both Lee and Jackson continued to grow
into the roles that benefitted them the most. Lee became a master at operational warfare, which
meant that he was adept at capturing objectives through a campaign or series of campaigns.
Jackson, on the other hand, was not a good tactician and instead attacked his enemies with
unbridled ferocity. He was also talented at seizing the initiative and maneuvering troops while
also determining the precise time in which to strike.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{63} “General Orders No. 14,” \textit{OR}, Vol. 5, 1099.
\textsuperscript{64} Glatthaar, \textit{Partners in Command}, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 20-21.
Jackson continued to perform above and beyond the expectations of Lee throughout 1862. At Second Manassas, Jackson befuddled John Pope and the Army of the Potomac. On August 28, Jackson engineered a daring move that caused Pope to believe Jackson was retreating. This certainly would not be the only time that sentiment would be shared by a Union officer. Jackson, outnumbered 3:1, divided his forces and sent them in different directions throughout the night, reuniting at the base of Sudley Mountain. Having caught Pope by surprise, Jackson was then able to strike at a Union division passing through the area. There were two circumstances that prevented a rout by Jackson: one of the brigades in the fight would later be nicknamed the Iron Brigade, and nightfall occurred seemingly too early. Although the Iron Brigade had withstood the assault by Jackson, both sides suffered enormous casualties.\(^{66}\) In the following days, Pope hammered Jackson’s lines and his forces were repulsed numerous times. Eventually, Jackson led an offensive against Pope, inflicting enough casualties as to drive Pope into the safe arms of Washington.\(^{67}\)

These exploits and a long history came to a head at Chancellorsville.\(^{68}\) Jackson had completely routed the Eleventh Corps and sent the Army of the Potomac into a panic. This sort of gutsy maneuver had been made possible via the relationship Lee and Jackson had built over the course of twenty years. Indeed,

After twenty-four months at war, the two Confederate generals had forged a strong military relationship, based on an audacious, aggressive approach to warfare that compensated splendidly for their dearth of manpower and resources. There was no debate, no expressed doubts. Lee the planner, Jackson the executor, they fell into the boldest operational scheme of the Civil War almost matter-of-factly.\(^{69}\)

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 40.  
\(^{68}\) For organizational reasons, the section detailing Jackson’s involvement at Antietam can be found in the previous chapter.  
There was no debate amongst them. Jackson had earned Lee’s complete trust and was willing to do whatever necessary to emerge victorious. Without Jackson, it is speculative as to whether or not the Army of Northern Virginia could have achieved such a crushing victory.

Nightfall was among several factors that halted Jackson’s lightning-quick advance into the Union lines. The long march had begun to wear the men down, and the men were further exhausted by the thrill of watching the Yankees run for their lives. Jackson pressed forward to personally inspect the new lines, when shots rang out. Jackson was hit three times: one in his right hand, one in his left wrist, and one above his left elbow. Jackson collapsed and was carried to a hospital tent, where his left arm was amputated by his own physician, Dr. Hunter McGuire.

Lee was informed of the wounds Jackson had sustained and sent him a dispatch lamenting that he “cannot express my regret at the occurrence. Could I have directed events, I should have chosen for the good of the country to be disabled in your stead. I congratulate you upon the victory, which is due to your skill and energy.” After 5 days, Jackson contracted pneumonia and Lee remarked, [Jackson] has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right.”

Jackson died on May 10 and Lee dispatched General Orders No. 61, which mourned the death of Jackson. It read,

With deep grief, the commanding general announces to the army that death of Lieut. Gen. T. J. Jackson, who expired on the 10th instant, at 3.15 p. m. The daring, skill, and energy of this great and good soldier, by the decree of an all-wise Providence, are now lost to us. But while we mourn his death, we feel that his spirit still lives, and will inspire the whole army with his indomitable courage and unshaken confidence in God as our hope and our strength. Let his name be a watchword to his corps, who have followed him to victory on

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71 Glatthaar, Partners in Command, 48.
73 Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 560.
so many fields. Let officers and soldiers emulate his invincible determination to do everything in the defense of our beloved country.74

With victory came a price from which Lee could not and would not recover. One of the best chances of winning the Civil War lay within the relationship between Lee and Jackson. With his death, Lee was forced to look elsewhere for a commander who could fill the void of an aggressive, confident general who was willing to march his men to hell and back if it meant the preservation of his home state and his country. Lee attempted to find that commander in the form of James Longstreet, who was unable to perform to Lee’s expectations, not necessarily because of Longstreet’s ineptitude, but because of Lee’s inability to capitalize on the strengths of his generals. This incompatibility came to a head several months later at a small town in Pennsylvania, called Gettysburg.

CHAPTER IV: 
ROBERT E. LEE AND THE GETTYSBURG CONTROVERSY

By the summer of 1863, Lee became convinced that he would have to take the offensive against the Union in an effort to end the war. After a decisive victory at Chancellorsville, Lee was of the belief that his army was invincible and he would be able to maneuver and defeat the Army of the Potomac with little effort. In Lee’s mind, an invasion of the North would help refit his army and pressure the Federal government into capitulation. Horses and food could be acquired in Pennsylvania, a place the war had not heavily touched, and a strike this far North might strengthen the Northern peace party which would press Abraham Lincoln to end the war. While Lee had a chance to deliver another blow to the Union cause, he stumbled and committed a number of uncharacteristic blunders that cost the Confederacy the battle and perhaps the war.

However, diaries and memoirs from some Confederate officers point to James Longstreet as the person responsible for the loss at Gettysburg. In addition, it seems that Lee was not fully in-control during the Gettysburg Campaign. Some historians have argued that Lee’s greatest fault during his tenure as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia was his inability to discipline or rein in his subordinates. He left most of the battlefield decisions to his junior officers. While it earned him an undying love from them, it may have weakened the infrastructure of the Army of Northern Virginia to the point that it did not function properly.

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4 Dumas and Rauch, Crisis of the Union, 204.
Following Chancellorsville, Lee was forced to reorganize his army into three corps, abandoning the two-corps approach he had originally used. This shift was brought on by the death of “Stonewall” Jackson, commander of Lee’s First Corps. After Jackson’s death, the Army of Northern Virginia reorganized into three corps consisting of James Longstreet commanding the First Corps, Richard Ewell commanding the Second Corps, and A. P. Hill commanding the Third Corps. Jackson’s death was not necessarily significant because it forced a reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia, but because his death deprived Lee of an aggressive general who was willing to assault an enemy position no matter the cost. An old anecdote of the Civil War had one Confederate soldier wishing the Yankees were in Hell with another soldier replying, “I don’t, because [Jackson] would have us standing picket at the gate before night and in there before morning.” Longstreet, on the other hand, was always pushing for Lee to keep a defensive mind, forcing the Union to attack the Confederacy on ground that benefitted them the most. Lee was now forced to look for another commander to fill the role of the “offensive” general of his army.

The shakeup in the command structure of the Army of Northern Virginia forced Lee to maneuver and strategize with two men who had never been corps commanders. This became evident when Lee was forced to make a crucial decision: assault Cemetery Hill on the first day at Gettysburg and risk a repulse or regroup and observe the Union strategy. Lee chose to give Ewell a somewhat vague order to take the hill “if practicable.” The lack of an aggressive general hurt Lee’s strategy. Lee would later suffer from the loss of Jackson when Longstreet urged Lee to leave Gettysburg and take a defensive position, which stalled an assault on an exposed Union left

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5 *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. XXV, Part II, 840. All other instances of the Official Records in the footnotes will be referenced by OR.

6 Ralph Green, *Sidelights and Lighter Sides of the War between the States: A Feast of History Cooked up in Small Bites!* (Shippensburg: Burd Street Press, 2007), 1-252.

flank and wasted an opportunity to turn the tide of the battle. Longstreet once again dragged his feet prior to Pickett’s Charge, allowing the Union time to prepare for the assault.\(^8\) I argue that Lee should not be criticized for making the wrong tactical decisions at Gettysburg but that he should instead be criticized for his failure to adequately manage the command structure of the Army of Northern Virginia. If Lee had been clearer on what he expected of his corps commanders and firmer on the orders they needed to carry out, the Battle of Gettysburg may have been turned in favor of the Confederacy.\(^9\) While not necessarily a completely new line of thinking, this chapter will demonstrate that the events dating back to September 1862 all play a role in how the Battle of Gettysburg played out.

**Historiography of Lee and the Battle of Gettysburg**

The historiography of this battle alone is enough to fill an entire bookshelf. Arguably one of the most-studied battles in American history, Gettysburg acts as one of our country’s most memorable “what-ifs?” Robert E. Lee is intertwined within this historiography because it was his decisions that created the outcome of the battle. Using poor tactical analysis, Lee threw away several opportunities that would have given him a better chance to win the battle, although it is difficult to determine whether or not victory was certain within these alternate timelines. Like the other chapters in this thesis, I have chosen to present the historiography of Gettysburg in

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\(^9\) Allen Guelzo argues that while Lee made some questionable decisions, not all of his decisions were foolish. He argues that he was acting “ill-informed” when was vague with Ewell about taking Cemetery Hill on July 1. Rather, Ewell’s corps was exhausted and it was not known if the hill would play a major role in the later part of the battle. In short, Guelzo argues that Lee “lost a battle he should have won” by not concentrating his forces at the onset, proved unable to properly coordinate attacks by the units he had available, and did not realize how fiercely the Army of the Potomac would fight. For more, see Allen Guelzo, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).
chronological order. I believe this helps readers understand the changes in the historiography over the many years since the battle took place.

Kent Gramm criticized Lee for singling out the center for the assault on the third day at Gettysburg in his book, *Gettysburg: A Meditation On War and Values*. Gramm argued that Lee made several crucial mistakes that cost him many troops in a “dense, murderous, and nearly point-blank crossfire.” First, Lee made the mistake of assuming that the center of the Union line was manned by so few troops and then to conclude that there were even less troops stationed there than was thought. Secondly, Lee severely underestimated the Union units that were stationed to the left and the right of the “focal point” of the attack. By-underestimating the total number of troops in the center and essentially ignoring the ability of the Union troops on the left and the right to move and fire, Lee cost himself a large portion of his army while gaining nothing.

Gramm made it clear that the idea of Pickett’s Charge was not nearly as foolish as historians now believe it to be. One of the major factors that led to its failure was the poor starting time by Longstreet, and the poor coordination of the division and brigade commanders. Gramm argues that the flanking fire created by the Union left and right should have been neutralized had the plan been executed properly. The troops on the far end of each side of the charge were supposed to receive and return fire from these flanking Union troops. However, the units on the right side of the attack did not go to the right point in the line which, as Gramm argues, is understandable given the scale of the attack and distance traveled. The units on the left did not start at the proper time and were late, allowing the Union right to fire into them.

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12 Gramm, 188.
Despite these problems, the attack was not likely to succeed even if these wrongs had been righted. As Gramm argues, “As it turned out, things did not all go right – and they had to all go right, even for what slim ephemeral chance might have existed.”

Charles P. Roland’s 1995 book, *Reflections on Lee*, demonstrates a further shifting of the blame at Gettysburg to Lee. Although Roland posits that some of the circumstances of the defeat lay on his corps commander’s Roland argues that “Lee himself must bear the ultimate responsibility for his defeat.” Roland notes that Lee was initially not in favor of bringing on a large engagement at Gettysburg, but he eventually capitulated to the notion. It should be noted, however, that Lee was more than willing to take an aggressive stance toward the Union army. Lee’s audacity would have to be at an all-time high given that his army was outnumbered by at least fifteen thousand Union troops.

Roland highlights Lee’s inability to clearly dictate his orders to Ewell on Day 1 at Gettysburg. Lee is well-known for ordering Ewell to take Cemetery Hill “if practicable, but to avoid a general engagement.” This is an incredibly vague order and, depending on how it is interpreted, even contradictory. Lee knew the strategic importance of Cemetery Hill and should have conveyed that to his corps commander. Regardless of this instance and Longstreet’s alleged dawdling on Day 2 before Little Round Top and Cemetery Ridge, Lee was ultimately responsible for his defeat. According to Roland, if Lee believed he could win at Gettysburg, he should have given the necessary orders to complete that. On the other hand, if Lee’s army did not

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13 Gramm, 189.
15 Roland, 61.
16 Ibid., 62.
17 Ibid., 63.
have a chance of winning, Lee should not have risked his army. Regardless, Roland argues that Lee overestimated the abilities of his men, believing them to be invincible.  

Roland further presents several intriguing arguments in regard to Lee’s behavior at Gettysburg, which was uncharacteristic of him. Roland argues that Lee’s assault on the third day demonstrates “combativeness and willingness to take the big risk,” and that it was similar to the costly attack he made against the Union position at Malvern Hill a year earlier. Furthermore, Roland argues that Lee’s issuing of orders was “tardy, fragmentary, tentative, and ambiguous,” and that Lee himself during the second day of battle was “extremely inert.” Finally, Roland suggests that Lee’s health played a factor in this behavior. Lee suffered exhaustion at Gettysburg and also sustained a bout of diarrhea, which may have hindered his abilities to command effectively.

Troy Harman argued that Lee’s original plan at Gettysburg was not carried out properly and his book, *Lee’s Real Plan at Gettysburg*, analyzed the battle, particularly the second day. The original plans for the Confederate assault during the second day called for Ewell to directly attack the Union right and drive them towards Cemetery Ridge and Cemetery Hill. While this was occurring, Longstreet was to attack indirectly from the Confederate right, in order to converge onto Cemetery Hill as Ewell was getting there. The attack called for Longstreet to march north, past the Round Tops and assault the Union center at Cemetery Hill. This was where the plan gets muddied. One of Longstreet’s division commanders, John Bell Hood, became hysterically worried about flanking fire coming from Little Round Top. While there were no troops there yet, his worry was legitimate as that is exactly what could happen had the Union

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18 Roland, 64.
19 Ibid., 64.
20 Ibid., 64.
21 Ibid., 65.
occupied the hill. Because of this, Hood lobbied to march around the Round Tops and take the Union from the rear. Longstreet refused this offer and many historians debate why this occurred. Some argue that Lee was present when Hood made his proposal and nixed it himself while others argue that Longstreet purposefully sabotaged the attack because Lee rejected his idea to move around the flank. If this was the case, Longstreet stuck to the plan that was based on the Union’s position during the morning hours. By the time Longstreet attacked during the evening, the Union occupied Little Round Top and rained fire down on Hood’s men just as he predicted.22

Although not well known to many outside of Lee’s officers, Longstreet created a proposal for Lee that could have shifted the course of the battle and, potentially, the war. According to Scott Bowden and Bill Ward, Longstreet suggested that the entire Confederate army should have marched around the Union right flank and entrenched itself in between Meade and Washington D.C. Some argue that Meade would have been forced to attack Lee because Washington was always concerned about its own vulnerability. An analysis by the authors points to the improbability of such a maneuver. According to Bowden and Ward, the Confederate army did not have a good series of roads near both Cemetery Hill and Cemetery Ridge. Because of this, the Confederate army would have had to detour much farther to the west, and then continue their march. Lee would have been forced to use the Emmitsburg Road to move in this direction, the road was in range of Meade’s cannons, and Buford’s cavalry had set up along the road near the Peach Orchard. In addition, the Union army was not fully concentrated which meant that more of Meade’s divisions could be using the Emmitsburg Road to march toward Gettysburg,

which would have put Lee’s troops in the position of Union troops to their east and south, during which Meade’s artillery would be pouring it on.\textsuperscript{23}

Bowden and Ward also argue that there were other roads that could have been used by Lee but the absence of Stuart’s cavalry made this potential maneuver very dangerous. Although Lee had around 1,800 amateur horsemen, using them would have been dangerous because of their inexperience and low numbers. Meade was also on high-alert in regard to a flanking movement by Lee. Not only was he well aware of the flanking movement performed by Jackson at Chancellorsville months earlier, but General Hancock had informed him on the night of July 1 that the Union flank was vulnerable from the south. With Meade occupying the high ground around Lee, it would have been both easy and likely for Meade to advance down the heights and into Lee’s flank. Had Lee taken the back roads, Bowden and Ward argue that Meade would have been competent enough to use Buford to screen and delay Lee while the Union infantry “moved faster” along the Emmitsburg Road. The authors argue that the possibility of Lee flanking the Union army was solely based on the belief that Meade was completely incompetent. However, previous information has shown that he was well-aware of Lee’s possible flanking maneuver.\textsuperscript{24}

Their final reason as to why Longstreet’s plan would not have worked deals with supplies and logistics. Not only would it have been extremely difficult for Lee to pick up and move from his current position, but his supply trains would have been under heavy threat. Moving would have also separated Lee from his communication, stretched his supply lines, and broken his line of retreat. Lee also should have known that there were Union troops in places like Frederick, Maryland and Harpers Ferry that would have threatened his movements and supply lines.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} Bowden and Ward, \textit{Last Chance for Victory}, 231-232.
\textsuperscript{25} Bowden and Ward, 233.
Although many historians point to Longstreet as one of the primary culprits of the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, there are some who argue that it was out of his control. Stephen Sears’ article, “General Longstreet and the Lost Cause,” argued that Longstreet was more of a victim of Lee and that “precious few Confederate decisions taken at Gettysburg had Longstreet’s approval.” Indeed, Longstreet would be blamed for the loss at Gettysburg years after the battle ended. Jubal Early, a division commander under Ewell during the Battle of Gettysburg, had set out after Lee’s death to “deify [Lee] as the paladin of the Lost Cause.” The Lost Cause argued that the South had fought a noble war against Northern invaders and industry and that the Confederacy’s leaders should be revered as heroes. It was at this juncture that Early created Longstreet as a scapegoat for Gettysburg. Early refused to sully Lee’s name and looked to Longstreet to carry that burden. Longstreet was especially vulnerable due to his assistance with Reconstruction under his friend, Ulysses S. Grant.

Early argued that he had met with Lee, Ewell, and General Robert Rodes the night after the first day at Gettysburg and Lee had told them that an attack would be made during the early morning hours on July 2. As such, Early had a distinct advantage when he made this accusation against Longstreet in 1872 because Lee and Rodes were dead and Ewell was on his deathbed. Because of this, it was Early’s word against Longstreet’s. He was president of the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia, head of the Lee Monument Association, and president of the Southern Historical Society. Although some of Lee’s staff argued that Lee had never proposed an attack at dawn, Early’s position in the Southern community had enough power behind it to start a chain reaction. He then enlisted the help of William Pendleton, Lee’s artillery chief. Pendleton argued that Lee had displayed a “Christlike cover-up” by not blaming Longstreet, thus

28 Ibid, 51.
adding to the myth of General Lee. Finally, J. William Jones, editor of the Southern Historical Papers, recruited other former Confederate leaders to write articles blaming Longstreet and absolving Lee. This produced a snow ball effect that Longstreet could not stop. Longstreet fought back through writing but blundered through his defense, most notably when he openly criticized Lee.29

Longstreet carried his grudge against Lee into the final years of his life, and continued to defend his criticism of the decisions made at Gettysburg. Although it is possible to argue that Longstreet’s plan was viable in a very general sense, the fact of the matter is that it probably would not have worked given communication and supply logistics, and a large part of the Army of the Potomac that was still marching and able to move quickly to meet Lee’s movements. Whether or not Longstreet’s plan could have succeeded, Lee refused to abandon his position in front of the heights occupied by the Army of the Potomac outside of Gettysburg.

Analysis of Day 1 at Gettysburg

The first day at Gettysburg is arguably the most crucial point of the battle. Initially, Lee was unwilling to mass his forces at Gettysburg for fear of a concentrated fight against the Union army. The Army of the Potomac’s strength was relatively well laid-out prior to July 1 by a scout employed by Longstreet. Known as “Harrison,” the scout had “walked through the lines of the Union army during the night of [June] 27th and the 28th…and brought information of the location of two corps of Federals at night of the 27th, and approximate positions of others.”30 Harrison was sent to Lee’s headquarters to give him the same information he had given Longstreet, but his presence was rejected by Lee. Lee did, however, give credit to Harrison and the other “amateur”

29 Sears, “General Longstreet and the Lost Cause,” 52.
scouts after Harrison’s reports of the Union movements were demonstrated to be very near to Longstreet’s idea of what the Union movements had been.  

The movements of Lee’s army had also been carried out incorrectly. While being pursued by the Army of the Potomac, Lee decided to move his army northward on June 29th towards Cashtown, in order to create distance between “heavy columns of the enemy [that] were hovering along the east base of [South] Mountain.” Longstreet argued that General A. P. Hill misconstrued the orders given to him by Lee and was under the impression that he should have marched toward Philadelphia or Harrisburg. It is possible that this is because he was new to corps command and was not yet adept at coordinating the march of such a large number of men. His lead division under Henry Heth was sent to Cashtown and his remaining two divisions followed on the 30th and July 1st. Longstreet made it clear that Lee wanted to center on Cashtown, not Gettysburg. Ewell’s corps was on the march for Harrisburg when Lee’s orders to move to Cashtown came in. Pettigrew’s brigade of Heth’s division made for Gettysburg on June 30th and there encountered John Buford’s cavalry before marching back towards Cashtown.

Lee was also at a disadvantage because his cavalry, under Jeb Stuart, was nowhere to be found and failed to screen the Army of Northern Virginia and provide reconnaissance of the Union army’s movements, leading Lee to be off his balance. Lee had given Stuart permission to ride around the Union east flank. Stuart took three of his best brigades and did just that, except Lee had given Stuart too much freedom and, as a result, Stuart was gone for many of the crucial moments during the battle at Gettysburg. Lee acknowledged this disadvantage in his final report of the Gettysburg campaign by remarking that the “movements of the army preceding the battle

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31 Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 347.
32 Longstreet, 348.
33 Ibid., 348-49.
of Gettysburg had been much embarrassed by the absence of cavalry.” Stuart’s absence caused problems throughout the rest of the battle because Lee began the battle blind and remained blind to the Army of the Potomac’s movements, its strength, and the strength of its defensive positions.

Stuart’s absence was met with anger by some of the officers of the Confederate army. The list of these officers is considerably long and includes Longstreet, Henry Heth, Edward Porter Alexander, Walter Taylor, and C. M. Wilcox. Moxley Sorrel, of Longstreet’s staff, directly blamed Stuart for the defeat and Charles Marshall, of Lee’s staff, urged Lee to court-martial Stuart for his actions. The attacks on Stuart were not met without backlash. John Mosby argued that Longstreet and Heth attacked Stuart’s role in the battle to cover up their own mistakes. Not all of Stuart’s cavalrymen came to his aid once the accusations began. Fitzhugh Lee argued that Stuart should have been positioned between Meade and Lee throughout the campaign but Fitz Lee did acknowledge Stuart had permission from Robert E. Lee to conduct his raids in Pennsylvania. In addition, regarding Stuart’s report of the Gettysburg campaign, Wade Hampton argued that “I never read a more erroneous – to call it no harsher name – one than it was.”

Instead, Lee cautioned his commanders, particularly Henry Heth, to practice caution and to not bring on a full engagement. Lee eventually capitulated and ordered his forces to push on to Gettysburg. However, it should be noted that, although Lee wanted to avoid an attack at Gettysburg, it was only because the army was not concentrated. Indeed, Lee’s move into the North was motivated by several factors, one of which was to take the fight to the Union. At this

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36 Thomas, *Bold Dragoon*, 252.
37 Thomas, 253.
38 Ibid., 253.
point, Lee’s audacity was at an all-time high considering his army was outnumbered by at least 15,000 Union troops.\(^{39}\)

While Lee eventually committed his army on the first day, his major blunder was his lack of clarity in issuing orders, particularly to Richard Ewell. Ewell had been a division commander under Jackson and had recently been promoted to corps command upon Jackson’s death. Ewell had performed quite admirably under Jackson and even in the first months as a corps commander. However, he is mostly remembered for his failure to assault Cemetery Hill despite Lee’s vague orders. Lee had told Ewell to “take the hill occupied by the enemy, if he found it practicable, but to avoid a general engagement until the arrival of the other divisions of the army.”\(^{40}\) Given the vagueness of the order and Lee’s insistence on avoiding a direct confrontation with the Union army earlier that day, it is completely understandable for Ewell to have used caution and avoid an assault on a hill that might have been receiving Union reinforcements in the very near future. Ewell was not put in an advantageous position when Lee refused to allow A. P. Hill’s corps to reinforce Ewell and even Jubal Early, Ewell’s aggressive division commander agreed they should not assault the hill.\(^{41}\)

According to Harry W. Pfanz, Jubal Early is one of the possible reasons why Ewell did not press the attack on Cemetery Hill late on the first day. Pfanz argues that Early sent troops to support General William “Extra Billy” Smith’s brigade situated along the York Pike. Smith’s brigade anchored Ewell’s left flank which was being threatened by “a large Federal force.” Despite Early’s belief that the report was not accurate, he sent a brigade under General John Brown Gordon to assist and stop the “stampeding.” In doing this, Pfanz argues that Early “squandered half his strength to answer a request in which he professed later to have had no

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\(^{41}\) Sears, *Gettysburg*, 228.
faith.”42 In addition, he left Ewell with fewer men and less likely an ability to take Cemetery Hill.43

Despite Early’s protests of an assault on Cemetery Hill, another general under Ewell realized the value of holding the heights in the early stages of the battle. According to General Isaac Trimble, he scouted around Gettysburg and discovered the value of Culp’s Hill. Trimble then urged Ewell to send his brigade and artillery to occupy the hill. He further argued that the hill would be seized by Union forces if Ewell did not act quickly. Ewell reportedly replied, “When I need advice from a junior officer, I general ask it.”44 Although there were factors working against Ewell, there is no doubt that blame can be put on both Ewell’s and Lee’s shoulders. Ewell seemingly dragged his feet and remained indecisive at a crucial time during the battle, certain extenuating circumstances notwithstanding. Lee is certainly at fault because his orders were unclear enough that they were either confusing or misinterpreted by Ewell. Even if Ewell read the orders wrong or interpreted them wrong, it was Lee’s responsibility to make it abundantly clear what he wanted done in regard to Cemetery Hill. Although there is no way to know if Ewell would have attacked had the orders been more concrete, it would certainly have taken much of the blame for the blunder away from Lee.

Analysis of Day 2 at Gettysburg

The beginning of the second day at Gettysburg saw Meade and the Union army entrenched on the heights outside of Gettysburg, mostly along Cemetery Ridge and Culp’s Hill.

43 Pfanz, 344.
44 Trimble to Bachelder, 8 Feb. 1883, David L. Ladd and Audrey J. Ladd, eds., The Bachelder Papers, Vol. 3, 930-31. Harry W. Pfanz provides an interesting consideration of this incident in Gettysburg – The First Day. According to Pfanz, Trimble’s request was more akin to a “pest[erring]” of Ewell and, since the account was written when he was in his eighties, it is likely that Trimble was attempting to enhance his own importance. Pfanz also notes that a separate account in Trimble’s “The Battle and Campaign of Gettysburg” argued that Ewell made “some impatient reply.” (212)
The second day is highlighted by the fight between Lee and Longstreet regarding the Confederate attack plan. While Longstreet is in favor of abandoning the position in front of the Union heights and swinging around and entrenching in between Meade and Washington D. C., Lee was adamant that he needed to attack the Union heights. Lee argued that “If [Meade] is there to-morrow, I will attack him,” Longstreet, ever the cautious voice, retorted, “If [Meade] is there to-morrow it will be because he wants you to attack…”\(^45\) J. F. C Fuller presented an interesting and entirely believable interpretation of Lee’s actions on the second day. He argued that Lee never truly analyzed his victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. This led him to believe that he could use any strategy he wished and he would still be able to defeat the Army of the Potomac. However, once Lee was faced with a strong Union defensive line on good ground, he exhibited tunnel vision and refused to consider an alternate plan.\(^46\)

By the second day of Gettysburg, the Union had firmly dug in along Culp’s Hill, Cemetery Hill, and Cemetery Ridge, ending just north of Little Round Top. By digging in along this position, the Union had arranged itself into the shape of a fishhook.\(^47\) Lee’s original plan was to flank the Union left, which he believed to be in front of Cemetery Ridge. The plan would be for Longstreet’s corps, minus Pickett’s division, which was still a day’s march away, to take Seminary Ridge, which was to the south of Cemetery Ridge and believed to be undefended. Longstreet would then flank the Third Corps situated in front of Cemetery Ridge. At this same time, General A.P. Hill’s corps was to assault the Union center to prevent any reinforcement of the left flank. On the Union right flank, at Culp’s Hill, Ewell was ordered to engage in a false


\(^46\) An excellent summary of the Union and Confederate positions and battle plans on the second day can be found in Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg – The Second Day* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

attack. However, Ewell was given orders to make it an all-out assault if it was possible.\textsuperscript{48} However, this was yet again a moment when Lee was not direct with his orders which could have led to a more promising attack.

Despite Lee’s attack seeming strategically plausible, the Union position was much different than what Lee had thought. During this battle, Lee was without his cavalry, under General J.E.B. Stuart. Stuart had been instructed by Lee to create a plan to conduct another cavalry raid and pass through the rear of the Union army. Stuart, however, had been given vague instructions by Lee on how to conduct his raids. As a result, Stuart found himself absent for most the battle at Gettysburg.\textsuperscript{49} Because of this, Lee was wrong about how the Union army was positioned. Rather than the Union left flank being in front of Cemetery Hill, it was actually on the crest of Cemetery Hill. This gave the Union a high position along the entirety of its line. However, Lee was given a gift prior to his attack. General Dan Sickles, in command of the Third Corps, was dissatisfied with the position he held on Cemetery Ridge. Believing he could find a better position for his artillery, he moved forward to higher elevation along the Emmitsburg Road. The Third Corps was now anchored on the right at a place called Devil’s Den, and their left was at the Peach Orchard. Unfortunately, Sickles’ daring move created a salient, a position that must be defended from two sides. It was also too late for Meade to recall Sickles, as Longstreet’s attack had begun.\textsuperscript{50}

Meade was now at a disadvantage. The Third Corps was out in the open and if the left flank was rolled up, the entire Army of the Potomac could break. Meade was forced to send


\textsuperscript{49} Daniel Zimmerman “J.e.b. Stuart: Gettysburg Scapegoat,” \textit{America's Civil War}, May98, 50-57.

20,000 men, mostly from the Fifth Corps, to reinforce the left. The Union troops were placed to the south of Sickles, ending on Little Round Top, a very steep, rocky hill. Sickles’ salient would be broken at Devil’s Den and the Peach Orchard, but reinforcements from Meade would plug any holes created during the attack. The Confederate attack, which was initially successful, was beaten back at Little Round Top by the 20th Maine and several other regiments of the Fifth Corps.

Major General Abner Doubleday argued Lee was ultimately responsible for the loss at Gettysburg and it became clear this was the case as early as the second day. According to Doubleday, Union Generals Warren and Slocum advised Meade that an attack on Lee’s left, from the Union position at Culp’s Hill, was “unadvisable.” Meade listened to his generals and began stacking units on the Union left in an effort to assault Lee’s right flank. Doubleday agreed with Meade’s idea. One would be curious as to how Chancellorsville would have played out had Hooker been as receptive to the suggestions of his subordinates. Although the assault on Lee’s right would have been a “much more sensible option,” Doubleday argued that Lee, however, “solved the problem for [Meade], and, fortunately for us, forced [Meade] to remain on the defensive, by ordering an assault against each extremity of the Union line.”

Doubleday continued his analysis by arguing that “columns converging on a central force almost invariably fail in their objective and are beaten in detail.” Doubleday argued that the second day at Gettysburg exemplified this as Lee repeatedly sent columns against the Union lines which were defeated before other parts of his army could arrive to sustain the attack.

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According to Doubleday, “[Lee] realized the old fable. The peasant could not break the bundle of fagots, but he could break one at a time until all were gone.” Further, Lee’s “concave” form of battle put him at a disadvantage as it took him a much longer time to communicate between different parts of his line and organize troops. Finally, Doubleday argued that Lee “could easily have manoeuvred [sic] Meade” from his position on the heights. If this were the case, Lee should have attacked at daybreak considering his entire army was concentrated and the Army of the Potomac was still missing the Fifth and Sixth Corps, as well as two brigades of the Third Corps.

Lee’s lack of analysis following his victories and the belief that his men were invincible only contributed to his questionable command tactics at Gettysburg. The belief of invincibility was also shared by some of Lee’s commanders and, subsequently, the soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee’s trust of his generals to carry out their own strategies under the umbrella of his comprehensive plan gave the soldiers of the army confidence in their officers as they believed they were strong enough to operate autonomously. Lee also had a habit of underestimating the Union army, linking the abilities and mannerisms of the Union commanders to the behavior of the Union troops. While the Army of the Potomac’s high command typically failed its soldiers, there was nothing inherently “bad” about the men of the Union army. In this case, Lee failed to distinguish the difference between “bad troops and good troops led badly.” The Union suffered from breakdowns in command and Lee had beaten a commander, but not an army.

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57 Ibid., 158.
58 Dumas and Malone, 204.
59 Churchill, 111.
In regard to Longstreet’s alternate plan, Lee was still of the belief that he could win the battle by directly assaulting the Union position. As General Abner Doubleday described,

The rebel commander, however, finding the Army of the Potomac in front of him, having unbounded confidence in his troops, and elated by the success of the first day’s fight, believed he could gain a great victory then and there, and end the war, and determined to attempt it. He was sick of these endless delays and constant sacrifices, and hoped one strong sword-thrust would slay his opponent, and enable the South to crown herself queen of the North American continent.60

Before discussing why this was a poor decision by Lee, it is important to analyze Longstreet’s role in the failed attack. Throughout the second day, Longstreet became increasingly agitated with Lee because he felt his plan was superior. He had tried to force his plan on Lee several times throughout the day to no avail. As a result, Margaret Sanborn argued that Longstreet “sulked,” and “deliberately” dragged his feet, which delayed the attack on the Union left flank.61 This cost the Confederacy precious time, considering the reinforcements placed on Little Round Top arrived just prior to Longstreet’s late assault on the hill. Sanborn also addressed Lee’s unwillingness to discipline his generals, a theme that links back to the main argument of this thesis. While Lee admonished Stuart upon his late arrival to the Army of Northern Virginia headquarters, Longstreet’s apparent insubordination was swept under the table.62 While Lee’s bouts of diarrhea during the battle may have caused him too much discomfort to deal with Longstreet, Sanborn argued that Lee “seemed singularly inept at all times to cope with Old Pete’s fits of sullenness and obdurateness.”63

Although Doubleday argued that Lee is ultimately responsible for the failure on the second day, he provides a well-thought-out analysis of the fighting between certain Confederate generals. This section is highlighted by James Longstreet, who has been repeatedly examined as

60 Doubleday, 159.
62 Sanborn, 198.
63 Ibid., 199.
a possible “saboteur.” Doubleday argued that many of the officers disagree on whether or not Lee ordered the attack to start at 9 A.M, as well as when Longstreet was “dilatory” and deserved the blame for not making the assault at the right time. Longstreet apparently waited for Law’s brigade to advance to his position and afterward there was a fair amount of marching and countermarching in order to avoid detection by the Union lines.64 Doubleday asserts, “The fact is, Longstreet saw we had a strong position and was not well pleased at the duty assigned him, for he thought it more than probable his attempt would fail.”65

Longstreet was sometimes one to exaggerate occurrences during the war and Gettysburg is no exception. In a letter to the editor from 1879, a private who served in the Union army at Gettysburg sought to refute several of Longstreet’s claims. However, the anonymity of the private leads one to be skeptical of the information presented. The private did not believe that Longstreet thought 12,000 of his men could break through the Union line on July 2, given its strength. The private argued, the men of Longstreet’s corps would have to be “the invincible, the immortal 12,000 that was not equaled in the late war or any other war.”66 The private also questioned whether “[Longstreet] expect[s] any one to believe that his 12,000 men were fighting and driving back four of our largest and best corps and two divisions? This is ridiculous.”67 The private admitted that the Confederate army performed some spectacular feats throughout the course of the war, but Longstreet’s account of the second day at Gettysburg is riddled with errors. The private refuted Longstreet’s claim that his 12,000 “charged the whole Federal army” and also questioned whether the men under Longstreet even fought some of the best men in the Union army. The private argued that Longstreet did slowly drive back the Union Second Corps

64 Doubleday, 158.
65 Ibid., 158-59.
but by the time the Third Corps arrived, they swept the Confederates down Little Round Top and took many Confederates prisoners.68

**Analysis of Day 3 at Gettysburg**

The Confederate attack plan on the third day at Gettysburg can be summarized as an all-out assault on a point of the Union line that Lee felt was vulnerable. Lee believed that the Union center was the most vulnerable part of the line because the Confederates had been repulsed on both Union flanks the day before. Lee assumed the Union had shifted troops to withstand the Confederate assaults and had left the center with a lack of reinforcements. Lee’s plan was to begin the attack with a massive artillery barrage intended to break up the Union’s infantry in the center and silence the Union artillery so Longstreet’s men could charge with relatively little cannon interference.

While Lee shares blame for the failure of the attack, due to its relatively low success-rate given the coordination of an attack of this size and the adequate defenses of the Union army, Longstreet should also be saddled with some of the blame. Pickett’s division was supposed to be on the battlefield by daylight of July 2, but the orders were not sent.69 Lee left Longstreet in charge of coordinating the actual attack and he consistently passed responsibility for its execution on to generals Pickett and Edward Porter Alexander, Longstreet’s Chief of Artillery.

In several dispatches between Longstreet and Alexander, Longstreet consistently urged Alexander to take the lead in informing Pickett of when the attack should occur. In the first dispatch, Longstreet deferred judgment to send Pickett in for the assault and instructed Alexander to fire on the Union position, but if it does not “drive off the enemy or greatly

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68 “A Private’s Account,” July 28, 1879.
demoralise him...I would prefer that you should not advise Gen Pickett to make the charge.” Longstreet finished this dispatch by writing that he “shall rely a great deal upon your good judgment” when making the decision on whether or not to send Pickett. Alexander replied that he did not have a clear field of vision during the artillery attack based on how the Union position was situated, and the smoke from the artillery blocked any available vision. He also cautioned Longstreet to carefully consider an alternate plan, if there was one, because the bombardment will “take all the Arty ammunition” and there will be none left for a second attack. Finally, he stated that his attack, “even if [it] is entirely successful,” would be extremely costly to the army. The time of these dispatches is not specified in the documents.

At around 12:30 PM, Longstreet informed Alexander that the purpose of that day is to “advance the Inf. if the Arty has the desired effect of driving the enemys off, or, having other effect such as to warrant us in making the attack.” Longstreet once again instructed Alexander to inform Pickett as to when the attack should commence and advised Alexander to advance as many cannons as possible with the infantry once the attack started. Ten minutes later, Alexander confirmed that he would notify Pickett when “our Arty fire is at its best.” The bombardment began after this most recent dispatch and lasted at least an hour, although some historians debate the length of the bombardment from 45 minutes to over two hours. The Confederate artillery had little effect on the Union position as the fuses delayed detonation of the

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70 Dispatch from James Longstreet to Edward Porter Alexander, July 3, 1863.
71 Dispatch from James Longstreet to Edward Porter Alexander, July 3, 1863.
72 Dispatch from Edward Porter Alexander to James Longstreet, July 3, 1863.
73 Dispatch from James Longstreet to Edward Porter Alexander, 12:30 PM, July 3, 1863.
74 Dispatch from James Longstreet to Edward Porter Alexander, 12:30 PM, July 3, 1863.
75 Dispatch from Edward Porter Alexander to James Longstreet, 12:40 PM, July 3, 1863.
shells and many of them exploded in the Union rear, leaving the front lines relatively untouched.\textsuperscript{77}

The Confederate artillery had been pouring so much ammunition into the bombardment it was beginning to run out. As such, Alexander sent a dispatch to Pickett around 1:25 PM, urging Pickett to “come at once” if the assault is to even occur, otherwise the artillery will not be able to support Pickett. Alexander also informed Pickett that the enemy fire has not weakened and that there are still 18 guns firing “from the cemetery.”\textsuperscript{78} After receiving no reply, Alexander sent another message to Pickett 15 minutes later, telling him the guns have been driven off. He finishes the dispatch by pleading, “For God’s sake come on quick, or we cannot support you. Ammunition is nearly out.”\textsuperscript{79} While it would be understandable that Alexander had issues with how Longstreet had essentially left him to fend for himself, Alexander’s ire was directed at Lee. Alexander blamed Lee for the loss at Gettysburg many years later stating, “Never, never, never did Gen. Lee himself bollox \textit{sic} a fight as he did this.”\textsuperscript{80}

Despite Alexander’s anger at Lee, he should be equally angry at how Longstreet approached the situation. Longstreet consistently attempted to pass off responsibility to his subordinates in an attempt to distance himself from the attack, which he believed to be a failure before it occurred. Earlier in the day, he had made his opinion on the assault clear to Lee:

General, I have been a soldier all my life. I have been with soldiers engaged in fights by couples, by squads, regiments, divisions, and armies, and should know, as well as any one, what soldiers can do. It is my opinion that no fifteen thousand men ever arrayed for battle can take that position.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{77} Sears, \textit{Gettysburg}, 397.
\textsuperscript{78} Dispatch from Edward Porter Alexander to George Pickett, 1:25 PM, July 3, 1863.
\textsuperscript{79} Dispatch from Edward Porter Alexander to George Pickett, 1:40 PM, July 3, 1863.
\textsuperscript{80} Gary W. Gallagher, ed., \textit{Three Days at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership} (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1999), 47.
\textsuperscript{81} Wert, \textit{Gettysburg: Day Three}, 283.
Despite Longstreet’s opinion on the matter, Lee insisted that the assault proceed as planned. When the time came for Pickett to begin the assault, Longstreet recalled the “effort to speak the order failed, and I could only indicate it by an affirmative bow.” Longstreet’s aversion likely stemmed from a true belief that the attack would be repulsed but it may also have come from a belief that Lee was wrong and he should have been listened to the day before.

Longstreet’s aversion of responsibility and poor planning by Lee may not have been the only reasons for the Confederate defeat on July 3. An account of Pickett’s Charge by a soldier in one of his divisions argued that the failure of the attack was because of the soldiers themselves, not Lee or Longstreet. Captain Thomas D. Houston, of the Eleventh Virginia Infantry, attributed the failure of Pickett’s Charge to the “wild and unaccountable panic” of the troops who were meant to support Pickett’s division. According to Houston, the supporting troops began to panic even before they reached the range of the Union muskets. Houston claims, “after terrible loss we (Pickett’s Division) reached the breastworks and some of the men had taken possession of the cannon, when we saw the enemy advancing heavy reinforcements. We looked back for ours but in vain; we were compelled to fall back and had again to run as targets for their [musket] balls.”

Longstreet’s Role in the Loss at Gettysburg

With regard to Longstreet’s disobedience to orders, a letter to his uncle later that summer detailed his views on Lee and the battle itself. The letter was written in confidence to his uncle and other close relatives because it criticized Lee who was still in command of the army. Longstreet told his uncle of his plan for Gettysburg and how Lee dismissed it. He also clarified

82 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 392
that he believed part of his duty was to express his views to the commanding general and if the commanding general did not adopt these views, it was up to Longstreet to change his own vision and “execute [Lee’s] orders as faithfully and as zealously as if they had been my own.” It seems that Longstreet either did not remember his own belief system during the Gettysburg campaign or he is attempting to save face with his relatives.

Longstreet continued his letter by lamenting that if Lee had followed his plan, the battle at Gettysburg would have had a different outcome, although he stated that “I am much inclined to accept the present condition as for the best.” Longstreet also argued there were no serious plans that did not receive consideration by Lee but the suggestions by Longstreet were “overlooked.” Despite these seeming reversals of opinion by Longstreet, he concluded by offering that all blame for the loss be put on him. As he stated, “As General Lee is our commander, he should have all the support and influence that we can give him.” Longstreet was somewhat vindicated in a letter from Lee in January 1864. Lee admitted if he had listened to Longstreet at Gettysburg, “how different all might have been.” This sentiment was further substantiated by Captain T. J. Goree, of Longstreet’s staff. In a letter from Goree to Longstreet, Goree explains that, in the winter of 1864, Longstreet had sent him to Lee with some dispatches. Upon his arrival, Goree noticed that there were a handful of Union newspapers sitting on a table. Lee remarked that after reading the official reports printed in these papers of the Battle of Gettysburg, he was certain that the Confederate army would have been successful had Lee allowed Longstreet to carry out his plan.

84 Longstreet’s letter to his uncle, July 24, 1863, published New Orleans Republican, January 25, 1876.
85 Longstreet’s letter to his uncle, July 24, 1863.
86 Longstreet’s letter to his uncle, July 24, 1863.
87 Lee’s letter to Longstreet, January, 1864, published New Orleans Republican, January 25, 1876.
88 Letter from Goree to Longstreet, winter 1864, published New Orleans Republican, January 25, 1876.
In regard to Longstreet’s seeming disobedience during the second day, Margaret Sanborn attempted to explain why Lee did not admonish Longstreet. Lee had greeted an extremely tardy Jeb Stuart with harsh sarcasm once he finally arrived in Gettysburg late into the second day, yet he seemed to let Longstreet’s apparent insubordination slide under the table.89 While Lee did suffer from bouts of diarrhea at Gettysburg which may have caused him too much discomfort to deal with Longstreet, Sanborn argued that Lee “seemed singularly inept at all times to cope with Old Pete’s fits of sullenness and obduracy.”90 However, bouts of diarrhea seem like a strange reason to keep him from dealing with his subordinates. Indeed, Sanborn is of the opinion that it was Longstreet who was ultimately responsible for the loss at Gettysburg. Longstreet was certain he had a superior plan to the one Lee had drawn up and tried to force it onto Lee several times. When it did not come to pass, Longstreet “sulked,” and “deliberately” dragged his feet when moving his troops into position, which delayed the attack on the Union left flank.91 Lee was also certain that if Longstreet would have attacked as ordered on the second day, “the battle would have been gained.”92

Although his book, *Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant*, focuses mostly on James Longstreet’s legacy following the Civil War, William Garrett Piston, considered Longstreet’s legacy alongside other Confederate heroes such as Jackson and Lee. Following the war, Longstreet faced heavy criticism due to his affiliation with and support of the Republican efforts to assist the Southern states.93 However, Longstreet’s military reputation did not come under attack until after the death of Lee, his close friend. Piston argued that Lee’s death opened the door for attacks on

90 Sanborn, 199.
91 Ibid, 127.
92 Ibid, 127.
Longstreet. Furthermore, Piston argued that at the time of Lee’s death, he was “only one of a large number of Confederate heroes” and was arguably second to Jackson in the memory of most of Virginia.  

This quickly changed when many of Lee’s former staff members came forward and attempted to enshrine Lee into memory. Piston argued that the main difference between Jackson’s supporters and Lee’s supporters is that Jackson’s supporters implied, incorrectly, that Jackson was Lee’s closest friend and second in command. This subconscious snubbing is in contrast to Lee’s supporters who built Lee’s reputation by attacking Longstreet, arguing that he had cost Lee victory. By shifting the blame from Lee to Longstreet, these supporters could portray Lee as a “sort of pure and stainless hero that the Southern people, evolving from Lost Cause rationale, were beginning to expect.” Chief among these supporters was former Confederate general Jubal Early, who spearheaded the attack against Longstreet in the early 1870s.

Lee’s Failure to Properly Clarify Commander’s Intent

J. F. C. Fuller further argued that Lee relied on the advice of his corps commanders, as did Grant, except Lee “extracted his ideas from them, and once he had done so, the normal detail of the art of war he frequently abandoned to chance.” Lee was also adept at judging character but he also relied too heavily on his own judgment, using that to guide his entire strategy. While he was able to understand, McClellan, Burnside, and Hooker, he was unable to thoroughly understand Meade and never understood Grant. Lee’s penchant for relying too heavily on judge

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95 Piston, 117.
96 Ibid, 118.
97 Fuller, 377.
of character signaled a potential downfall once McClellan was removed because from then on, Lee understood less and less about each man to take command of the Union armies. Finally, Fuller argued the reason Lee was unable to understand Grant was because of how the two men viewed the war. Grant commanded his army in a theatre in which strategy dominated, while Lee commanded in a theatre in which politics dominated. Lee understood men like Burnside and Hooker because they commanded politically. Once Grant arrived, he brought with him a new type of war and “[Lee] was confronted not only by a man he could not understand, but by a problem and a war which were utterly novel to him.” Lee had no political foundation to work from and he served a cause that was beginning to falter after the Battle of Gettysburg.

Dumas Malone and Basil Rauch provide an overview of the turmoil in the Unites States from 1841 to 1877 in their 1960 book, *Crisis of the Union*. In the chapter, “The Height of the Conflict, 1862-1863,” they examine Lee’s ascent to command and his first two years as a commander. According to the authors, one of Lee’s faults was his gentlemanliness. They argue that Lee’s greatest weakness was his unwillingness to discipline or rein in opinionated subordinates. Throughout the course of the war, Lee left most battlefield decisions up to his junior commanders. Although this earned him undying respect from both his generals and his soldiers, there were times when it weakened Lee’s strategy. However, the confidence Lee had in his generals transferred to his men who came to believe that they were invincible.

This deference of battlefield decisions to his commanders culminated at the Battle of Chancellorsville, when Stonewall Jackson found and utilized a number of small roads to flank

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98 Fuller, 376-377.
99 Ibid, 379.
100 Ibid, 379.
101 Malone and Rauch, *Crisis of the Union 1841-1877*, 204.
the Union army on its right flank.102 This led to Lee’s bold move into Pennsylvania. Malone and Rauch give several motivations for Lee’s invasion of the North. First, his army had been severely low on both food and horses. The lack of fighting in the North would provide them with both food and horses to refit. Second, an invasion may strengthen the peace party in the North which would push to force a treaty. However, the authors argue that Lee was “overconfident” and he “underestimated” his opponents.103 Finally, the authors argue that it was Lee’s lack of heavy hand when dealing with his generals that had led to his defeat at Gettysburg. Stuart’s absence for most of the battle, Ewell’s reluctance to take Cemetery Ridge, and Longstreet’s resistance to Lee’s plan had been secondary causes of the defeat. The primary cause was Lee’s passiveness in command.104

Although blame for the loss at Gettysburg can be shared by James Longstreet and some of the other generals of the Army of Northern Virginia, it is Lee who should be criticized for this loss. Despite Longstreet’s stubbornness, it was Lee’s job as commander of the army to ensure that his orders were carried out. While Longstreet should have been allowed to operate without the watchful eye of Lee on the second day at Gettysburg, it would have been beneficial for Lee to consider taking charge the next day, instead of relying on Longstreet to do his duty, once again. In addition, Lee’s failure to properly convey orders to both Stuart and Ewell severely hindered the Army of Northern Virginia’s chances of achieving victory at Gettysburg. Lee did not give clear orders to Stuart, who cavaliered around the countryside, leaving Lee’s army blind and unscreened. Lee also did not clearly urge Ewell to assault Cemetery Hill on the first day at Gettysburg. While Lee had very able subordinates, his lack of clarity in his orders left his army vulnerable to the Army of the Potomac, which was finally working as a cohesive unit.

102 Malone and Rauch, 213.
103 Ibid., 214.
104 Ibid., 216.
CONCLUSION

Robert E. Lee remains one of the most beloved generals in American history. He is admired by many observers for his tenacity on the battlefield as well as his grandfatherly demeanor. While he was a successful commander on the battlefield, he is best described as “talented,” but not overly-proficient, as he is normally labeled. Many of Lee’s victories, including those at Antietam and Chancellorsville, were the product of quick-thinking, boldness, and the proper conveyance of his commander’s intent to his very competent and able corps and division commanders. Lee also benefitted from facing a handful of incompetent commanders in the forms of John Pope, George B. McClellan, Ambrose Burnside, and Joseph Hooker. These men all made extremely poor decisions on the battlefield when facing Lee even though many of them had plans that, if executed properly, would have certainly pushed Lee to his limits both strategically and numerically. However, Lee’s defeat at Gettysburg was the product of poor conveyance of his commander’s intent and his inability to consider the input of his subordinates.

Although Lee fixed these problems after Gettysburg, the battle in the small Pennsylvania town was Lee’s last opportunity at gaining independence for the Confederacy. After Gettysburg, Lee began to backtrack and his last two invasions of the north had been stonewalled by McClellan and Meade. Although there would be more fights between the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia, they were minor in their casualty counts. Ulysses S. Grant was promoted and commanded all Union forces by March of 1864 and Lee was relegated to a defensive strategy in hopes of staying alive and prolonging the Confederacy’s chance for peace talks. Gettysburg turned out to be the last major battle in which Lee undertook a major offensive, and the battle ended up being one of his greatest defeats.
Lee has been reexamined as a historical figure more times than can be counted. The historiography of the Confederate general is vast and could fill several rooms lined with shelves. It is because of this, that I had to be very careful in choosing the scholarship I consulted for this project. Chancellorsville and Antietam are two battles that defined the early years of the Civil War. Antietam only reinforced the belief that the war would be long and bloody. Chancellorsville demonstrated the prowess of Lee and the strong bond between Lee and his most trusted subordinate, Thomas Jackson. However, I would argue that Antietam and Chancellorsville, as well as Fredericksburg, were important for the Union cause in addition to the Confederate cause. It is because of Lee’s escape from Antietam with his army intact and his nearly complete victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville that he was emboldened to invade the north for a second time. The confidence that Lee had was spilling over into his men and he believed he could accomplish all of the objectives he set forth prior to his invasion. However, this confidence is what ultimately lost him the battle. His over-confidence on the second and third day of Gettysburg exemplified his insistence that he could accomplish whatever he desired on the battlefield. His refusal to listen to advice from his subordinates also reinforces the argument that Lee was blinded and arguably hurt psychologically from his victories in late 1862 and early 1863.

Just about every battle throughout the war has been reexamined time and again but this project takes this reexamination one step further. I created this project as a case-study with the intention of showing that Lee’s performance at Gettysburg, in particular, was not an isolated incident. Although it might appear that Lee was simply off his game, it, in fact, demonstrates a growing problem within his own mind and his army. The victories at Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville clouded his judgment.
As for Fredericksburg, I did not include it because there nothing noteworthy about it. Although Lee was forced to hold against an onslaught of Union attacks and, ironically enough, both battles saw the Union sending in attacking units piecemeal, Lee’s situation at Antietam was exacerbated by the Lost Order and McClellan’s missed opportunity. Although McClellan did not ultimately seize the initiative and destroy Lee’s army as he claimed he would, Lee still faced a much larger danger than he did at Fredericksburg. In addition, Lee did not make any major mistakes at Fredericksburg as he had done at Antietam. Rather, Burnside was unable to seize Marye’s Heights because bureaucratic constraints delayed the deployment of the pontoon bridges necessary to cross the river prior to Lee’s arrival. This allowed Lee to fight Burnside in the city of Fredericksburg and anchor himself very well along the heights beyond the town. At Antietam, Lee foolishly made a desperate fight for the gaps at South Mountain when it would have been wiser to find a good defensive position and being making preparations to receive McClellan’s attacks. In a way, Fredericksburg did not display Lee’s faults as Antietam did.

Chancellorsville acted less in its own right and more as a precursor to Gettysburg. The victory at Chancellorsville should be attributed to both Lee and Jackson. While it was Lee who created the idea to flank the Eleventh Corps, it was Jackson who so ably carried out the mission. It is difficult to imagine anyone but the hard-driving Jackson accomplishing a long forced-march of 12 miles and getting his men into position while still having several hours of daylight to work with. Coupled with incompetence by Hooker and Howard, Jackson achieved a smashing victory that is often credited to Lee as he was the “mastermind.” However, Jackson’s death seriously diminished Lee’s ability to conduct an offensive campaign. He had lost the fiery commander who was willing to assault a Union position at any cost. Chancellorsville also demonstrated what Lee could accomplish with Jackson at his side and Gettysburg demonstrated what he could not
accomplish without Jackson by his side. This is idea is reinforced by the debacle concerning Ewell and Cemetery Hill on the first day at Gettysburg and Longstreet’s delay in getting around the Union left flank. There is little reason not to believe that Jackson could have accomplished such a march and attack, considering he accomplished a very similar task just a few months prior.

However, this brings everything back to the main point of the thesis. Lee was afforded early victories in the war because all of the pieces he needed to win fell into place. He was fortunate to be facing men who seemed to forget half of their military training once the battles began. He benefited from the presence of talented corps and division commanders. Once Jackson, and several other subordinates, were taken from him in the late months of 1862 and early 1863, Lee was forced to reorganize his army and assign new roles to his remaining commanders. However, he was unable to capitalize on their strengths and adapt to their weaknesses as he had in years prior. Lee’s insistence on having Longstreet, a defensive-minded general, conduct a series of quick attacks against a position he knew to be strongly fortified was met with disaster. His inability to properly convey his commander’s intent and understand the strengths and weaknesses was realized at Gettysburg, but corrected afterwards. But by that time, the damage had been done. Lee was kicked out of Pennsylvania and he remained on the defensive against an aggressive, intelligent foe in Ulysses S. Grant until the bitter end of the war.
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