MAINTAINING ORDER IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS:
ROBERT E. LEE’S USAGE OF HIS PERSONAL STAFF

A thesis submitted
to Kent State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

by

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May, 2009
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS........................................................................................................iv

Chapter

I. Introduction..........................................................................................................................1

II. The Seven Days: The (Mis)use of an Army Staff.............................................................17

III. The Maryland Campaign: Improvement in Staff Usage.............................................49

IV. Gettysburg: The Limits of Staff Improvement...............................................................82

V. Conclusion......................................................................................................................121

BIBLIOGRAPHY..................................................................................................................134
Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the history faculty at Kent State University for their patience and wise counsel during the preparation of this thesis. In particular, during a graduate seminar, Dr. Kim Gruenwald inspired this project by asking what topics still had never been written about concerning the American Civil War. Dr. Leonne Hudson assisted greatly with advice on editing and style, helping the author become a better writer in the process. Finally, Dr. Kevin Adams, who advised this project, was very patient, insightful, and helpful.

The author also deeply acknowledges the loving support of his mother, Beverly Sidwell, who has encouraged him at every stage of the process, especially during the difficult or frustrating times, of which there were many. She was always there to lend a word of much-needed support, and she can never know how much her aid is appreciated. It is to her that this work is dedicated.
Chapter I: Introduction

The American Civil War is the most written-about event in United States history. Thousands of books have been written discussing seemingly every aspect of the conflict. The war’s leading personalities, like President Abraham Lincoln, have become household names, and have been the subject of hundreds of scholarly works, as have the rank and file soldiers of both armies. Major battles of the war continue to provide subjects of conjecture, analysis, and debate. In recent years, much scholarship has examined the central relationship of African-Americans and slavery to the war. Unit histories, almanacs, photograph collections, and even cookbooks have been printed about the Civil War.

Among the personalities of the Civil War, few save President Lincoln have been more extensively researched than General Robert E. Lee. Lee has been the subject of multiple biographies, character studies, and military analyses. Scholars have examined the general’s family life, his leadership style, his postwar years, and his military record. As the symbol of the “Lost Cause,” Lee is still intensely studied today.

In spite of all the attention that has been lavished on Robert E. Lee, a gap in scholarship remains. Lee’s “military family,” his staff, remains largely anonymous to historians.1 These men performed vital support and assistance to the general as he sought to command, control, and maintain the Army of Northern Virginia. They were

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responsible for seeing that Lee’s orders were actually carried out by his subordinates, and for keeping him notified of urgent matters requiring his attention on and off the battlefield. Additionally, unlike many private soldiers, Lee’s staff officers were usually literate men whose endeavors in army paperwork left lengthy “paper trails” for scholars to retrace.\(^2\) Most of them also wrote books or magazine articles after the war, identifying themselves with Lee and recalling their exploits. In light of all this, it is somewhat surprising that Lee’s staff officers have remained largely unstudied.\(^3\)

In part, this scholastic oversight was the will of the staff officers themselves. In writing their works, most of Lee’s staff officers did not focus on their own wartime activities, but on the general’s. A few of these men emphasized their own connections to the general to gain personal notoriety.\(^4\) Others, such as Armistead Long and Walter Taylor, were involved in the efforts to deify Lee after the war, and focused on his achievements at the expense of all others, including themselves.\(^5\) This can be seen in the titles of their works; for example, Armistead Long’s book is entitled *The Memoirs of Robert E. Lee*, even though Lee himself was long dead when Long wrote the work.

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\(^2\) For example, they helped Lee prepare his after-action reports; see J. Boone Bartholomees, *Buff Facings and Gilt Buttons: A History of Staff and Headquarters Operations in the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865* (Colombia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1998), 242-247.

\(^3\) In his introduction to Walter Taylor’s *Four Years with General Lee* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1996), James I. Robertson, Jr. described the staff as being “among the most underrated but most important components of any Civil War army.” (1)

\(^4\) In his brief appendix on Lee’s staff, Douglas Southall Freeman commented on the difficulties this poses for those attempting to study the staff, as many men falsely claimed to have held staff positions.

\(^5\) For an in-depth analysis of these efforts, see Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1977). These efforts must be borne in mind when reading any postwar account by any of Lee’s officers; in particular, Virginians tended to praise Lee, while non-Virginians, especially James Longstreet, were more critical.
Taylor’s two books are likewise entitled *General Lee: His Campaigns in Virginia, 1861-1865, With Personal Reminiscences*, and *Four Years with General Lee.*

The anonymity of Lee’s staff has also resulted from certain prevailing views about staff work. Compared to generals and even private soldiers, staff officers have often been seen as mere “hangers-on” to generals who performed only unglamorous army paperwork. Indeed, in most accounts, both primary and secondary, Lee’s staff is only mentioned coincidentally, remaining in the background while the scene is dominated by the general and his leading subordinates. This makes the staff difficult to track in many accounts; information about them is found in books and articles focused on more prominent figures or larger events, and they are seldom to be found in book indexes, even though they were present and very active.

Additionally, in analyzing Lee’s staff, researchers have been hindered by the postwar feuding between many ex-Confederates regarding Lee’s career. To Virginians in the postbellum years, Lee became nearly infallible. He could not be beaten; his failure to achieve final victory was due to others’ failures, not his own. In particular, Lee’s staff and other Virginians tended to blame non-Virginians, especially James Longstreet, for battlefield reverses. Responding to these charges, Longstreet and his partisans often became themselves very passionate and subtly reinterpreted established facts to improve the records of non-Virginians.

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**Historiography**

In spite of these factors, a handful of historians have touched upon the work performed by Lee’s staff, and their assessment has typically been unfavorable. One of the earliest secondary source writers, G. F. R. Henderson, asserted that Lee’s staff drafted “foolish” orders, and blamed it for many of the army’s missed opportunities.7 Lee’s most influential biographer, Douglas Southall Freeman, repeatedly insisted that Lee’s staff was inept. In his lectures to the Army War College in the 1930s, Freeman repeatedly used the words “improvised” and “inadequate” when describing Lee’s staff.8 Interestingly, though, in his earlier and better-known work, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, Douglas praised Colonels Taylor, Venable, and Marshall of Lee’s staff, asserting that they had all earned “well-deserved” colonelcies by 1865. Although Douglas admitted that identifying Lee’s staff was difficult because of the false claims of some to have been on it, his general criticism of Lee’s staff has deeply influenced scholarly literature.9

In fact, Freeman’s general assessment of Lee’s staff as inadequate has gone largely unchallenged until very recently.10 For example, in his article, “Southern by the Grace of God but Prussian by Common Sense: James Longstreet and the Exercise of Command in the U.S. Civil War,” Richard L. DiNardo implies that Longstreet’s method of staff officer selection was superior to Lee’s even as he stresses the need for further

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7 See G. F. R. Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War* (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1994), 2:20. Henderson was a personal friend of several of Jackson’s staff officers; this may have colored his accounts somewhat; he originally wrote his works in the 1900s.

8 Examples of such denunciations can be found in Freeman’s lectures, collected in Smith, ed. *Douglas Southall Freeman on Leadership* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1993), 103-104, 123.


10 James I. Robertson, for example, seems to accept it; see James I. Robertson, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, the Soldier, the Legend* (New York: MacMillan Publishing USA, 1997), 484.
studies into all Confederate generals’ staffs. In his essay, “The ‘Great Tycoon’ Forges a Staff System,” Robert E. K. Krick provides an overall summary of Lee’s relationship with his staff while admitting that much more work needs to be done. He disagrees with most of Freeman’s overall analysis, finding Lee’s staff usually highly capable and emphasizing that it improved in the performance of its duties as the war progressed.

To date, the only book-length study of Army of Northern Virginia staff work has been J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr.’s Buff Facings and Gilt Buttons: A History of the Staff Operations of the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865. In this work, Bartholomees surveys the administrative functions of each of the staff positions in the Army of Northern Virginia. Although invaluable as a reference work concerning the proper roles of staff officers, Bartholomees’ book centers on the theories of proper staff functions, and presents few case studies. It discusses all staffs within the Army of Northern Virginia, not exclusively Lee’s.

In his work, Bartholomees discussed and dismissed one of the most persistent historiographical myths about Lee’s staff: that it was extremely small, too small to properly perform its administrative or field duties. In his analysis, Bartholomees demonstrated that Lee’s staff and its supporting personnel numbered over a hundred men.

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He admitted that there were stories of Lee running out of staff officers at critical moments during battles, but he insisted that these instances were rare.\textsuperscript{14}

This truncated historiography can be traced in part to a recent trend in historical writing that has impeded further inquiries into military aspects of the Civil War, including Lee’s staff. As seen in the writings of Russell Weigley and others, many historians are now arguing that the battles and campaigns of the Civil War were irrelevant to its outcome. According to this line of reasoning, military technology in the Civil War period had far outpaced battlefield tactics. In particular, the widespread adoption of rifled small arms and cannon had given defenders an overwhelming advantage. In such a situation, attack was suicidal, and wars could only be resolved through attrition, that is, to inflict more casualties than their opponents could sustain. Thus, there could be no “decisive battles,” and no outright destruction of an opposing army. Given this state of affairs, proper command and control, correct staff work, and even generalship mattered little; the only factors required for victory were a large population base, willingness to continue the struggle, an economy that would support war, and a general who realized that war was now only a matter of attrition. Because of all this, Weigley and others conclude, the Union was inevitably going to win the Civil War, particularly since Ulysses S. Grant realized this truth while Lee did not.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 7-12. In all, his arguments are quite convincing. This thesis will focus not on the size of Lee’s staff, but rather on how the general used the staff officers and couriers he had; see discussion below.

\textsuperscript{15} See Russell F. Weigley, \textit{The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy} (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1973), 92-152. For example, on page 127, Weigley declares that “Lee was too Napoleonic. Like Napoleon himself, with his passion for the strategy of annihilation and the climactic, decisive battle as its expression, he destroyed in the end not the enemy armies, but his own.” In his \textit{Taken at the Flood: Robert E. Lee and Confederate Strategy in the Maryland Campaign of 1862} (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1999), Joseph L. Harsh disagrees with this traditional view and
This paradigm has not been conducive to military studies of the Civil War. There is little point in studying techniques of command and control or even results on the battlefields if they were always irrelevant. A full refutation of this “attrition” theory is beyond the scope of this thesis, but several scholars have pointed out the gross reductionism of its argument. Indeed, most authors of works on the Civil War claim at least implicitly that battles were “winnable.”\textsuperscript{16} This thesis will thus assume that Civil War battles were crucial to the outcome of the conflict, and that proper command and control of the armies was extremely important.

\textit{Defining the Problem}

This thesis intends to help fill a gap in the existing literature by analyzing how Lee used his staff to command the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee’s staff served as his top administrative and tactical assistants both during active operations and quieter periods between campaigns. Not all staff officers shared the same functions. Some were heads of administrative units such as the quartermaster and commissary departments, while others were responsible for general army paperwork or for taking Lee’s dictations, such as assistant adjutants-general and military secretaries. These functions divided the staff convincingly argues that Lee realized that he might never have been able to “destroy” the Union army, but only to defeat the Union through increasing Northern war-weariness.\textsuperscript{16} For example, Stephen W. Sears, James B. McPherson, and Gary Gallagher have all argued in favor of the importance of battles and campaigns in determining the war’s outcome; see Stephen W. Sears, \textit{Gettysburg} (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), and Gary Gallagher, \textit{Lee and His Generals in War and Memory} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1998).
into the *general* staff and the *personal* staff, a distinction dating in the United States from
the Continental Army, and retained by the Confederacy.\(^{17}\)

In theory, the *general* staff was composed of all representatives of the
Confederate Army’s centralized administrative departments: the adjutant and inspector
general’s department, artillery, quartermaster, ordinance, commissary, and medical.\(^{18}\)
Except for artillery, Confederate States Army had a centralized head for each of these
departments back in Richmond, and the departmental representatives with the armies
were theoretically subject to their respective departments’ orders even above those of
Lee. These staff officers were officially assigned to the army itself, not to Lee
personally. With the exception of the army chief of artillery, their functions were
supposed to be largely administrative and they rarely accompanied Lee into the field.
Most contemporary sources did not even list them as part of the staff, instead referring to
them as the “department heads” or “chiefs of special services”.\(^{19}\)

Officially, the only soldiers in Lee’s *personal* staff were his aides-de-camp,
military secretaries, and couriers. Lee’s secretaries were supposed to take his dictation,
while the aides-de-camp and couriers were to carry his messages and supervise the

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\(^{17}\) See Russell F. Weigley, *A History of the United States Army* (New York: The Macmillan Company,
1967), 45-62, 122-124. Although it was first established in the Revolutionary War, the U.S. Army general
staff dated continuously from the War of 1812.

\(^{18}\) The position of chief of staff was nowhere precisely defined, but Lee used it as another assistant adjutant-
general. Inspector generals were usually also assistant adjutant generals.

\(^{19}\) See Bartholomew’s, *Buff Facings*, 3-7, 13-122. Bartholomew’s points out that this distinction roughly
Corresponds to the contemporary military definition of “general” staff and of “special” staff combined. See
also Robert E. K. Krick, “The ‘Great Tycoon’ Forges a Staff System”, in *Audacity Personified: The
Generalship of Robert E. Lee*, ed. Peter S. Carmichael (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2004),
82-106.
execution of his orders. In contrast to the officers of the general staff, the personal staff was assigned specifically to Lee and followed him onto the battlefield.\textsuperscript{20}

In practice, the Army of Northern Virginia seldom adhered to military regulations, and staff arrangements were no exception. As well as his officially authorized “personal” staff, Lee also used his assistant adjutants-general to give messages and supervise their execution. Lee was usually accompanied in the field by his aides-de-camp, his secretaries, his couriers, and by his chief of staff and other assistants-adjutants-general.\textsuperscript{21} When contemporaries spoke of Lee’s “staff,” they usually referred only to these officers. In the words of G. Moxley Sorrel, General James Longstreet’s chief of staff:

I suppose that at this date there are some hundreds of men in the South who call themselves members of Lee’s staff, and so they were if teamsters, sentry men, detailed quartermasters (commissary men), couriers and orderlies, and all the rest of the following of a general headquarters of a great army are to be considered. But by the staff we usually confine ourselves to those responsible officers immediately about a general, and Lee had selected carefully. Four majors (afterwards lieutenant-colonels and colonels) did his principal work…Of course it does not include the important administrative officers like Cole, chief commissary; Corley, chief quartermaster; Doctor Guild, medical director, and his chiefs of ordinance and other organizations.\textsuperscript{22}

In practice, most chiefs of staff and assistant adjutants-general were considered throughout the Confederate armies as being personal staff; that is, they were attached to the commanding generals and accompanied them personally into the field.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 123-146.
\textsuperscript{21} To be sure, there was a vast social gulf between staff officers such as aides-de-camp and couriers, who were usually detailed private cavalrymen or infantrymen. In practice, it was commonly understood that couriers delivered written or less important messages, while staff officers delivered oral or more important messages, and also stayed in some cases to supervise their execution; see Bartholomewes, 211-212.
\textsuperscript{22} G. Moxley Sorrel, \textit{Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer} (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1994), 74-75. Note that Sorrel excludes couriers. In the omitted portion of the above passage, Sorrel provided very brief biographical sketches of Lee’s personal staff. In \textit{General Lee}, 55-57, Taylor similarly excluded the “chiefs of the several departments of the service attached to his staff” (emphasis added).
\textsuperscript{23} See Bartholomewes, \textit{Buff Facings}, 181-182.
An analysis of all parts and officers of Lee’s staff is beyond the scope of this thesis, and would require a book-length study such as Bartholomew’s. In this thesis, the author proposes to examine Lee’s use of his personal staff to control his army in the field. By personal staff, the author adopts the understanding of G. Moxley Sorrel and Walter H. Taylor, themselves staff officers in the Army of Northern Virginia. It will not be confined exclusively to the staff officers, but also to couriers, whose function was to assist the staff officers in the performance of their duties.

Staff officers’ duties were somewhat unclear when the war began. Staff practice in the United States Army had been extremely amateurish until 1813, when Winfield Scott took it upon himself to learn French staff theories and put them into practice against the British in Canada.24 Staff performance in the Mexican War was marked by the superb performances of Robert E. Lee, George McClellan, and P.G.T. Beauregard, among others, on Winfield Scott’s staff.25 However, the United States had not relied on personal staff officers during the 1850s, when lengthy distances made courier systems impractical and the military hierarchy was reluctant to use more efficient means like the telegraph. Because of this, commanders were often left in semi-autonomous situations, free to act within very broad guidelines as they determined best.26 Overall by 1861, the United States Army had a mixed history of personal staff usage, but Lee’s staff enjoyed

24 Weigley, History, 127-132.
25 Kevin Dougherty alleges that Lee learned a great deal about “the value of reconnaissance” while serving on Scott’s staff. Presumably, Dougherty means staff reconnaissance; his book discusses Scott’s influence on the staff work of Union generals such as Joseph Hooker and George Meade in greater detail. See Kevin Dougherty, Civil War Leadership and Mexican War Experience (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 30-31, 91-95, 185.
26 For examples of this, see Tony R. Mullis, Peacekeeping on the Plains: Army Operations in Bleeding Kansas (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2004), 61-118, 153-193.
both a commander who had been a staff officer himself and a chief of staff with prewar administrative experience.\textsuperscript{27}

Many historians have emphasized the lack of proper training for Civil War staff officers as a further impediment to their effectiveness. While there was nothing like a modern “staff school” for either the Confederacy or the Union, Lee’s staff officers were not completely without guidance. The Confederate States Army Regulations contained some guidelines for the administrative duties of staff officers and mentioned the duties of couriers, albeit offhandedly. Numerous extant manuals would have provided Lee’s assistant adjutants-general with some guidelines concerning paperwork. However, works discussing direct staff participation in the field for commanding and controlling the army were rare.\textsuperscript{28}

One of the few books discussing staff usage in the field was Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini’s \textit{The Art of War}. This work had been published in the 1830s in French, and was reprinted in the North during the war. Jomini had been a staff officer himself in the Napoleonic Wars, and in an era in which military thinking was deeply influenced by Napoleonic ideals, his writings possessed great influence.\textsuperscript{29} Jomini argued that the French Revolution had vastly increased the size of armies; no longer were armies small contingents of intensely-trained career soldiers, but they were rather now vast “people’s armies” composed from mass mobilizations of the population to war.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{27} Alexander commented on this.
\textsuperscript{28} See Bartholomees, \textit{Buff Facings}, 156-162.
\textsuperscript{29} As far as this author has been able to determine, there is no direct proof that Lee had read Jomini’s book, but he would almost certainly have been familiar with it from his decades in the antebellum army.
Because of this development, warfare had been transformed from a small-scale endeavor to a vast enterprise. Armies were now too large for all of their components to march over the same roads, and battlefields were now too large for a single commander to personally observe all of the fighting. Moreover, in all military operations, plans will go awry, as subordinate generals and soldiers are fallible human beings. Therefore, Jomini argued, staffs must expand and help clear this “fog-of-war” for their commanders. In Jomini’s words,

But when war began to be waged without camps, movements became more complicated, and the staff officers had more extended functions. The chief of staff began to perform the duty of transmitting the conceptions of the general to the most distant points of the theater of war, and of procuring for him the necessary documents for arranging plans of operations. The chief of staff was called to give assistance to the general in arranging his plans, to give information of them to subordinates in orders and instructions, to explain them and to supervise their execution both in their ensemble and in their minute details: his duties were, therefore, evidently connected with all the operations of a campaign.31

Thus, staff officers were supposed to be their commanders’ voices and senses, carrying his instructions to subordinates and ensuring that the orders were followed according to his design. In critical situations, Jomini even expected chiefs of staff to issue orders in their commanders’ names.32

Surviving testimony from Confederate authorities indicates that they shared Jomini’s definitions of the roles for personal staff officers in battle: to carry messages from their commander to his subordinates, to supervise their execution, and to issue orders in his name if necessary. As Walter Taylor phrased it, “The theory is that he (the commanding general) is served by an officer who speaks by his authority and in his

31 Ibid, 253. By “camp”, Jomini referred to the ancient Roman tradition of moving the army’s entire fortified camp with it wherever it traveled and reconstructing it every night. The duties he described as belonging to the “chief of staff” were divided amongst all of Lee’s personal staff in practice; see Sorrel, 75.
32 Ibid, 56-57.
name, who is supposed to be so well informed as to his chief’s views…to make all decisions…to conform to these established principles.” Edward Porter Alexander, himself a staff officer before becoming a general of artillery, concurred: “An army is like a great machine, and in putting it into battle it is not enough for its commander to merely issue the necessary orders. He should have a staff ample to supervise the execution of each step, & to promptly report any difficulty or misunderstanding.”

Lee had mixed thoughts on using his staff in this manner. He clearly held that he should use his staff to carry his orders and see that they were followed: “If, in addition, a proper inspector-general, with sufficient rank and standing, with assistants, could be appointed to see to the execution of orders…great benefits and savings to the service would be secured.”

The greatest difficulty I find is causing orders and regns [regulations] to be obeyed. This rises not from a spirit of disobedience but from ignorance. We therefore have need of a corps of officers to teach others their duty, see to the observation of orders, and to the regularity and precision of all movements.

Despite these professed views, in practice, Lee often maintained a “hands-off” command style. He typically gave overall directions to his chief subordinates, often in person, and then trusted them to handle their assignments without staff oversight. As he explained to a Pomeranian observer:

33 Taylor, General Lee, 56.
35 Lee, in O. R., Series 1, vol. 19, pt. 2, 597. As mentioned above, assistant inspector generals were usually also assistant adjutant generals, and Lee used the latter officers to carry field orders.
I plan and work with all my might to bring the troops to the right place at the right time; with that I have done my duty. As soon as I order the troops forward into battle, I lay the fate of my army at the hands of God; It is my generals’ turn to perform their duty.37

Many scholars have noted that such an arrangement would function well when Lee’s subordinates were themselves capable commanders possessed with individual initiative; the system became questionable, however, when subordinate generals were either insufficiently talented or simply misunderstood Lee’s plans.

**Evaluation**

To determine how effectively Lee used his staff, this thesis will analyze his use of it in three of the Army of Northern Virginia’s early major battles: the Seven Days’ Battles (June 25-July 1, 1862), the Maryland Campaign (September 1-19, 1862), and Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863). These engagements were chosen for three reasons. First, each represents a different period in the history of the Army of Northern Virginia’s organization. The army’s structure changed many times during its brief history, from a desire to streamline command and control, and it was in a different stage during each of the three selected campaigns. Second, in each campaign, Lee’s army had to execute orders over a large area, with widely scattered detachments far away from the commander’s personal supervision. In such a setting, as Jomini asserted, staff command and control should have been even more imperative than usual.38 Finally, all three of the battles took place before trench warfare became dominant in the Civil War in late 1863.

37 Justus Scheibert, *Seven Months in the Rebel States during the North American War, 1863*, n. 75.

Arguably, if Weigley and others who contend that defensive warfare was all-dominating were not correct before this period, their argument appears true afterward.

Lee retained the same personal staff officers for all three engagements. This thesis will focus on the six officers who formed the personal staff: Robert Chilton, Walter Taylor, Charles Venable, Armistead Long, Charles Marshall, and Randolph Talcott. It will also touch on the couriers who assisted them in carrying Lee’s orders to his generals and supervising their execution. Some members of the personal staff (especially Chief of Staff Chilton) also issued orders in Lee’s name. For each battle, this thesis will proceed chronologically through the action, analyzing how Lee used or failed to use his staff to issue and supervise orders. First, each chapter will analyze the staff as a carrier and supervisor of orders. Second, it will examine the staff as a source of orders in Lee’s name, investigating whether these orders reflected Lee’s expressed objectives. Overall, it will analyze how effectively Lee used his staff to command and control the Army of Northern Virginia, especially when his plans miscarried or circumstances required their adaptation.

This thesis will demonstrate that Lee’s staff on the whole quite competently carried, distributed, and supervised Lee’s orders. It will show that Lee often failed to use his staff to supervise, and that this neglect proved crucial in the shifting circumstances of campaigns. Further, it will be revealed that while Lee’s use of his staff improved as the war progressed, as late as Gettysburg he had yet to utilize his staff to intervene in

39 Soon after Gettysburg, this group of six men no longer comprised Lee’s personal staff. Chilton was promoted to brigadier general and assigned an administrative position in Richmond, Talcott was given the colonelcy of the First Confederate Engineer Regiment, and Long was promoted to brigadier general and assumed command of the Second Corps artillery in the Army of Northern Virginia. Taylor, Marshall, and Venable remained with Lee until the end of the war.
situations when his objectives were clearly not being achieved. This thesis does not suggest that better staff work alone might have turned the tide of the Civil War in Lee’s favor; rather, it suggests that poor use of staff officers contributed to the outcome of several engagements. It is hoped that this study and others like it will help to partially exonerate Lee’s staff from some of the blame heaped on it by Henderson, Freeman, and others. Perhaps, with more in-depth studies of the staff, scholars can also liberate it from relative historical obscurity.
Chapter II: The Seven Days: The (Mis)use of an Army Staff

Lost opportunities generate controversy. In the short history of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, few events presented more lost opportunities than the Seven Days Campaign of June 26-July 1, 1862. In that campaign, General Robert E. Lee attempted to drive Union General George B. McClellan’s Army of the Potomac from its position threatening Richmond, and to destroy it in the process if possible. While Lee’s army succeeded in expelling the Federals from their positions so near the Confederate capital, it did not succeed in destroying it. Rather, the campaign ended with the beaten-but-still-defiant Union army huddled at Harrison’s Landing on the James River, and the Confederate army back where it had started near Richmond. The campaign had presented Lee with multiple opportunities to wreck at least a portion of the Army of the Potomac, but each of these opportunities had been missed.1

Shortly after the guns ceased on July 1, recriminations began.2 Over the years, writers ranging from Confederate veterans to modern historians have wondered what caused the Confederate army to miss priceless chances to destroy its enemy. One of the most persistent of the explanations has been that Lee’s staff was incompetent, and that its bungling ruined the army’s chances. According to this view,

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1 Lee was presented with opportunities to destroy the Union V Corps north of the Chickahominy on June 26 and 27, and arguably the Union army on June 30 in White Oak Swamp near Glendale.
2 In the U.S. War Department’s *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC, 1880-1901; hereafter referred to as the *Official Records*), Major General John Magruder’s report, written a month after the Seven Days, indicates that his role in the campaign had already been heavily criticized.
Lee’s staff either failed to carry out its functions properly or did so in a disastrously amateurish fashion. This argument was particularly influenced by Lee’s principal biographer, Douglas Southall Freeman, who repeatedly asserted both in lectures and writings that Lee’s staff was always inept, and that the general achieved his many startling successes in spite of its inability. ³ In addition to Freeman, General Thomas Jackson’s staff and biographers joined in the chorus of rebuke against Lee’s staff, seeking to exonerate Stonewall from charges that he had performed poorly in the campaign. ⁴ Even writers more favorable to Lee’s staff have seen the Seven Days’ Campaign as an example of its poor performance on at least this occasion. ⁵ Finally, critics have charged that Lee filled his staff with unworthy men who lacked either ability or experience in managing such a large army. ⁶ One, Jennings Cropper Wise, even blamed Lee’s staff with mismanaging the army’s artillery. ⁷

³ Examples of Freeman’s lectures can be found in Smith, ed. Douglas Southall Freeman on Leadership (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1993) For example, in lectures to the U. S. Army War College in the 1930s, he spoke of the staff as “inadequate” (103-104) and specifically blamed it for the army’s Seven Days failures (69). Interestingly, though, in his appendix to R. E. Lee: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934), 1:642, Freeman asserted that Taylor, Venable, and Marshall had earned “well-deserved” promotions to lieutenant colonel by war’s end.

⁴ Prominent among these writers are Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, in his Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1994), and more recently, James I. Robertson, Jr., Stonewall Jackson: The Man, the Soldier, the Legend (New York: MacMillan Publishing USA, 1997), 484. In particular, Edward Porter Alexander’s postwar account was distinctly unfavorable to Jackson; see Edward Porter Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy: Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander, ed. Gary Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1989).


⁶ For example, Freeman, in Smith, ed., Freeman on Leadership, refers to Lee’s staff as “improvised” (123). See also Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1973), 106-108. Weigley is very critical of both Lee and his staff.

A closer examination of the facts of command and control in the Seven Days, however, will not bear out this evaluation of most of Lee’s staff. On the whole, Lee’s staff did not fail him; it carried out its assignments faithfully and correctly, carrying orders to the general’s subordinates and guiding them into their assignments whenever its officers were sent. Only Lee’s chief of staff, Colonel Robert Chilton, seems to have failed in carrying out his duties, and these mostly involved the drafting of orders. In Lee’s report, the general found no fault with his staff. Excepting Chilton, the only major mistake attributable to the rest of Lee’s personal staff was its failure to provide Lee’s subordinates with guides who knew the country according to the general’s precariously few maps. On the whole, Lee’s staff performed its assigned tasks adequately.

Despite the good performance of Lee’s staff in delivering the commanding general’s orders and occasionally supervising his subordinates, the Seven Days were marked by repeated breakdowns in Lee’s command and control of his army. Many of these mishaps resulted from poor staff usage. There was a staff failure at the Seven Days, but the responsibility rested with Lee, not his staff officers, as Lee was guilty of what J. Boone Bartholomees calls his “reluctance to use his staff to supervise” the

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8 Bartholomees, Buff Facings, 233, 278-281.
9 Although these errors were consequential, impeding the general’s expressed plans, they were infrequent.
10 See Lee’s official report in Official Records, Series 1, Volume XI, Part 2, 498. While Lee never faulted his staff in any report, he did neglect to mention them at times.
11 The Army of Northern Virginia had almost no maps, and several writers, including two members of Lee’s staff, criticized the Richmond staffs for its negligence in preparing them. Jackson, for one, seems to have expected the staff to provide guides, for he had his own staff arrange for them after Lee’s did not.
execution of orders. Throughout the Seven Days, Lee gave orders to his several division commanders in person, and then rode away, never leaving a staff officer to oversee their movements or even sending one later to find out what had transpired when the divisions failed to arrive at their destinations on time. Many writers, inspired by Walter Taylor’s complaint about the size of Lee’s staff, have asserted that Lee needed more staff officers, but during the Seven Days, it appears that he neglected to use the ones he already had to maintain his control over the army.

As already noted, prevailing nineteenth-century military doctrine held that, given the modern era of warfare with mass armies on large battlefields, it was impossible for army commanders to personally supervise all of their forces as they maneuvered and fought. It was supposed to be the responsibility of the staff to assist commanders in maintaining command over their armies by functioning as extensions of himself, relaying his orders to subordinates and making sure they were being executed as he wished. Sometimes, they were even supposed to issue orders in his name. While the famous Prussian theories of a strategic general staff had not penetrated to the United States, Jomini’s theories contained the potential for such advances.

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12 See Bartholomees, Buff Facings, 263.
13 Freeman sharply criticized Lee for this; see Smith (ed.), Freeman on Leadership, 75. Even Krick conceded this (“Tycoon,” 104-106). For an opposing view, see Bartholomees, Buff Facings, 7-8.
14 See U.S. Military Academy, trans., The Art of War, 253. As discussed in the Introduction, Lee expressed similar ideas regarding the proper role of his staff officers; see Introduction, 11-12.
15 Bartholomees points out that the Jominian staff responsibilities outlined above were in fact similar to contemporary military staff theory; see Bartholomees, Buff Facings, xiv-xv.
In analyzing and evaluating the staff in the Seven Days, the distinction between Lee’s general staff and his personal staff must be recalled. Lee’s general staff consisted of a series of administrative officers who managed their own departments, such as the chiefs of artillery, quartermaster, commissary, ordinance, and engineers, as well as the chief medical officer. Few argue that this general staff failed to perform its duties at the Seven Days. Rather, the dispute centers around Lee’s personal staff, which was composed of seven men whose job was to carry Lee’s orders and occasionally issue them in his name.

Rather than retell the story of the Seven Days, then, this chapter will survey the Seven Days from the staff’s perspective, utilizing published primary sources. It will use the criteria outlined above to evaluate the staff’s performance at each stage of the campaign, focusing in particular on the incidents in which Lee’s plans miscarried. In each case, it will discuss the role of the staff officers in the failure and see whether they carried out their duties properly. The chapter will analyze each of the staff duties in turn, proceeding in roughly chronological order through the Seven Days. Each section will begin with a summary of Lee’s plans, and their lack of execution, and then focus on the role of Lee’s staff. In the end, it will demonstrate that, aside from Colonel Chilton’s errors, Lee failed to use his staff as prescribed in military theory. This failure contributed to several errors in the execution of Lee’s plans, and consequently to the escape of the Federal army.

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16 For a full definition of “general” and “personal” staff, see Introduction, 6-9.
17 An exception is Robertson, Stonewall Jackson, 484. He may be confused by the relative ambiguity of this distinction.
18 For more on the distinction between general and personal staffs, see Krick, “Great Tycoon,” 104-106, and Bartholomees, 1-6, 96-97.
Preparing the Staff and Army

Lee assumed command of the Confederate army defending Richmond on June 1, 1862, immediately after its commanding general, Joseph E. Johnston, was wounded at Seven Pines. Five staff officers accompanied him: Colonel Armistead Long, Major Walter H. Taylor, Major Charles S. Venable, Major Charles Marshall, and Major Randolph Talcott. The new chief of staff, Colonel Robert Chilton, arrived on June 4. Of these men, only Chilton and Long had any significant prewar military experience; the former had served as a United States Army paymaster on the western frontier, while the latter was stationed in the artillery. Taylor had been a student at the Virginia Military Institute for two years, but had dropped out to care for his family. Marshall had been a mathematics professor, while Venable was a lawyer.  Nevertheless, Long, Taylor, Venable, and Marshall had all served with Lee for the previous year, including Lee’s failed West Virginia campaign of fall 1861, and his subsequent service commanding coastal defenses in Georgia and South Carolina. In these operations, however, Lee had never commanded more than about 10,000 men; he and his staff now commanded three “armies” totaling 80,000 men, with no

19 Armistead Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee (Seacaucus, NJ: The Blue and Grey Press, 1983), 162. It was customary for a general’s personal staff to accompany him to whatever assignment he received; see Bartholomees, Buff Facings, 182.

20 Chilton was the only one Lee knew from the prewar army. Lee had not, however, asked for him specifically, but only for a “chief of staff”. See Robert K. Krick, “Robert Hall Chilton,” in The Confederate General, ed. William C. Davis (National Historical Society, 1991), 1:184-185.


increase in Lee’s staff, as only Captain A. P. Mason remained temporarily from Johnston’s staff. The task of controlling this huge force must have been daunting, and likely contributed to Lee’s apparent reluctance to entrust his staff with important assignments in the field, as he assumed all such crucial tasks himself.

The army’s organization was detrimental to smooth command and control procedures. At this time, the Confederate forces, including Jackson’s Army of the Valley, were organized into five independent infantry divisions, and two multi-divisional “commands,” one of three divisions, the other of three divisions and an independent brigade. The cavalry as yet had no overall centralized commander; Jackson’s Valley cavalry, under Colonel Thomas Munford, would operate independently of Brigadier General J. E. B. Stuart’s troopers. Finally, the artillery was parceled out, a battery at a time, to the infantry brigades, with a central reserve of two multi-battery battalions. This arrangement meant that Lee’s staff would have to carry orders to at least seven infantry commanders as well as multiple cavalry and artillery commanders. Such an arrangement would tax even a larger staff than Lee’s.

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24 Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 84. This move was supposed to convince McClellan that Jackson was going to advance back up the Shenandoah Valley, thus halting reinforcements that would otherwise have reached McClellan from Fredericksburg. The independent divisions were commanded by Major Generals James Longstreet, A. P. Hill, D. H. Hill, Benjamin Huger, and Theophilus Holmes. The first multi-division “command” was under Major General John Magruder, while the second was under Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson.
25 See the report of the army’s artillery chief, Brigadier General Pendleton, in *O.R.*, I, XI, 23, II, 533-534. For an extended critique of this organization, see Wise, 197-209.
26 Alexander specifically faulted this organization with contributing to the army’s missed opportunities; see Gallagher (ed.), *Fighting*, 104-106. Freeman referred to this arrangement as “three armies in one” (107). For more on the necessity for simplifying army organizations to simplify staff
Nevertheless, Lee set quickly to work. He ordered his men to dig a series of entrenchments to guard the direct approaches to Richmond, an order deeply resented and loudly complained about by both the men and their officers. Lee used his staff well during this prelude to the campaign, ordering his chief engineer, Colonel Stevens, to inspect the fortifications, and using his personal staff, notably Major Marshall and Colonel Long, to visit the lines everyday. In a June 3 conference held with his division commanders, Lee made sure Long and Marshall were present. He even discussed his strategy for the upcoming action privately with Long and Marshall. He entrusted Marshall with carrying out his deception in sending reinforcements to General Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley.

Lee’s plan was determined by McClellan’s position. The Army of the Potomac was positioned astride the Chickahominy River, with a single 30,000-man infantry corps north of the river, and the other four, some 80,000 men, south of it. Jackson, moving southeast from Ashland where he had arrived from the Valley with his three divisions on June 23-24, was to march around the vulnerable Union right flank, forcing the Federals to abandon their entrenched positions along Beaver Dam work, see Robert M. Epstein, “The Creation and Evolution of the Army Corps in the American Civil War,” in The Journal of Military History 55, no. 1 (January 1991): 21-46.
27 Lee mentioned this bitterly in a dispatch to Davis (see Dowdey and Manarin, Wartime Papers, 184), and Marshall remembered it after the war; see Charles Marshall, An Aide-de-Camp of Lee: The Papers of Colonel Charles Marshall, ed. Sir Fredrick Maurice (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1927), 79.
29 Maurice, Aide-de-Camp, 84. This move was supposed to convince McClellan that Jackson was going to advance back up the Shenandoah Valley, thus halting reinforcements that would otherwise have reached McClellan from Fredericksburg.
30 The corps north of the river was the V Corps, under Brigadier General Fitz-John Porter.
Creek. This would open the way for three of Lee’s other infantry divisions, those of Ambrose Powell Hill, James Longstreet, and Daniel Harvey Hill, to cross the river and attack, crushing the Union corps between them and Jackson. Lee announced the general attack order on June 24, and drafted it himself, having his staff prepare copies for distribution.31

Lee Fails to Use His Staff to Communicate: Mechanicsville to Glendale (I)

On June 26, the prescribed date of the offensive, nothing went as planned. Jackson was very late in moving his troops, and failed to get around the Union right. Consequently, the Federals remained in their strong positions, and at 4:00 PM, A. P. Hill attacked without receiving any staff communication from Lee, perhaps hoping to spark Jackson into action. His attack was easily repulsed, with severe casualties. Lee had lost the first encounter of the campaign.32

Several factors caused the miscarriage of Lee’s plans, and all of them had to do with his failure to use his staff officers to communicate. Jackson’s staff had bungled the march of his three divisions to their jumping-off points, forcing him to use precious time catching up to his assigned position.33 Jackson was apparently confused by his orders. He was further perplexed when a courier from Lee arrived

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31 Many of the staff’s critics, such as Henderson (Stonewall Jackson, 2:20), have charged it with drafting a “foolish order” in this instance. However, as testified by Marshall (Maurice, Aide-de-Camp, 86), Lee wrote the order, and the staff merely copied it.
33 See Robertson, Stonewall Jackson, 461. Like Lee’s staff, Jackson’s staff had not increased along with his command.
bearing a very complicated letter which suggested which roads he might take.\textsuperscript{34} Lee’s staff had not provided Jackson with a map, since almost no maps were available.\textsuperscript{35} It had also failed to arrange a guide for Jackson, who was forced to rely on the brother of his chief of staff, Major Dabney.\textsuperscript{36} Hence, he arrived too late and too far away to flank the Federals as Lee had intended. Jackson simply followed his orders as he understood them.\textsuperscript{37}

For his part, Lee failed to communicate with his generals.\textsuperscript{38} He had arranged for General Lawrence O’Brien Branch, commanding one of A. P. Hill’s brigades, to maintain communication between Hill and Jackson, but Branch failed to do so.\textsuperscript{39} Throughout the day, according to his staff officers, Lee waited and watched anxiously, for any sign of Jackson.\textsuperscript{40} It appears that all he did was wait, without sending any staff officer to find out why Jackson was so late or even where he was. According to Major Dabney, “not a single orderly or message reached him [Jackson]...
during the whole day.”41 Rather, the prevailing attitude of Lee and his staff seems to have been that it was Jackson’s responsibility to maintain communication; as Marshall stated it, “it was assumed (if Jackson had encountered serious opposition), it would have been made known.”42 Such language strongly implies that Lee and his staff maintained a very passive attitude and were not inclined to seek out Jackson to discover what had gone wrong, even though none of them could imagine what was keeping him. At least one of the staff was fully appraised of Lee’s plan, and all of the officers had been involved in copying it, so any of them should have been suitable to supervise Jackson’s movements. Even when Lee sent A. P. Hill orders to stop his attack, he used a cavalry lieutenant, not a personal staff officer.43 Thus, on June 26, Lee’s staff had failed to supply Jackson with a guide, but the general had failed to use the staff to correct an obviously wrong situation.44

The next day, Lee met with Jackson in person and communicated his new plans. He intended to crush Porter’s corps, now at Gaines’ Mill, using much the same strategy developed for the previous day. Once again, Lee’s plans were disrupted. All of the divisions were sluggish in their pursuit, and Porter heavily fortified his new

41 As quoted in a personal letter to Henderson, found in Henderson, Stonewall Jackson, 2:21. See also Robertson, Stonewall Jackson, 472.
42 Maurice, Aide-de-Camp, 95.
43 Ibid, 94; 85-86, 89. The cavalry officer was Lieutenant T. W. Sydnor; see Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants, 1:514. This order was already too late; see Henderson, Stonewall Jackson, 2:16. In his report (O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 835), Hill did not even mention it. D. H. Hill reported that he had received late-day messages from Lee to help A. P. Hill, but did not say who carried them; see O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 623.
44 Henderson placed the blame squarely on Lee’s staff; he even headed his discussion of Mechanicsville “Shortcomings of the Staff” (Stonewall Jackson, 2:21), and claimed that the “duty of keeping up communications should not have been left to Jackson, but have been seen to at headquarters” (20). See also Hal Bridges, Lee’s Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1991), 65-69, and Weigley, The American Way of War, 106.
position.\textsuperscript{45} Just as at Mechanicsville, A. P. Hill attacked the enemy alone, this time at Lee’s direct order. Hours passed waiting for Jackson to arrive and threaten Porter’s right flank. When he finally reached the battlefield, a general advance by all six Confederate divisions finally overwhelmed the Federals, who withdrew in confusion. Lee had gained his first battlefield victory of the campaign, but at a very high cost in casualties.\textsuperscript{46}

Jackson’s tardiness again nearly cost Lee a victory, but the commanding general had apparently learned from his mistakes of June 26. Even so, in Alexander’s words, the battle “was left in the hands of the division commanders until it was nearly lost.”\textsuperscript{47} Once again, Lee’s staff had not provided Jackson with a guide. He procured one from the Fourth Virginia Cavalry, and this guide actually led him down the wrong road. This time, Lee sent Major Taylor to find Jackson and correct his march.\textsuperscript{48} The necessary countermarch caused further delays, as Jackson’s artillery became entangled on the road with his ambulances.\textsuperscript{49} Taylor then returned to Lee

\textsuperscript{45} In Edward Porter Alexander, \textit{Military Memoirs of a Confederate: A Critical Narrative} (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 124, Alexander blamed this slow movement on “the inexperience, in handling such large bodies, of many of our generals and staff-officers”. Likewise, Weigley faulted “poor intelligence work by the staff and cavalry” (\textit{The American Way of War}, 106). In fact, faulty reconnaissance seems more to blame than inexperience by either Confederate generals or their staffs. Lee apparently did not assign any staff officer to reconnaissance duty on June 27.

\textsuperscript{46} The Confederates suffered about 8,000 casualties at Gaines’ Mill, to about 5,000 Union losses. For overviews of the Battle of Gaines’ Mill, see Sears, \textit{To the Gates of Richmond}, 210-248, and Allan, \textit{Army of Northern Virginia}, 85-95.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 132. As seen in the Introduction (12, n. 35), Lee practiced this “hands-off” style of command quite often.

\textsuperscript{48} Robertson, \textit{Stonewall Jackson}, 475-480. In his report, Stuart claimed the troopers of the Fourth Virginia possessed “invaluable merits” as guides (\textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 522-523). Jackson had said that he wanted to go to “Cold Harbor”, near Gaines’ Mill; the guide led him to New Cold Harbor while his correct destination was Old Cold Harbor. Long criticized Jackson for giving the guide faulty instructions; see Long, \textit{Memoirs}, 172.

\textsuperscript{49} See the report of Jackson’s chief of artillery, Colonel Stapleton Crutchfield, in \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 560.
while Jackson took up a defensive position near Porter’s right flank, to be ready to attack him as he retreated.\footnote{Jackson had been ordered to threaten Porter, not to attack him; see Maurice, \textit{Aide-de-Camp}, 99-101.}

By now, A. P. Hill was in desperate trouble, and Lee again sent Taylor and several other staff officers to Jackson, this time ordering him to attack. Similarly, Lee sent Captain Mason to Longstreet urging him to attack.\footnote{Robertson, \textit{Stonewall Jackson}, 478. See also Richard Ewell’s report in \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 605, Long, \textit{Memoirs}, 173, Longstreet, \textit{Manassas to Appomattox}, 127, and Wert, \textit{Longstreet}, 137.} In fact, Lee apparently sent all of his staff officers away, and had to “borrow” Richard Ewell’s assistant adjutant general, Captain G. Campbell Brown, to carry orders for him at one point.\footnote{Ewell discussed this in his report; see \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 605.} As a result of the army’s complicated organization, these staff officers had to issue orders to one wing commander and five divisional commanders in the heat of battle, and the artillery, parceled out to infantry brigades, was hardly brought into the fight at all.\footnote{See Wise, 208-209. In his words, “The time had not come, nor ever will, when an artillery column can patrol the battlefield, undirected by the will of the commanding-general.” The artillery might have distracted the Union artillery, or at least inflicted some damage on it as it pounded the Confederate infantry.} To make matters worse, Jackson’s staff bungled his orders, committing his divisions in piecemeal fashion, and at least one of his brigades appears to have gone into the battle without any staff guidance at all.\footnote{See Jackson’s report at \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 555, and Robertson, \textit{Stonewall Jackson}, 479. The last brigade was Alexander Lawton’s; he claimed in his report that he “failed to find any staff officer” who could direct him to any position on the firing line; see \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 595.} This was the only time during the Seven Days that Lee appears to have run out of staff officers, but he had used the ones he had well to carry and supervise his orders. The staff officers seem to have done their
duty for the most part.  Overall, Lee used his staff well to carry his orders at Gaines’ Mill, and this contributed to his victory.

With the Confederate victory at Gaines’ Mill, McClellan was forced to retreat. However, there was no certainty as to which way he would fall back, and June 28 was spent in reconnaissance efforts by Lee’s staff and infantrymen. Lee used his staff, specifically Chilton, to communicate with Magruder, commanding south of the Chickahominy, and repeatedly asked him to try to ascertain McClellan’s heading. By June 29, it had been ascertained that McClellan was withdrawing towards the James River rather than the York, and orders were given for pursuit. Jackson, now with D. H. Hill’s division as well as his own three divisions, was to cross the Grapevine Bridge and pursue McClellan directly. Major General John Bankhead Magruder, whose command had been south of the Chichahominy, was to pursue and attack McClellan’s rear guard with the support of Jackson and Benjamin Huger. A. P. Hill and Longstreet were to recross the river and move to intercept the head of McClellan’s columns.

However, this design unraveled just as its predecessors had. Jackson repaired the Grapevine Bridge, but then failed to cross the Chickahominy and assist Magruder. Magruder grew paranoid and frantically claimed he was about to be attacked. This

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55 There were rumors that Taylor had placed himself in the charge of a Virginia regiment; he did not mention it in any of his writings.
56 A copy of such an order from Chilton to Magruder can be found in O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 685. In it, Chilton told Magruder, “I will communicate whenever I can discover anything of importance; you do the same.” After the war, both Marshall, in Maurice, Aide-de-Camp, 105, and Long, in Memoirs, 174-175, criticized Magruder for failing to detect the retreat.
57 Chilton wrote Magruder again, this time assuring Magruder that McClellan had retreated; see Magruder’s report in O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 662.
caused Huger to deviate from his proscribed march and attempt to assist him. By the time Magruder was reassured, it was too late.\footnote{See Huger’s report in \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 789, and that of one of his brigadiers, General Wright, at \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 809.} Late in the day, Magruder launched a half-hearted attack on the Union rear guard at Savage’s Station, and was repulsed.\footnote{For more detailed accounts of the Battle of Savage’s Station, see Sears, \textit{To the Gates of Richmond}, 269-276, and Allan, \textit{Army of Northern Virginia}, 101-106.}

Once again, even when his plans were clearly not being carried out Lee failed to use his staff to communicate in a timely manner to correct the situation.\footnote{Robertson, in \textit{Stonewall Jackson}, 490, refers to Lee’s staff work at Savage’s Station as “abominable.”} In the words of Alexander, Lee’s plan took too many divisions out of the “personal eye of the commander.”\footnote{Alexander, \textit{Memoirs}, 135. Here, despite his claim to be assessing the Virginian Theater as a “military observer”, Alexander was apparently ignorant of Jomini’s theory of the necessity of large battlefields and staff control, as discussed in the Introduction, 10-11, and U. S. Military Academy, trans., \textit{The Art of War}, 252-268. However, it can be argued that the staff was supposed to function as the “personal eyes of the commander” in the Jominian system.} Lee issued orders personally to Jackson, then left him to issue orders to Magruder, before departing and stationing himself with Longstreet and A. P. Hill. From this point onwards, the campaign was conducted in the heavily wooded salt marshes southeast of Richmond, which prevented the general staff from using its usual system of signal stations. Given these conditions and the fact that Lee had apparently not designated a formal headquarters, many had trouble locating the commanding general.\footnote{Ibid, 137, and \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, 23, II, 662; Bartholomees, \textit{Buff Facings}, 115, and Alexander, \textit{Memoirs}, 172-173.}

To exacerbate matters, Lee did not leave staff officers to supervise Jackson or Magruder. For his part, Magruder was unaware of the role that Huger had been
ordered to take in the operation, and this increased his anxiety. Even though Marshall had written Magruder a note had informing him that Jackson was rebuilding Grapevine Bridge, Magruder still vacillated between fears that Jackson would mistake him for the enemy or that Jackson would fail to support him. Consequently, his advance was slow and hesitant. Lee eventually sent Major Taylor to Magruder asking why he had not attacked as ordered, and Magruder answered him that Jackson had claimed that he was not to support Magruder. Lee only responded by sending Magruder’s own staff officer back to him with an assurance that Jackson had been so ordered. At one point, Taylor was sent with a message for Jackson, but confessed to Magruder that he did not know the way to the Grapevine Bridge; Magruder then had him give his message to one of his own staff officers for delivery. After the action, Lee rebuked Magruder for his lack of progress. Amidst all this, it should be noted that Lee had made little effort to supervise his efforts or Jackson’s.

The next day, June 30, Lee was presented with his best opportunity yet to trap McClellan’s army. The Union host was in the process of traversing the salt marshes of White Oak Swamp, whose very few roads left its units widely dispersed and

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63 He frankly confessed in his report (O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 716), that he “did not understand” the purpose of Huger’s movements.
64 The note is found in ibid, 685. At one point, Magruder even had a regimental flag advanced ahead of his line to let Jackson know that his troops were Confederate; see ibid, 716, 726.
65 He simply decided to wait for Huger and Jackson, as he admitted in his report (ibid, 664).
66 This was due to a very badly worded order to Stuart from Chilton, to be discussed below.
67 According to Magruder, by this time, it was “evening”. See O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 665, 687.
68 Ibid, 666. Aside from the possible involvement of Taylor in the infantry charge on June 27, this was the only instance found which could be described as dereliction of duty by any of Lee’s personal staff besides Chilton.
69 Ibid, 687.
vulnerable. Lee’s orders for June 30 called for General Jackson to pursue McClellan and attack it at White Oak Swamp, while Longstreet and A. P. Hill attacked the middle of its column at Glendale. Huger was to advance between Longstreet and Jackson and attack the enemy in conjunction with them. Magruder was to support Longstreet, while the newly-arrived division of Theophilus Holmes was to attempt to head off McClellan’s army.

Yet again, Lee’s orders were not followed as he envisioned. Holmes was driven back by Federal gunboat fire and frantically called for support; Magruder turned aside from helping Longstreet and A. P. Hill and went to assist Holmes. Holmes did not actually require assistance, and Magruder’s men ended up marching and countermarching all day in the swamps looking for the correct road to follow. Huger, meanwhile, was delayed by Federals felling trees in his path and never became a real factor in the day’s fighting. Jackson saw that the crossings of White Oak Swamp were hotly contested and simply failed to advance. Longstreet and A. P. Hill ended up attacking the Union army alone. While they enjoyed some initial success, they suffered very heavy losses.70

This time, Lee supervised Magruder very closely; he simply failed to do so with any of his other generals. Lee delivered Magruder’s orders in person and his staff provided him with a guide. Twice during the early part of that day, Lee sent

70 Longstreet’s and A. P. Hill’s Divisions suffered another 5,000 casualties at Glendale, to add to their heavy losses at Gaines’ Mill, and Hill’s casualties at Mechanicsville. Once again, Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 277-30, and Allan, Army of Northern Virginia, 106-122, provide excellent summaries of the Battle of Glendale.
messengers to confirm that Magruder was marching on course.⁷¹ Even though Magruder had been assigned a secondary role in the day’s operations, Lee was now taking no chances with him.⁷²

On the whole, however, the events of June 30 represent Lee’s most glaring failure to utilize his staff.⁷³ As on the day before, Lee gave his instructions to each commander in person before riding away along with his staff to another of the divisions. On June 30, he gave Jackson his instructions before departing to see Longstreet, A. P. Hill, and Holmes in turn.⁷⁴ He finally settled with the most remote division, Holmes’, and again failed to leave staff officers in his wake. After the war, Alexander sharply criticized Lee for this failure, claiming he should have positioned himself with Huger and left “reliable members of his staff” with Jackson and Longstreet, receiving reports every half hour or oftener, & giving fresh orders as needed.”⁷⁵ Lee failed to do this, establishing himself and his staff with Longstreet.

Once he had attached himself to Longstreet, Lee continued to keep his staff close to him. According to Longstreet, the commanding general and President Jefferson Davis rode up with their staffs to observe the action. Observation was all Lee’s staff apparently did, as Longstreet claimed that “all parties engaged in pleasant

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⁷¹ See Magruder’s report in O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 666. Lee used Major Bloomfield of Magruder’s staff to deliver the second message to Magruder.
⁷² See Gary Gallagher, Lee and His Generals in War and Memory (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1998), 129.
⁷³ Henderson, in Stonewall Jackson, 2:59, blamed Lee’s staff officers for failing to keep the divisions “in hand”. As will be seen, however, Lee failed to use his staff to do this. See also Emory M. Thomas, Robert E. Lee: A Biography (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 240-241. In Thomas’ words, Lee “seemed to resolve to do his own staff work” on June 30.
⁷⁴ Robertson, Stonewall Jackson, 491. Sears, in To the Gates of Richmond, 284, points out that Huger was the only one of Lee’s personal attendants not to receive his orders from Lee in person, but he does not say who carried his orders to him.
⁷⁵ Gallagher, Fighting, 110-111.
talk and speculations of the result of a combination supposed to be complete and proper for concentrating battle.” In fact, there were so many staff officers with Lee and Davis that the combined party attracted Federal artillery fire and was ordered off the battlefield by A. P. Hill. Aside from being fired upon, all Lee and his staff did was wait. Finally, Lee and Longstreet heard cannon fire to their north and assumed that this was Huger’s attack. No staff officer was sent to Huger to ascertain whether he was actually engaged; instead Lee ordered Longstreet to make his costly assault.

Lee never sent a single staff officer to find out what was retarding Jackson’s progress or to order his aid on behalf of Longstreet and A. P. Hill. Jackson was but forty minutes away from Lee via horseback, yet Lee and his staff sat waiting. Longstreet, hard-pressed by the superior Federal numbers he and A. P. Hill were attacking, sent Captain Fairfax of his staff to Jackson to ask for reinforcements. Without direct authorization from Lee, Jackson declined. Even though his men could have marched to aid Longstreet in three hours’ time, he did not feel authorized to change his objectives. In fact, Lee appears not to have used his staff at all to

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76 Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 134.
77 As Alexander phrased it “Hours we stood there waiting-waiting for something that never happened.” *(Memoirs*, 140).
78 Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 108.
79 See Longstreet’s report in *O. R.*, I, XI, 23, II, 759. In fact, Huger was only engaged in sporadic artillery exchanges with the Federals; for most of the day, his division was engaged in clearing the road down which he was to advance even as the Union troops kept felling more trees; see Huger’s report in *O. R.*, I, XI, 23, II, 789.
80 Robertson, *Stonewall Jackson*, 497-498.
81 Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 111.
82 Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson*, 2:57. Henderson here quotes a personal letter to him from Jackson’s former medical director, Dr. Hunter McGuire. Both Henderson and Robertson imply that Lee’s staff would have had such authority to order “Stonewall” to alter his objectives in Lee’s name. In Jackson’s words, *(Sears, To the Gates of Richmond*, 288), “If General Lee had wanted me he could have sent for me!”
communicate on June 30; when Holmes asked for assistance, Lee went personally to check on Holmes rather than sending a staff officer to investigate. By the end of the day, in Emory Thomas’ words, “If nothing else Lee learned… that he could not manage complex operations all by himself.”

Throughout these examples, it is important to recognize that Lee’s staff followed his instructions. They usually did not fail Lee; instead, he simply failed to send them. He usually did not use them to carry messages in a timely fashion, and did not entrust them to supervise the execution of his orders. If Major Marshall is any indication, the staff definitely knew at least something of Lee’s plans, and could have helped make sure they were implemented. Lee had entrusted the Richmond fortifications to his staff officers, but he could not bring himself to entrust them with supervision of field operations. Repeatedly, Lee gave all orders in person, and then retired to a remote point without further communicating with his embattled subordinates. Apparently, he had not yet learned how to properly use his personal staff in the field. He may not have understood that subordinates might fail to carry out his instructions, or underestimated the effects of battlefield confusion.

**Chilton Fails to Issue Practical Orders: Glendale (II) and Malvern Hill**

Thus far in the campaign, Lee had either issued most of the orders himself verbally or wrote them down for the staff to copy. His chief of staff, Colonel Robert Chilton, had accordingly not often been called upon to issue orders himself.

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83 Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 290-293.
However, when he had done so, the results had been mixed at best. Chilton had done an admirable job of managing Magruder’s troops south of the Chickahominy River on June 26-27, but had badly garbled the drafting of an order to cavalry chief J. E. B. Stuart two days later. This order directed the cavalry commander to support Jackson, who was apparently to remain north of the Chickahominy to block any crossing by the Federals. Lee had ordered Jackson to support Magruder’s attack at Savage’s Station, but Jackson read Chilton’s order to Stuart and concluded the opposite; hence his communicating to Magruder that he had been ordered not to support him on June 29.85 This would not be Chilton’s last failure at drafting orders, nor his most costly one.

While Lee failed to send a staff officer to ascertain events in Jackson’s and Huger’s commands, his chief of staff, Colonel Robert Chilton, deprived the Confederates of another badly-needed command on June 30. In Lee’s plan for the battle, Magruder was supposed to support Longstreet and A. P. Hill. When Holmes’ Division was driven back by Union gunboat fire, however, Holmes panicked and sent frantic messages to Chilton asking for immediate assistance. Chilton responded by ordering Magruder to break off his march to aid Longstreet’s and A. P. Hill’s embattled divisions and march his command to reinforce Holmes.86

Chilton’s order was terribly unrealistic in light of the terrain near Glendale and White Oak Swamp through which Magruder had to move. When Magruder

86 O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 666-667, 907. While Lee had ordered Chilton to write this order, the chief of staff was unfamiliar with the terrain; see discussion above.
attempted to comply with Chilton’s orders, he became lost in the woods, as his headquarters-supplied guides failed him. He finally resorted to asking a local farmer for advice as to which road he should take, and the farmer directed him to a narrow, meandering path not suitable for his artillery. By this time, Chilton had determined that Longstreet, not Holmes, needed help, and ordered Magruder back to aid Longstreet. The consequent marching and counter-marching wearied Magruder’s units, and they did not reach Longstreet until about 2:00 in the morning, having missed the entire battle.\textsuperscript{87}

After escaping the Confederate trap on June 30, the Army of the Potomac took up a very formidable position on Malvern Hill to protect its supply trains. A very frustrated Lee set his army in pursuit.\textsuperscript{88} When the Confederates arrived at Malvern Hill, they were discouraged by the nearly impregnable Union position. Lee, though, was determined to crush McClellan’s army this time, and allowed Longstreet to persuade him that the position could be carried by an immense artillery bombardment followed by an all-out infantry charge. This time, Lee did not give the attack orders himself, but delegated that task to Chilton. The plan called for a massive preliminary bombardment of the Union line to drive away the massed Federal artillery clearly visible from the Confederate position. Once the Union guns had been driven away, the infantry of Magruder’s, Huger’s, D. H. Hill’s, and Whiting’s Divisions was to


\textsuperscript{88} This frustration even carried over to Lee’s official report, finally submitted in April 1863.
launch an all-out charge into the enemy, thus crushing McClellan’s army against the James River and destroying it.\footnote{Whiting’s Division was one of Jackson’s three divisions. Jackson’s remaining troops were in reserve. For an excellent summary of Lee’s plans, see Miller, “Siege of Richmond”, 53-54. It should be pointed out that any offensive against Malvern Hill was likely doomed, but it will be demonstrated that Chilton handled the actual assault very poorly.}

The battle was the worst disaster of the Seven Days for the Confederates, resulting in about 5,000 casualties against only 1,500 for the Federals. The Confederate artillery bombardment was very poor in its execution, as only a few Confederate batteries were ever brought forward, and they were knocked to pieces by the Federal gunners as soon as they took up positions. The subsequent infantry charge, which finally went forward at about 5:00, was a fiasco, as a total of fifteen Confederate brigades hurled themselves, one or two at a time, into the massed firepower of about fifty Union cannon and the infantry fire of two Federal divisions, strongly positioned at the top of a steep hill flanked by swamps. In the end, Malvern Hill cost Lee’s army more than 5,000 casualties, about three times the Union tally. McClellan continued his retreat to Harrison’s Landing, effectively ending the campaign, but the Confederacy had wasted the lives of many of its soldiers.\footnote{For detailed summaries of the Battle of Malvern Hill, see Sears, \textit{To the Gates of Richmond}, 308-336, Allan, \textit{Army of Northern Virginia}, 122-139, and Bridges, \textit{Lee’s Maverick General}, 79-83.}

At Malvern Hill, Lee’s staff as a whole did not fail him. Rather, Chilton badly bungled his responsibilities, and Lee himself should once again bear some of the blame. After Lee accepted Longstreet’s suggestion that the Federal line could be taken, he left Chilton to actually manage the attack. Chilton was to position the troops and issue the orders. He largely seems to have mishandled these assignments.
From the start, Chilton was hampered by the fact that Magruder and Huger had both lost their way to Malvern Hill. This time, Lee had corrected the error by dispatching Walter Taylor and Randolph Talcott to correct Magruder’s and Huger’s marches, but both were late in arriving at Malvern Hill. To further exacerbate matters, Magruder again became lost when he was ordered by Lee to take up a position on the Confederate right along the Old Church Road. Like many other Confederate generals during the campaign, Magruder had enlisted his own guides, and their knowledge of the terrain did not agree with Lee’s maps. Consequently, Magruder was again out of position, and Chilton finally had to personally direct him to his assigned position.91

After directing Magruder to his position at last, Chilton does not seem to have taken any further role in placing any of the troops, or the vitally-important artillery. After showing Magruder which road to take, he did not even finish positioning that general’s troops, leaving that task to Magruder and Longstreet.92 When Magruder became apprehensive about attacking such a strong position, Longstreet volunteered to go himself and get batteries to open the bombardment. He only sent a handful of batteries, which were knocked out one by one.93 Likewise, on the Confederate left, Chilton was not mentioned as being present at all. He certainly did not help to place

92 See O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 691, 719, 751. Interestingly, Longstreet did not mention his role in positioning Magruder’s men in his official report. Although Wert (Longstreet, 147) accepts Longstreet’s version, McLaws’ report differs. Even Magruder does not mention Chilton placing his troops. Freeman (Lee’s Lieutenants, 1:598) points out that Longstreet poorly positioned Magruder’s troops in any event.
93 See O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 668-669, 747, 813, 823. In Manassas to Appomattox (143-144), Longstreet blamed the artillery fire from Jackson’s sector of the line under Whiting (see discussion below) for being late and ineffective.
the Confederate artillery there, as the reports all specify that an infantry commander was being placed in command of the batteries in this area. Once again, the batteries came up singularly and were blown apart in piecemeal fashion, with considerable confusion reigning amongst battery commanders, some of whom did not know whom to ask for orders. 94 At one point, some unidentifiable “source” was rumored to have ordered all artillery here to leave the field, and consequently many batteries withdrew. 95 Overall, Chilton did nothing to arrange the preliminary bombardment, and it failed miserably. After the battle, one artillery battalion commander referred to “the great superabundance of artillery and the scanty use that was made of it.” 96 As a result of this failure, the infantry charge was virtually unsupported by artillery. 97

Chilton proceeded to issue one of the most-criticized attack orders of the war. Issued to Magruder and D. H. Hill, it read: “Batteries have been established to rake the enemy’s lines. If it is broken, as is probable, Armistead, who can witness the effect of the fire, has been ordered to charge with a yell. Do the same.” 98 This order was extremely unclear and carried the potential for the chaotic attack that resulted. It effectively placed the responsibility for ordering the attack on Brigadier General

94 O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 566-567, 571, 628. Here, Lee’s general staff failed him spectacularly, as the army’s chief of artillery, Brigadier General Pendleton, was not even on the battlefield, having spent June 29 absent sick and the next two days vainly searching for Lee to give him orders. Lee should not have been too difficult to find, even though he had not sent out staff officers to the various divisions on June 30. In any event, Pendleton and others had ordered much of the army’s artillery to the rear the previous day because it was nearly useless in the wooded swamps near Glendale; see O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 536, and Gallagher, Lee and His Generals, 132. Wise fervently defended Pendleton, placing the blame on Lee’s failure to communicate with him using his other staff; see The Long Arm of Lee, 227-231.
95 Ibid, 549, 573-574, 618.
96 Ibid, 550. In his report, Lee blamed the artillery’s poor handling on the terrain (ibid, 496).
97 See Wise, The Long Arm of Lee, 225-231.
Louis Armistead, who had just led his brigade for the first time into combat in a skirmish on June 25. Chilton’s offhanded reference to the batteries indicated that he felt no responsibility to ensure that they were correctly placed or handled with skill. Indeed, the entire order distanced the chief of staff from any active role in the infantry charge.99

Since Chilton failed to assume responsibility for managing the attack, the commanders involved often were simply thrown into the fray without even knowing from whom they were supposed to be receiving orders. Chilton did not verify that his order had been received by all the generals. D. H. Hill showed his brigadiers the attack order and discussed it with them, but Magruder failed to do so. Magruder only received the order very late, and he appears not to have discussed it with his division or brigade commanders at all, as not a single one of them mentions the order in his official report of the battle. Magruder simply ordered Armistead to advance, and then issued orders to some of his subordinates to attack in his support. At least one of Magruder’s brigade commanders became engaged only when Armistead asked for his support.100

99 As Henderson (Stonewall Jackson, 2:63) phrased it, “The order…gave an opening to misunderstanding; and, as is almost invariably the case when orders are defective, misunderstanding occurred.” Bartholomees (Buff Facings, 269) described the order as “a poorly conceived order without a hint of the coordination required for a multibrigade assault”.

100 O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 687, 748-750, 800, and Gallagher, Lee and His Generals, 133. Another of Magruder’s brigade commanders reported that he had no “specific instructions” (O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 728).
Armistead did not mention Chilton’s attack order in his report. Even while the slaughter was raging, at least one of Huger’s brigade commanders, Robert Ransom, had still not been notified that he was to take orders from Magruder. He consequently refused to obey them until Huger ordered him to follow Magruder’s directions. Another of Huger’s brigadiers claimed he received no attack orders at all from any division commander or army headquarters, but simply followed Armistead’s orders. Chilton had failed to position the troops, drawn up an incredibly poor attack order, and failed to clarify the chain of command as was his responsibility.

Despite all of these failures on Chilton’s part, he is often wrongly blamed for ordering the actual attack. After it became obvious that the artillery bombardment was not going to work, Lee had ridden to the Confederate left with Longstreet to investigate the possibility of flanking the Federals off Malvern Hill. He had, as Longstreet correctly believed, decided to cancel the infantry attack. Suddenly, a message arrived claiming that Armistead had repulsed a Federal advance and that the Union army was retreating. In fact, Armistead had merely driven back the Union skirmish line and established his brigade in a protective ravine to await the “effect of the batteries.” Impatient at the prospect of letting McClellan escape again, Lee

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102 Ibid, 794, 813-814. Chilton had ordered Huger to support Armistead, whose brigade was temporarily detached from Huger; see ibid, 686. Freeman pointed out in *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 1:597, that Huger was himself “waiting for orders that never came.”
ordered the assault.\textsuperscript{103} He still did not use his own staff to deliver the order, but sent Captain Dickinson of Magruder’s staff to tell that general to attack.\textsuperscript{104}

After the war, Longstreet mistakenly alleged that Lee had neglected to cancel the original, poorly-worded attack order, and that the suicidal assault was merely the result of oversight on the part of Lee and possibly his staff.\textsuperscript{105} Instead, it was Lee who actively confirmed Chilton’s initial order with the final attack order.\textsuperscript{106} Indeed, he did not even consult with his chief of staff, as the final attack order to Magruder did not bear Chilton’s signature. Certainly, Chilton deserved censure for failing to keep his chief accurately informed of events in Armistead’s front. Indeed, Chilton seems not to have even been fully aware of what was transpiring there, as his eventual order to Huger to support Magruder was very vague.\textsuperscript{107} Once again, Lee failed to communicate with his subordinates, and this time Chilton likewise failed to keep Lee abreast of developments.

After the battle, Chilton blamed the assault’s failure on Magruder. Much of Magruder’s report was consumed by his desire to restore his reputation.\textsuperscript{108} He even

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 760. Gallagher (133) records that Freeman had claimed Magruder had delivered a falsely optimistic report of Armistead’s initial success, thus prompting Lee to order the main attack. See also Wert, Longstreet, 148.
\item O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 669, 677-678, and Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants, 1:599.
\item Henderson advanced this claim: “Unfortunately, through some mistake on the part of Lee’s staff, the order of attack which had already been issued was not rescinded.” (Stonewall Jackson, 2:62, emphasis added). Alexander fervently denied this, claiming the battle “was begun by a direct order from Lee given hastily under a misapprehension of fact” (Memoirs, 161).
\item Thomas, Robert E. Lee, 242-243. Reportedly, when Lee asked Magruder why he had attacked, Magruder replied, “In obedience to your orders, twice repeated” (Gallagher, Lee and His Generals, 134).
\item O. R., I, XI, 23, II, 678, 686.
\item Chilton even wrote President Davis accusing Magruder of being “utterly incompetent and deficient”, and alleging that Lee felt the same way. Such rumors destroyed Magruder’s career; see Gallagher, Lee and His Generals, 136.
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secured the testimony of his July 1 guides that the road that they led him on before Chilton corrected them was in fact the Quaker Road to the best of their knowledge. Magruder also preserved and produced copies of Chilton’s attack order and Lee’s subsequent final attack order in his report. Interestingly, though, he never criticized Chilton directly; perhaps he felt that the obviously flawed nature of Chilton’s order spoke for itself. In the end, Magruder wildly overestimated the success of the attack, magnifying Union losses while underestimating Confederate casualties.\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{Conclusion: Lee Misused His Staff}

The Seven Days’ Battles as a whole are considered to be a Confederate strategic victory, but five of its six battles were tactical defeats for the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee’s army suffered approximately twenty-five percent casualties, five thousand more total casualties than its opponent, losses the Confederacy could ill-afford.\textsuperscript{110} The Federals had been driven away from Richmond, and several months of Union planning had been wasted. A huge amount of war materials and large numbers of prisoners had fallen into Confederate hands. Yet, Lee was disappointed that his victory was not decisive. He knew that the Union army was far from destroyed, and that it would return, probably under better leadership, in the future.

The Seven Days had been Lee’s first battle in command of a major army, and his inexperience had showed. In his defense, he was attempting to forge a unified army from what had been three separate commands that still retained a cumbersome

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 660-677.
\textsuperscript{110} In total, the Army of Northern Virginia took approximately 20,000 casualties, while the Army of the Potomac suffered about 15,000 casualties.
organizational structure. He had been assisted by only seven personal staff officers, and of them, only one had any significant prewar military experience. He had been facing a very powerful adversary whose men fought with skill and determination. Facing such challenges, Lee had achieved a great deal.

Nevertheless, he had failed to properly utilize his limited personal staff. While he had been willing to entrust them to oversee the digging of fortifications and even to know his plans before anyone else, he rarely sent them to supervise operations in the field. Repeatedly, Lee had issued orders himself and then simply waited for his subordinates to execute them. When his subordinates failed to follow through, Lee kept waiting, seldom sending any staff officer to discover what was happening, and he never left any staff officer to oversee any complex movement. Such innate trust in subordinates might have functioned well in a tightly organized army with well-established, reliable generals, but the Army of Northern Virginia had yet to achieve this condition. In time, Lee would learn to use his staff better and the army’s organization would make command and control easier, but during the Seven Days, these flaws were exhibited prominently. 111

Since G. F. R. Henderson and Douglas Southall Freeman, writers have chastised Lee’s staff and used Malvern Hill to prove their arguments. Certainly, Malvern Hill represents a great mistake by the Confederates, but this does not establish the case against Lee’s staff for the entirety of the war. At Malvern Hill, Chilton badly mismanaged the attack, but his failure should not be seen as

111 See Bartholomees, Buff Facings, 8-13, Krick, “Great Tycoon”, 102-104, and Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 278.
representative of general incompetence on the part of all of Lee’s staff, or even of Chilton himself. In fact, the final responsibility for the fiasco rested with Robert E. Lee, not Chilton. Chilton’s order has been much-cited by historians, but it was Lee’s order that sent the brigades forward.\footnote{112}

On the whole, then, Lee’s staff was not incompetent; he simply failed to make proper and timely use of it. In order to succeed in the Civil War, commanders needed competent staffs, and they needed to utilize their talents. As Walter Taylor wrote of the commanding general, “The theory is that he is served by an officer who speaks by his authority and in his name, who is supposed to be so well informed as to his chief’s views...to make all decisions...to conform to these established principles.”\footnote{113} In the Seven Days’ Battles, Lee was not served by such an “officer,” but most evidence asserts that he seldom entrusted most of his staff to either speak by his authority or to make their own decisions. When he gave a staff officer such trust at Malvern Hill, that officer proved a poor choice to receive it, and bungled his opportunity.

It is true that the staff as a whole might be faulted for failing to assume a larger role for itself.\footnote{114} For instance, it might be alleged that staff officers could have volunteered to stay with the division commanders or to visit them when they failed to appear as scheduled. However, such an argument overlooks the chain of command that, by all accounts, was strictly observed in the Army of Northern Virginia.

\footnote{112} Ironically, in \textit{Lee’s Lieutenants}, 1:588, Freeman labeled his chapter on Malvern Hill “A Tragedy of Staff,” and never mentioned that Chilton drafted the infamous first attack order! Summarizing the campaign, he declared (1:604), “The strategic aim of the campaign had been achieved despite bad co-ordination, worse tactics and the worst imaginable staff work.”
\footnote{113} Taylor, \textit{General Lee}, 56.
\footnote{114} For a partial example of such an argument, see Wise, \textit{The Long Arm of Lee}, 227, 231.
Many explanations have been offered as to why the Confederates failed to destroy the Union Army in the swamps near Richmond. Alexander blamed Jackson. Long faulted the division commanders. Taylor blamed the difficult terrain of operations. Some have emphasized the poor maps supplied by the Confederate General Staff in Richmond. Many more have asserted that Lee’s personal staff was to blame. As this study has shown, though, Lee’s staff accomplished almost everything that was expected of it. One officer failed to perform well, but the others did their duty faithfully, and they should be remembered accordingly.

The staff has received blame partially because of their status in the army hierarchy. Staffs tended to become invisible even while the war was being fought; they were seen as mere appendages of their commanders. Thus, this study may be biased in favor of declaring that the staff possessed a very minor role, when in fact they may have had a prominent part in the action. There is enough explicit testimony from the published primary sources to establish that the staff was not used at key moments in the campaign, and that Chilton issued ill-considered orders at critical times. While Lee’s staff work would improve in his later campaigns, the Seven Days definitely represented his worst failure to use his staff to command and control his army.
Chapter III: The Maryland Campaign: Improvement in Staff Usage

The Maryland Campaign of 1862 presents a study in command style. Fresh from victories over superior Federal forces in the Seven Days’ Battles and at Second Manassas, Robert E. Lee’s Confederate Army of Northern Virginia embarked on its first invasion of Union territory in September 1862. Lee sought to draw the recently-beaten Union Army of the Potomac away from the Washington fortifications and lure it into fighting a battle resulting in its destruction.\(^1\) Such a victory would likely sway foreign opinion towards recognition of the Confederacy and force the Lincoln administration to the peace table. This result was not to be, because Federal detachments forced Lee to divide his own army, and the Army of the Potomac attacked before its divisions could readily reunite. In the end, Lee made a desperate stand at Sharpsburg, Maryland, and fought the bloodiest single-day battle in American history. Lee was forced to withdraw after the battle, and the Confederate invasion of Maryland failed.

This campaign, especially the decision to stand and fight at Sharpsburg, was one of Lee’s most criticized after the war. James Longstreet, Daniel Harvey Hill and others criticized the general’s judgment to engage a superior enemy with an unfordable river to his rear. Lee’s former staff officers rose to his defense, offering detailed explanations of the general’s mindset in September 1862. Although it is

\(^1\) For a very in-depth study of Lee’s motives for invading Maryland, see Joseph L. Harsh, *Taken at the Flood: Robert E. Lee and Confederate Strategy in the Maryland Campaign of 1862* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1999).
interesting to read these exonerations of Lee’s conduct, the nature of the staff officers’ writings poses special problems for historians seeking to study Lee’s staff in the Maryland Campaign. The general’s staff is often lost in his shadow in postwar writings, but the especially determined efforts the staff made after the war to defend Lee’s decisions in Maryland have tended to erase their own activities from the historical record.²

As Joseph Harsh demonstrates, the historiography of the Maryland Campaign is extensive, although the importance of Antietam has been overshadowed in scholars’ minds by Gettysburg. The first extensive study of the campaign was conducted in the 1880s and 1890s by a Union veteran, Ezra Carman, but his lengthy narrative went unpublished until 2008.³ The first book-length study of Antietam published was James V. Murfin’s 1965 *The Gleam of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam and Robert E. Lee’s Invasion of Maryland, 1862*, and it focused mostly on the Union side of the campaign. Likewise, Stephen W. Sears’ 1982 *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam*, as a part of that author’s Army of the Potomac series, focused on George McClellan and his many mistakes during the campaign.

² For example, Charles Marshall’s writings reveal nothing at all about his own endeavors during the campaign. Instead, Marshall never finished his memoirs, but was writing a lengthy defense of Lee’s decisions in Maryland; see Sir Frederick Maurice (ed.), *An Aide-de-Camp of Lee: Being the Papers of Charles Marshall, Sometime Aide-de-Camp, Military Secretary, and Assistant Adjutant General on the Staff of Robert E. Lee, 1862-1865* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1927), 143-162. For more on Lee’s staff officers and their relationship to the general’s “Lost Cause” image, see the Introduction to this thesis, 3.

³ Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 1-6, and Ezra A. Carman, *The Maryland Campaign of 1862: Ezra A. Carman’s Definitive Study of the Union and Confederate Armies at Antietam*, ed. Joseph Pierro (New York: Routledge, 2008). Carman was on the committee that established the Antietam National Battlefield, and he placed the current-day unit position markers there. It is known that Carman based his writings and marker placements on interviews with fellow veterans of both armies, but which people he interviewed has been lost to history; see Pierro, xi-xii.
The Confederate side of the campaign has been examined in greater detail more recently. Robert K. Krick’s “The Army of Northern Virginia: Its Conditions, Its Circumstances, and Why It Should Not Have Been at Sharpsburg,” and D. Scott Hartwick’s “Robert E. Lee and the Maryland Campaign” are two such studies. However, Joseph P. Harsh’s detailed examinations of Confederate military strategy in 1861 and 1862 tower above all previous efforts in their focus on Lee and his decisions. Harsh analyzes Lee and his army in great detail, but his work is focused on Lee’s thinking, and does not examine his usage of his staff in the Maryland Campaign. The only historian to offer specific comments on Lee’s staff at the onset of the campaign was G. F. R. Henderson, who offered a similarly negative view of its performance here as he had for the Seven Days, referring to the staff’s “ignorance,” and claiming it was “half-trained.” Similarly, assessing the overall state of the army after the campaign, Robert K. Krick claimed, “When Lee made the army his own, and bent its staff functions to his own purposes, acute straggling disappeared.”

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Although the Maryland Campaign had less-than-optimal results for the South, it showed that great improvements had been made in staff usage to command and control the Army of Northern Virginia. During the Seven Days’ Battles, the army frequently struggled with mistaken orders, miscarried messages, and failures to maintain communications. The army repeatedly divided into smaller detachments moving over different roads to reach assigned destinations, and units were chronically late or even failed to arrive at all. In Maryland, Lee’s army was again divided into portions operating far out of sight of the commanding general, and Lee was still operating with the same seven officers on his personal staff. In this campaign, though, Lee maintained communications with his subordinates throughout the battles of South Mountain, Harper’s Ferry, and Antietam, receiving and relaying reports and orders to most of his generals.7

Lee used his staff much more effectively to communicate in Maryland than he had in the battles near Richmond, yet he did not take advantage of their power to issue orders in his name. As a result, Lee’s far-flung subordinates now possessed great flexibility in carrying out their assignments. Much has been written about Lee’s allowance of great discretion to his subordinates; for example, Douglas Southall Freeman remarked that Lee showed his generals too much deference during the Maryland Campaign, and attributed this to Lee’s own experience as a member of

7 In his essay, “The ‘Great Tycoon’ Forges a Staff System,” in Audacity Personified: Essays on the Generalship of Robert E. Lee, ed. Andrew Carmichael (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, 2004), 82-106, Robert K. Krick asserts that Lee began to “overhaul” his staff between the Seven Days and the Maryland Campaign (88-89). He cites no sources for this claim, however, and there is no direct evidence of drastic reform. Similarly, Sears (62) wrote that “Both he [Lee] and his lieutenants were learning the art of handling large bodies of troops.” For more on these issues, see Chapter 1.
Winfield Scott’s staff in Mexico. This deference extended to Lafayette McLaws and John Walker, both of whom commanded independent columns in Lee’s plans, even though neither had previously held such responsibility. Indisputably, though, Lee’s failure to use his personal staff to issue orders in his name or to travel with subordinates and supervise their work left his army very dependent on the abilities of his generals.

This chapter will proceed chronologically through the Maryland Campaign, analyzing Lee’s usage of his personal staff. It will demonstrate that Lee used his staff officers and couriers to maintain his communications and control over the detached units of the Army of Northern Virginia. It will also show, however, that Lee rarely allowed his personal staff to issue orders in his name during this campaign. In the end, it will be revealed that the Army of Northern Virginia might have been better served if Lee had used his staff officers to accompany or to supervise his subordinates when they were out of his personal oversight. It does not suggest that better supervision by staff officers would have changed the outcome of the campaign;
rather, it argues that Lee’s army would likely not have experienced the perilous situations it did, and would have reacted more swiftly when crises arose.

**Lee’s Injury, August 31**

Just before the army entered Maryland, Lee suffered an injury that affected his command style. As the fighting near Manassas was ending on August 31, Lee was injured when his horse Traveller suddenly bolted with the general’s hands grabbing for the bridle. Lee tripped and fell, breaking a bone in one hand and badly spraining the other. His hands bandaged and both arms in slings, Lee could not dress, feed himself, ride his horse, or even write. Because of his condition, as the evidence demonstrates, Lee kept his staff officers in close proximity throughout most of the campaign. When Lee traveled, he did so by ambulance, and this further necessitated the close proximity of his staff, who had to assist him into the ambulance and clear the roads for him.10 Because of the pain in his hands, Lee rarely left his tent; when he desired to discuss operations with his generals, he had couriers summon them instead of going to see them himself, further occupying headquarters personnel. Even at Antietam, when Lee’s hands had healed sufficiently for him to ride his horse, he had to be assisted onto his horse, and still used a courier to hold the reins.11

Whenever messages needed to be written down, Lee was now dependent on the staff to take down his dictation. While staff officers routinely took dictation, it

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11 Sears, 87. Lee usually pitched his tent near either Longstreet’s or Jackson’s. See also Pierro, 257; Harsh, *Sounding the Shallows*, 176; and comment on note 13 above.
was atypical for the staff to have to write all of Lee’s paperwork for him. In addition to orders for the army, Lee had habitually sent daily dispatches to Jefferson Davis; these messages too had to be written for Lee. Although Lee only had a single officially designated “military secretary,” Armistead Long, evidence indicates that all of Lee’s personal staff became secretaries while the general was injured, regardless of title. Once on paper, couriers, not staff officers, took the messages to their recipients. Because couriers did not possess the prestige of staff officers, more discretion in interpreting and following the orders was necessarily left to Lee’s subordinates. Before the Maryland invasion had even commenced, Lee’s staff was even busier than usual in helping the general maintain his command over the Army of Northern Virginia. As Walter Taylor summarized the situation, Lee’s injury “made life a trial to him for several weeks, and came near depriving the army of his presence.”

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13 This assertion is supported by the short intervals between dispatches in which multiple messages were sent out under different staff officers’ names at Lee’s dictation. For examples, see O. R., I, XIX, II, 589-596. As of September 21, Lee was still dictating routine paperwork to Chilton; see O. R., I, XIX, II, 613.

14 It is crucial to review the distinction between staff officers and couriers. Staff officers were ranked individuals who were supposed to possess some grasp of the overall tactical and strategic situation; i.e. to possess some of their generals’ knowledge. Couriers, on the other hand, were normally unranked messengers whose sole job was to deliver messages. They were not empowered to issue orders in their generals’ names, nor to modify those they carried to suit the circumstances; they were simple carriers of orders whose jobs were merely to bear their dispatches to their destinations and wait for return messages. For more details on this distinction, see Bartolomees, 205-215.

15 Taylor, General Lee, 115. Chilton reported the incident to Richmond (Chilton to Randolph, O. R., I, XIX, II, 588).
The Organization of the Army of Northern Virginia: Complications

After the battle, many participants and historians mistakenly portrayed the Army of Northern Virginia as possessing a neat, simple command structure of two corps under James Longstreet and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. In reality, in the words of then-Colonel Edward Porter Alexander, “The different divisions were still only associated, not formed, into corps.” When the campaign opened, Longstreet only possessed formal authority over three divisions, those of Brigadier Generals Cadmus Wilcox, David R. Jones, and Nathaniel Evans. Jackson only commanded his own division, under Brigadier General William Starke, Ewell’s Division, under Brigadier General Alexander Lawton, and Major General Ambrose P. Hill’s “Light” Division. The army’s other four divisions, under Major Generals Richard H. Anderson, Lafayette McLaw, Daniel Harvey Hill, and Brigadier General John G. Walker, all reported directly to army headquarters, along with Major General J. E. B. Stuart’s cavalry and Brigadier General William N. Pendleton’s Reserve Artillery. Thus, Lee’s staff was preparing orders not for two wings or corps as has been supposed, but instead for two wing commanders and six other independent generals.

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17 To further complicate matters, on September 10, Wilcox’s Division was merged into Richard H. Anderson’s, and on September 14, John Bell Hood was detached from Evans’ Division with two brigades, leaving Evans with a single independent brigade; see Harsh, Sounding the Shallows, 52-53.

18 The artillery was itself evolving in its organization. Rather than being parceled out by individual batteries to infantry brigades, it was now consolidated in battalions in every division except Walker’s. See Jennings Cropper Wise, The Long Arm of Lee, or The History of the Artillery of the Army of Northern Virginia (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 1:278-286.
This organization revealed the evolving system of command and control of
the Army of Northern Virginia. During the Seven Days, the army was largely
composed of independent divisions. Corps arrangements were forming as the army
progressed, and would become formalized just after the Maryland Campaign ended.
In the meantime, Harsh has suggested that Lee was “testing” different commanders
and command structures to discover which generals and organizational arrangements
would control large portions of his army most efficiently. In the short term, Lee’s
staff had to meet the general’s heightened needs as well as prepare eight sets of
orders. When it is recalled that Lee had only seven personal staff officers, the
difficulty of this task becomes apparent.19 Lee at least partially grasped this
predicament, as he stressed at the start of the campaign that it was his subordinates’
job to maintain communications with him, not the reverse.20

Special Orders No. 191 (September 4-10, 1862)

At Lee’s command, the Army of Northern Virginia crossed the Potomac on
September 4 and assembled in Frederick, Maryland, by September 7. Here, Lee used
his aide-de-camp Charles Marshall, a Marylander, to write a declaration appealing to
Marylanders to rise up and enlist in the ranks of the Confederate army to overthrow

19 These officers were Colonel Robert H. Chilton, Colonel Armistead Long, Major Walter H. Taylor,
Mason. See discussion in Chapter 1, 7-8, Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 160, and Sounding the Shallows,
76. A common criticism of Lee’s staff holds that it was too few in number. J. Boone Bartholomees
(12) has successfully dispelled this notion for most of the army’s history, but this author wonders
whether it might have been true for much of the Maryland Campaign simply because of Lee’s physical
condition.
20 O. R., I, XIX, II, 596. It is noteworthy that Robert K. Krick insisted that this organization still
worked better than that of the Union army during the campaign; see Krick, “The Army of Northern
Virginia,” 46.
the Union “despotism.” Lee had interposed his army between the Union garrisons at Martinsburg and Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, and the Army of the Potomac in the Washington defenses, and he expected the garrisons to retreat northward to safety. They did not withdraw, and their presence threatened Lee’s planned supply line in the Shenandoah Valley. Accordingly, Lee devised a plan to drive the Federals away or capture them. Lee’s plan, embodied in Special Orders No. 191, has been extensively studied by historians, and will not be examined in detail here. It called for the Army of Northern Virginia to be divided into four pieces, with three heading towards Martinsburg and Harper’s Ferry, and one remaining behind at Boonsboro, Maryland. The army was thus to be separated in the presence of a superior enemy, with the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers isolating the detachments from one another, and far from Lee’s personal oversight.

Interestingly, Special Orders No. 191 also placed three divisions under Major General Lafayette McLaws and Brigadier General John Walker, neither of whom had previously held independent command. Between them, these two officers were charged with sealing off the Federals in Harper’s Ferry. They were provided with no cavalry to scout for them, and they were not told to cooperate with Jackson or each other: they would continue to report to army headquarters. No staff officer was

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21 Douglas, 150. The announcement did not work; Lee’s army gathered a few hundred recruits at best in Maryland. The text of the proclamation, which does not mention Marshall, can be found in O. R., I, XIX, II, 601-602. While Lee might have used Marshall to write the proclamation in any event, it still reveals the additional myriad tasks that the general’s injury now forced on his staff.

22 For excellent studies on Special Orders No. 191 and their loss, see Murfin, 328-338, and Harsh, Sounding the Shallows, 160-162, 166-167.

23 Harsh has emphasized in Taken at the Flood (168-190) that Special Orders No. 191 did not call for Jackson to proceed to Harper’s Ferry, but only to Martinsburg. He adds that Lee changed them verbally later to allow for the possibility of the Martinsburg garrison retreating to Harper’s Ferry.
detached to supervise either general, and Lee still relied on couriers to communicate. Thus, McLaws and Walker would operate virtually without direct guidance from Lee or any other, more-experienced leader.\textsuperscript{24} Prevailing military theory held that Lee send a staff officer to accompany such subordinates and ensure that they were executing his commands.\textsuperscript{25}

Unfortunately for the Confederates, Special Orders No. 191 fell into Union General George McClellan’s hands on September 13, thus placing the separated Confederate detachments in grave peril. Because Lee’s staff was implicated in the orders, its role in their issuance and execution must be considered. Firstly, as Lee could not write them, the orders had to be put on paper by the staff officers. However, in the only instance during the campaign in which Lee sent any staff officer far from his presence, he sent Walter Taylor back to Virginia to intercept President Davis, who was on his way to join the army in Maryland.\textsuperscript{26} Taylor was the officer

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{24} Of course, so would Jackson, but Jackson had already proven his ability to command an independent force in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1862; see Jubal A. Early, “The Campaigns of Robert E. Lee,” in \textit{Lee the Soldier}, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 37-74, 57. James Robertson refers to this feature of Special Orders No. 191 as “somewhat strange;” see James I. Robertson, Jr., \textit{Stonewall Jackson: The Man, the Soldier, the Legend} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 598.
\item\textsuperscript{26} See \textit{O. R.}, 19, 2:602-603. Item II of Special Orders, No. 191 sent Taylor to Virginia ostensibly to arrange transportation of the wounded to Winchester, but Lee had indicated earlier in a letter to Davis that he was sending Taylor to intercept him. Harsh believes (\textit{Taken at the Flood}, 156) that Item II was merely a front to cover Taylor’s real mission and asserts that Taylor “seems to have paid little attention to this duty;” in \textit{General Lee}, 120-121, Taylor claimed that the wounded had already been removed. In any case, Taylor missed Davis, who aborted his trip anyway. In a September 12 letter to his older sister from Winchester, Taylor mentioned only his mission to intercept Davis. See Walter H. Taylor to Mary Lou Taylor in R. Lockwood Tower, ed., \textit{Lee’s Adjutant: the Wartime Letters of Colonel Walter Herron Taylor, 1862-1865} (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1995), 43-44.
\end{itemize}
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usually in charge of the issuance and certification of orders, and the task likely fell to Robert Chilton.\textsuperscript{27}

The staff prepared at least seven copies of Special Orders No. 191, and addressed them to Generals Longstreet, Jackson, McLaws, D. H. Hill, Walker, Stuart, and possibly Pendleton. The one later discovered by Union soldiers was addressed to D. H. Hill, and signed by Chilton. D. H. Hill, though, had received a copy from Jackson. Jackson had received his own copy from Chilton, assumed that Hill was still attached to his command, and made a copy for Hill. Most historians believe that Hill’s headquarters received Jackson’s copied version of the orders, and that Chilton’s copy was simply discarded as a duplicate.\textsuperscript{28}

This still begs the question, however, of whose staff lost the orders. Both Hill and his assistant adjutant general denied ever receiving a copy of the orders from Chilton, claiming that a courier from Lee’s headquarters was at fault. In return, after the war Venable alleged the orders were “left carelessly by some one at Hill’s headquarters.”\textsuperscript{29} Some historians, notably D. H. Hill biographer Hal Bridges, have

\textsuperscript{27} Sears, 91. In his account, Taylor emphasizes his absence. This may have been an attempt to excuse himself from the fallout from the blunder, but he was accurate in saying so. Harsh has closely examined Special Orders, No. 191, and found numerous mechanical errors in it which he alleges prove that the orders were carelessly and hastily written; see Harsh, \textit{Taken at the Flood}, 152-164.

\textsuperscript{28} There is a minor controversy over how many copies of Special Orders, No. 191 were ever prepared; see Harsh, \textit{Sounding the Shallows}, 160-162. Certainly, the “Lost Order” copy came from Lee’s headquarters, not Jackson’s; it bore Chilton’s signature, which was used by the Federals to verify its authenticity. Interestingly, in his report (\textit{O. R.}, I, XIX, I, 1019), Hill referred to Special Orders No. 191 as coming from Lee, not Jackson.

\textsuperscript{29} As quoted by Carman in Pierro, 131. Taylor also wrote that Venable blamed Hill’s staff; see Taylor, \textit{General Lee}, 125. According to William Owen, Marshall also blamed General Hill’s staff; see William Miller Owen, \textit{In Camp and Battle With the Washington Artillery of New Orleans: A Narrative of Events During the Late Civil War from Bull Run to Appomattox and Spanish Fort} (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1885), 140. Douglas Southall Freeman likewise blamed Hill’s staff; see Douglas Southall Freeman, \textit{R. E. Lee: A Biography} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934), 2:363.
alleged that there was a Union spy on Lee’s staff. However, Lee vehemently denied after the war that any courier on his staff could have been responsible, because couriers were required to present receipts proving that they had successfully delivered their messages. Whatever the exact circumstances of the famous “Lost Order”, Lee’s staff was at least peripherally responsible, with their mistake having left the Army of Northern Virginia in mortal danger.

The Campaign Proceeds: September 10-13

Unaware that its security had been gravely compromised, the divisions of the Army of Northern Virginia broke camp at Frederick on September 10 and marched off to their respective destinations. Trailing Jackson’s and Longstreet’s commands, McLaws’ two divisions did not proceed until late in the day, even though they had further to travel than Longstreet’s command. Almost immediately, the detachments fell behind schedule. In part, this was due to the inevitable delays inherent in any military endeavor, but it also resulted from lack of staff supervision, especially of McLaws and Walker. Indeed, while Jackson kept sending a “steady stream of

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30 Hal Bridges, *Lee’s Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1961), 97-98. See also *Southern Historical Society Papers* XII, 520, and XXI (1893), 131.
32 A very detailed history of the Army of Northern Virginia during this period can be found in Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 168-252.
33 In the words of D. Scott Hartwick (340), “Staff work, never a strength of the Army of Northern Virginia in 1862, clearly suffered here and exposed McLaws’ troops to unnecessary fatigue and delay. It also led to the famous loss of Special Orders No. 191.” Note Hartwick’s assessment of Lee’s staff as a whole.
couriers”, McLaws and Walker failed even to maintain courier communication with Lee. Lee reprimanded McLaws on September 13 for this negligence:

Major-General McLaws, Commanding Division, etc:

General: General Lee desires me to say that he has not heard from you since you left the main body of the army. He hopes that you have been able to reach your destined position. He is anxious that the object of your expedition be speedily accomplished. The enemy have doubtless occupied Frederick since our troops abandoned it, and are following our rear. You are particularly desired to watch well the main road from Frederick to Harper’s Ferry, so as to prevent the enemy from turning your position. The commanding general hopes that the enemy around Harper’s Ferry will be speedily disposed of, and the various detachments returned to the main body of the army. You are also desired to communicate as frequently as you can with headquarters.  

In the meantime, Lee ordered Longstreet and the reserve artillery to Hagerstown, thus further dividing the army.  

In particular, Lee granted too much latitude to his cavalry chief, J. E. B. Stuart. Special Orders No. 191 had entrusted Stuart with screening the army’s rear as its components bore down on Harper’s Ferry and Martinsburg, but Stuart’s performance was indifferent at best. He seemed more interested in entertaining Maryland girls than in his role as cavalry commander, occupying his own staff with arranging elaborate balls rather than sending regular messages to Lee. On the other hand, Lee never sent any officer to supervise Stuart in the execution of his duties. He did not even send any couriers to Stuart except as a response to the cavalry chief’s sporadic messages.  

As a result of these failures to communicate, Lee’s principal subordinates remained ignorant of each other’s operations. For a long time, McLaws was  

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34 O. R., I, XIX, II, 606 (emphasis added).
35 Douglas, 156, Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:366-367, and Sears, 124-125. Interestingly, Lee made no recorded attempt to communicate with Walker at all; see Pierro, 129. D. H. Hill was left at Boonsboro, at the foot of South Mountain.
36 Von Borcke, 1:193-198, and Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 205-208.
paralyzed by the discovery that the reinforced Harper’s Ferry garrison was as large as his detachment, and by his failure to receive any word concerning Jackson’s or Walker’s movements. Stuart likewise had no inkling that army was now behind the schedule mandated in Special Orders No. 191, and assumed Harper’s Ferry was surrendering on September 12 as planned. Although Lee eventually did send couriers to all of his detachments except Walker’s, thus correcting his mistakes of the Seven Days, communication was still slow.37

On the evening of September 13, Lee received word from Stuart that McClellan’s Union army was moving westward towards his army more rapidly than expected. Knowing that the Harper’s Ferry expedition had by then transitioned into an unplanned siege, Lee promptly used his staff to notify his subordinates of the crisis.38 He summoned Longstreet to his tent, and ordered him to take his two divisions back to Boonsboro to assist D. H. Hill in holding the passes over South Mountain. He sent couriers pounding off to both Jackson and McLaws with messages urging the generals to expedite their operations against Harper’s Ferry. Finally, he sent additional couriers to D. H. Hill and Stuart ordering them to hold South Mountain until Longstreet arrived. This time, despite the miscarriage of his plans, Lee used his staff promptly and effectively.39

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37 See *O. R.*, I, XIX, I, 816, 854, and Harsh, 186-187. Hartwick (341) insisted that the delay was not the fault of either McLaws or Walker. Eventually, Jackson and McLaws communicated by signal.
38 Murfin unfairly and incorrectly claimed that Lee was slow to issue orders to his subordinates on the evening of September 13, referring to Lee’s “overconfidence in some generals and his inability to enforce his authority on others;” see Murfin, 165-167. Similarly, Hartwick doubted that Lee fully grasped the danger on the night of September 13; see Hartwick, 343.
39 Harsh, 244-252. Talcott and Chilton wrote the orders to McLaws and Jackson, respectively; see *O. R.*, I, XIX, II, 607, 951. See also James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the
The Battle of South Mountain, September 14

Although Lee sent couriers to his generals urging them to speed up the siege of Harper’s Ferry and to make a stand in the South Mountain passes, he sent no staff officers to supervise their actions. This led to major problems at Turner’s Gap, the more northern of the two principal gaps in the mountain. During the night of September 13-14, J. E. B. Stuart convinced himself that the Federals were mounting their main efforts towards Crampton’s Gap, south of Turner’s, and rode off towards it with all but one regiment of cavalry. He failed to notify D. H. Hill, whose division had to hold South Mountain until Longstreet arrived. Stuart’s departure left Hill alone to face three full Union army corps on September 14. Seeing his predicament, Hill sent Lee a desperate plea for help.40

Lee arrived at the foot of South Mountain near Turner’s Gap about noon with Longstreet’s divisions. There was no possible way that Lee’s ambulance could ever be brought up South Mountain under combat conditions, and therefore no question of the general’s ability to be present to personally observe the battlefield.41 According to Jominian military theory, such a complication should have presented no problem; Lee could simply have remained at the base of the mountain and still have maintained

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40 Pierro, 145, and Bridges, 104.
41 Taylor pointed out that Lee’s ambulance “could not go into many places a horse would have carried him” (General Lee, 115). Because of this, Harsh has referred to South Mountain as “a field [Lee] would never see” (256).
full operational control over his army through his staff, which could have both acted as observers for Lee and issued orders in his name. In reality, Lee only observed the first of these possibilities. Lee turned his ambulance off the road, and sent his entire staff away to observe the battle except Chilton.\textsuperscript{42} The only recorded action performed by Chilton was that of first summoning and then formally restoring Brigadier General John Bell Hood to command a two-brigade demi-division independently of Brigadier General Evans.\textsuperscript{43} Joseph Harsh summed up the situation:

No Civil War commander could ever exert efficient control over a large battle, but never would Lee be so helpless as he was this afternoon at South Mountain. He would have no feel whatsoever for the dispositions of Hill or the enemy, and he would exert absolutely no influence over the placement of the reinforcements. He was denied not only the use of his hands but also of his eyes and ears.\textsuperscript{44}

Military theory dictated that Lee not be rendered “helpless” in such situations, but Lee failed to use his staff to supervise or control the battle.

Without Lee’s guidance, in the words of William Allan, the Battle of South Mountain was “badly handled.”\textsuperscript{45} Lee’s staff, sent up the mountain, apparently only observed, as no commander anywhere on South Mountain recorded receiving any


\textsuperscript{43} John Bell Hood, \textit{Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States and Confederate States Armies} (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 39-40, Freeman, \textit{R. E. Lee}, 2:370, and Priest, \textit{Before Antietam}, 187. Chilton wrote out a formal “Special Order” restoring Hood; Hood had been under arrest following a dispute with his superior, Evans, over some captured ambulances at Second Manassas.

\textsuperscript{44} Harsh, \textit{Taken at the Flood}, 256.

\textsuperscript{45} William Allan, \textit{The Army of Northern Virginia, 1862}, in William Allan, \textit{Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and the Army of Northern Virginia, 1862} (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 360. As Carman expressed it, “The Confederates indulged in many regrets that affairs at South Mountain were not differently managed.” (Pierro, 167). Freeman simply asserted in \textit{R. E. Lee}, 2:372 that “in his [Lee’s] crippled condition he did not attempt to direct the battle.” See also Hartwick, 343-345. To date, the only book-length study on the Battle of South Mountain is John Michael Priest’s \textit{Before Antietam: The Battle of South Mountain} (New York: Oxford University, 1992). Like Priest’s work on Antietam, this book focuses on common soldiers, and because of this was used sparingly in this study.
orders at all from any staff officer besides Longstreet’s. The only recorded order Lee sent either D. H. Hill or Longstreet was carried by Majors Venable and Talcott, and it simply ordered Longstreet to hold the mountain until dark.\textsuperscript{46} As a result, D. H. Hill and then Longstreet conducted the entire battle virtually free from Lee’s control. They did not conduct the battle with great skill either, as Roswell Ripley’s brigade marched away from the entire battle due to a misapprehension of orders.\textsuperscript{47} Likewise, Evans’ Brigade was hardly engaged while Evans repeatedly countermanded Longstreet’s orders and still acted as though he commanded more than merely his own brigade. Colonel George T. Anderson marched his brigade into battle “without a guide or directions.”\textsuperscript{48} Finally, three other brigades, Garnett’s, Kemper’s and Jenkins’, were mistakenly marched in the wrong direction to meet a phantom enemy threat only to be exhaustingly countermarched when the threat proved to be nonexistent.\textsuperscript{49} All of these mistakes in troop placement occurred while D. H. Hill’s

\textsuperscript{46} O. R., I, XIX, I, 842, 1032. It is possible that Longstreet may have utilized Lee’s staff officers to carry orders to his subordinates, as in his report, he credits them for doing so during the campaign, but he never specifies when during the campaign this occurred. Additionally, both the battle reports and Gilbert Moxley Sorrel’s account only mention members of Longstreet’s staff as carrying orders. Sorrel was on Longstreet’s personal staff. Additionally, one of Lee’s general staff, Ordinance Chief Edward Porter Alexander, even indulged in sniping at some Federals with an eight-man detachment to load his rifles; see Edward P. Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander, ed. Gary Gallagher, 143. While Alexander was on Lee’s general staff and not his personal staff, the episode still reveals that Lee was not using his staff officers effectively at South Mountain. Bartolomees also makes this point (258-260). See also Jeffrey D. Wert, General James Longstreet: The Confederacy’s Most Controversial Soldier: A Biography (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 189-190.

\textsuperscript{47} O. R., I, XIX, I, 1021,1050; Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 222. In Carman’s words, “Ripley, who had been left by D. H. Hill in command of four brigades, appears to have been unequal or disinclined to the task.” (Pierro, 153).

\textsuperscript{48} O. R., I, XIX, I, 909, 941, and Pierro, 159.

\textsuperscript{49} Murfin, 180. In From Manassas to Appomattox, 224, Longstreet claimed that Lee issued these errant orders based on faulty intelligence; see Pierro, 160-161. Sears (137) blamed “bad staff work” for this wasted march, but more specifically, Brigadier General Richard Garnett and Colonel Joseph
Division was fighting desperately for its existence against three full Union corps. All might have been corrected or prevented had Lee used his personal staff to supervise instead of only observe.⁵⁰

South of Turner’s Gap, the Union VI Corps assaulted the Confederates defending Crampton’s Gap. McLaws left only an understrength infantry brigade, under Colonel William Parham, to hold the gap, while Stuart reinforced Parham with Colonel Thomas Munford’s two-regiment cavalry brigade. As to be expected, the 6,000 Federals in the first of the Sixth Corps divisions had little difficulty breaking through the roughly eight hundred Confederate defenders, capturing scores of them. McLaws sent another brigade to reinforce the Crampton’s Gap defenders with one of his own staff officers, but he was too late. The brigade arrived just in time to be routed with the others, and the staff member made his way there too late to rally the men. Lee apparently did not know anything about the situation at Crampton’s Gap. Had Lee sent a staff officer with the authority both to supervise McLaws and to issue orders in Lee’s name, the officer might have perceived that McLaws’ rear was open to attack through the gap, and ordered the general to take better precautions.⁵¹ At the very least, he might have insisted that McLaws better observe Lee’s order to guard his rear. Instead, the ranking officer present when the Confederate line collapsed was

⁵⁰ Here, the army was regressing to its Seven Days’ performance; see Chapter 1.
⁵¹ In Carman’s words, “It would appear from this dispatch [telling McLaws to hold South Mountain] that Lee was not aware of the fact that McLaws had any infantry at Crampton’s Gap.” (Pierro, 136). See also Allen, 350.
politically-appointed Brigadier General Howell Cobb, who panicked along with his men. 52

Lee Concentrates His Army, September 15-17

At the end of the day on September 14, Lee sent his staff to bring Longstreet and D. H. Hill to his headquarters at the foot of South Mountain, where he questioned both men about the state of affairs on the mountain. Both generals quickly agreed that their positions were untenable, and that the army must withdraw that night. Lee ordered the army to retire to Keedysville, west of Boonsboro, and his subordinates promptly rode away to execute his order. 53 Lee recalled his personal staff, and they spent the night taking down his dictation. He sent a message to Jackson through Chilton informing Jackson that the day’s battle had been averse to Confederate fortunes. He then ordered him to break off the siege of Harper’s Ferry in order to assist the retreat of the portions of the army still in Maryland. Lee then sent three messages to McLaws and Munford expressing extreme anxiety over McLaws’ perilous position, trapped between the Union Sixth Corps and the Harper’s Ferry garrison. 54 Through Long and Chilton, Lee ordered McLaws to break off the siege immediately and do whatever was required to save his two divisions. McLaws was

52 Pierro, 140-142. In his report, McLaws commented on Cobb’s inexperience; see O. R., I, XIX, I, 854.
53 Bridges, 113-114. Lee had originally intended to retire all the way to Sharpsburg. Word of the Crampton’s Gap disaster motivated him to halt Longstreet and D. H. Hill at Keedysville to protect McLaws’ rear; see Hartwick, 345. For a much more detailed account of Lee’s actions, see Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 284-367.
54 These messages are found in O. R., I, XIX, II, 608-610. See also Pierro, 121, 169, Murfin, 190-191, and Sears, 150-151. The messages were dated at 8:00, 10:30, and 11:15 p.m. Munford was to use his cavalry to keep the roads open for McLaws.
even to abandon his artillery if necessary for his men to escape over the mountains or some inhospitable Potomac ford.55

Despite his fears, Lee still did not send any staff officer to McLaws to ascertain his situation. There was no communication from McLaws; although McLaws had tried to send one of his staff with messages to Lee, the officer was intercepted by Federals and forced to turn back.56 J. E. B. Stuart somehow slipped a message to the commanding general, and Lee’s messages did reach McLaws. This proved that communication, although somewhat perilous, was not impossible, and a staff officer from Lee could have reached McLaws to survey his situation and issue appropriate orders. As it was, McLaws was taking his orders from Jackson, who was across the Potomac from him and communicating via signal station.57

There is evidence that Chilton exercised rare independence for probably the only time during the campaign on the evening of September 14. While Chilton as chief of staff signed many of Lee’s messages, he became especially defensive about McLaws’ adherence to the one of 11:15 p.m. After the campaign, Chilton accused McLaws of disobedience to orders because he recrossed the Potomac into Harper’s Ferry the next day instead of attempting to march through Maryland to join Lee at Sharpsburg. McLaws felt compelled in his report of the campaign to defend himself

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55 Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:375-376. Chilton wrote the 8:00 and 11:15 dispatches; Long wrote the 10:30 one.
56 McLaws, under criticism from Chilton, stressed this in his report; see O. R., I, XIX, I, 855.
57 The contents of these communications are in ibid, 958-959, and I, LI, LXIII, II, 618-619.
to Chilton, claiming he had followed the spirit of Lee’s orders and was sure his actions would have been approved by the commanding general.58

Whether Chilton authored one of the September 14 dispatches, he definitely asserted his theoretical right to issue orders in Lee’s name in the predawn hours of September 15. During the night, the Union cavalry of the Harper’s Ferry garrison escaped the Confederate trap and, riding north, intercepted part of Longstreet’s reserve ammunition train. Rumors still abounded of Union cavalry in the Keedysville area, and Longstreet ordered two brigades of infantry to drive the supposed Federal troopers away. Chilton countermanded Longstreet’s orders, insisting that only two regiments were necessary for the task, but the general persisted. At any rate, the Union cavalrymen were already in Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, Lee was sufficiently moved by apprehensions about Union horsemen that he sent Charles Venable to Sharpsburg to see if there were any Federal cavalry there. Venable returned with a negative reply, and Lee ordered Longstreet’s and D. H. Hill’s commands to Sharpsburg, positioning them behind Antietam Creek. The troops were exhausted, and straggling was heavy; Lee employed his staff to help direct traffic.59

On September 15, Lee sent another dispatch to McLaws through Colonel Long ordering him to “withdraw immediately… and join us here”, even if doing so

58 Ibid, 856. McLaws separated the portion of his report that covered the Pleasant Valley period and submitted it directly to Chilton to emphasize his reasoning. He acknowledged receipt of Lee’s multiple dispatches. It will be remembered that Chilton had a similar dispute with John Magruder after the Battle of Malvern Hill over an order Chilton had issued in Lee’s name; see discussion in Chapter 1. See also Pierro, 189-190.
59 O. R., I, XIX, I, 1036, Pierro, 172, and Wert, 190. In the words of Adjutant William Owen of the Washington Artillery, “General Lee and staff pass by and urge everyone to move along as fast as possible.” See Owen, 137.
meant abandoning all of his artillery in order to cross the mountains between Harper’s Ferry and Keedysville. Lee continued to be anxious about both Jackson and McLaws; in the words of Ezra Carman, “Lee was reasonably sure that some time during the day he would hear from Jackson, who would come to his relief by the Virginia side of the Potomac in response to his urgent dispatch of the night before, but of McLaws nothing was assured.”

By the time Jackson received Lee’s message ordering him to terminate the siege of Harper’s Ferry, the post was already surrendering. Jackson had already sent a message to Lee informing him that the Federals were capitulating; he accordingly wrote “I will join you in Maryland” on Lee’s message, and sent it back to him. He then sent another, more detailed dispatch to Lee promising to join him with J. R. Jones’ and Lawton’s Divisions, leaving A. P. Hill’s behind to oversee the prisoner arrangements. Upon receipt of Jackson’s message, Lee had his staff announce it to the army to build morale. Thus, by early afternoon on September 15, Jackson was marching two of his three divisions from Harper’s Ferry to Sharpsburg. McLaws and Walker, both of whom crossed their respective rivers to the Harper’s Ferry side, soon followed. Jackson and Walker joined Lee without further staff prodding on September 16.

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60 Pierro, 173. Note that if a staff officer had been posted with McLaws, he could have acted to make sure that McLaws both obeyed Lee’s instructions and kept the commanding general notified.
61 Douglas, 164, and Pierro, 186. Lee responded by sending another courier notifying Jackson the army was at Sharpsburg and again urging haste; see Pierro, 188, and Harsh, *Sounding the Shallows*, 186-187.
62 Owen, 139. McLaws was across the Potomac River from Harper’s Ferry, while Walker was across the Shenandoah River from the town.
Lee remained anxious for the reuniting of his army. His position at Sharpsburg was a strong one for defense, but his army had the Potomac less than a mile to its rear, and was facing an approaching Federal army twice its size. Accordingly, Lee ordered General Pendleton to take his reserve artillery battalions across the Potomac and guard the fords over the river. Pendleton was also to keep Lee fully informed of the approach of Jackson, Walker, and McLaws.  

Jackson and Walker soon arrived at Sharpsburg, but McLaws proved slow in his march. Lee sent a courier with an urgent message to hurry up McLaws, but that general did not arrive with his two divisions until the September 17 battle was beginning. Such a task as hurrying up McLaws was better suited for a staff officer than a courier, as the officer could have supervised McLaws and issued orders to him as needed, not merely delivered a written “hurry up” summons. Had Lee used his staff to supervise, McLaws might have arrived sooner at Sharpsburg than he did. No courier or staff officer was yet sent to retrieve A. P. Hill’s Division at Harper’s Ferry.

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63 *O. R.*, I, XIX, I, 830, and I, XIX, II, 610. Pendleton was soon engaged in forwarding “important dispatches.” Note that once again, Lee sent none of his personal staff officers to any of his subordinates at Harper’s Ferry, but only couriers.

64 Taylor, *General Lee*, 130, and Owen, 142. A dispute in the historiography has arisen over McLaws’ alleged slowness on September 16. Carman believed criticism of McLaws was “unjust,” while Allen (442) vigorously criticized the general. Sears (174) simply claimed that “nothing had gone right” for McLaws.

65 McLaws’ alleged slowness was a major part of Chilton’s case against him; see discussion above. It could be argued that it did not matter in the end, as McLaws still arrived in time to participate in the Battle of Antietam on September 17. However, as most historians have noted, George McClellan was his usual desultory self on September 15 and 16, giving Lee two full days to reassemble and position his army. Another commander would likely have attacked Lee before September 17.

66 Bridges (125) criticized Lee for failing to send A. P. Hill a courier before September 17. In fact, Lee sent for Hill very late on September 16, and Hill received the message early the next day; see William Woods Hassler, *A. P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1962), 104. In von Borecke’s words (1:226), “Our great leader had been too cautious to neglect the concentration of his forces, which had been partially accomplished by forced marches.”
The Battle of Sharpsburg (Antietam), September 17

At Antietam, George McClellan launched a series of attacks on Lee’s army, first on its left, then its center, and finally its right. To meet these attacks, Lee used his staff to summon reinforcements from less-threatened parts of his line to block each attack in turn. For this, veterans and historians of the battle have credited Lee with tactical mastery; in Walter Taylor’s words, “never were troops more skillfully handled.” Assessing the battle, Douglas Southall Freeman argued that Lee’s staff had performed well during the action, claiming that the units arrived at their designated locations and rendered support to each other properly, and credited the staff with guiding them into position.

Closer examination, however, shows that Lee still used his staff officers mainly to carry orders, not to issue them on their own or even to guide units into line. Lee used his staff at Antietam much as he had at South Mountain, as observers rather than sources of orders. This time, though, Lee kept abreast of the fighting as it developed. By this point, Lee had remounted Traveller, using a courier to hold the horse’s reins. He then went in person to issue orders to many of his subordinates,

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67 For excellent survey histories of the battle, see Murfin, 209-288, and Sears, 180-297. For a much more detailed analysis of Lee’s movements on the battlefield, see Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 368-429.
68 Taylor, General Lee, 134. Later writers agreed with Taylor; in Stephen W. Sears’ words, “The severest military critic would be hard-pressed to find fault with the way the Confederate high command conducted the battle.” Lee’s principal biographer, Douglas Southall Freeman, concurred: “the larger tactical direction of the action had fallen to Lee and he had discharged it flawlessly;” see Sears, Landscape, 309, and Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:414. Thomas claimed (262) that “Desperation at Sharpsburg/Antietam compelled Lee to abandon his distant stance as strategic director on the battlefield.”
69 Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:413. In Freeman’s words, “The staff and the division commanders, in the second place, learned other new lessons of co-operation at Sharpsburg.”
70 Owen mistakenly claimed that Lee led his own horse; see Owen, 141.
using his staff officers to summon more distant generals’ commands and to rally stragglers.

At daybreak, Major General Joseph Hooker’s Union I Corps attacked Jackson’s position on Lee’s left. Jackson’s troops barely beat back Hooker’s onslaught, and Stonewall called upon Lee for reinforcements. Lee responded by sending Colonel Long of his staff to Brigadier General Walker, whose division was now posted on the Confederate right. Long ordered Walker to take his two brigades to reinforce Jackson. Unfortunately for Walker, Long did not supervise him or accompany his troops. Instead, once it arrived in Jackson’s rear, Walker’s Division meandered blindly trying to find its assigned position. In his report, Walker remarked bitterly that his command had not received proper guidance. Lee had used Long as “a highly-paid courier,” and had not ordered his staff officer to supervise Walker’s Division as it filed into line.71

At approximately the same time as he sent Long to bring up Walker’s Division, Lee sent Major Taylor to retrieve McLaws’ Division. McLaws had only arrived that morning with his two divisions, and was napping in tall grass near his men when Taylor arrived with his summons to battle. Taylor was unable to find McLaws in the tall grass, and finally gave up, relaying Lee’s order to McLaws’ assistant adjutant general. Taylor eventually found and roused McLaws, but by then the division was already in motion. Taylor then departed, leaving McLaws to

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71 This was about 8:00 a.m.; see Harsh, *Sounding the Shallows*, 204-205. *O. R.*, I, XIX, I, 914-917, Henderson, 2:252, and Harsh, *Sounding the Shallows*, 204-205. Note that this contradicts Freeman’s assertion that no unit complained of a lack of proper support; see quotation above. The phrase “highly-paid courier” is from Bartholomees, 260.
reassume command of a division marching northward to support Jackson without
guidance and without being fully appraised of the situation.\textsuperscript{72} As a result of this lack
of supervision, one of McLaws’ four brigades drifted away from the division and
fought the entire battle with D. H. Hill’s Division.\textsuperscript{73} Once again, Lee had promptly
used his staff to carry messages when urgently necessary, but had not authorized his
staff officer to issue orders on his own or to supervise the execution of Lee’s orders.

At Antietam, aside from dispatching Long and Taylor after Walker and
McLaws, Lee reverted to his South Mountain behavior of using his staff to keep him
appraised of events transpiring out of his sight. Jackson was left to manage affairs on
his front without supervision, but Lee used Chilton and Venable to watch
Longstreet’s and D. H. Hill’s fronts.\textsuperscript{74} After McClellan’s attack on Lee’s right was
repulsed, the Federals tried again on Lee’s center, D. H. Hill’s Division. Eventually,
after hours of struggle over the infamous “Bloody Lane,” the Federals succeeded in
piercing the Confederate center. Chilton was present to witness the state of affairs, as
Longstreet recorded:

> We [remnants of various units] made it lively while it lasted. In the meantime General
Chilton, General Lee’s chief of staff, made his way to me and asked, “Where are your troops
you are holding your line with?” I pointed to my two pieces [of artillery] and to Cooke’s
regiment, and replied, “There they are, but that regiment hasn’t a cartridge.” Chilton’s eyes
popped as though they would come out of his head; he struck spurs to his horse and away he

\textsuperscript{72} Harsh, \textit{Taken at the Flood}, 384. Although Longstreet claimed long after the war in \textit{From Manassas to Appomattox} that McLawes marched to the front “under conduct of Major Taylor of general head-
quarters staff” (245), the contemporary sources reveal that Taylor left McLawes on the march; see \textit{O. R.}, I, XIX, I, 857.
\textsuperscript{73} This was Cobb’s Brigade; see \textit{O. R.}, I, XIX, I, 858, 871-872, Pierro, 258-259, and Murfin, 236. One
of D. H. Hill’s staff officers eventually pointed McLawes’ other three brigades to their places in the
firing line.
\textsuperscript{74} Freeman, \textit{R. E. Lee}, 2:397, 403. In Sears’ (232) words, “While it was not General Lee’s habit to
look over the shoulders of his lieutenants in battle, he was nevertheless keeping in close and active
touch with the fighting that morning.”
went to General Lee. I suppose he made some remarkable report, although I did not see General Lee again until night.\textsuperscript{75}

Chilton apparently merely reported what he had seen to Lee, as there is no record of him issuing any orders to anyone in the splintered Confederate center.

Although Chilton did not issue any recorded orders to the Confederate center, Lee had him issue an order to Pendleton at the Shepherdstown Ford on the Potomac to send forward all the artillery pieces and stragglers he possibly could. Lee also sent a courier to Ambrose P. Hill urgently imploring him to bring up his division from Harper’s Ferry.\textsuperscript{76}

Fortunately for Lee, McClellan decided not to press his advantage in the center, and the fighting shifted to the Confederate right. Here, Ambrose Burnside’s IX Union Army Corps broke through the handful of Confederate defenders left holding Lee’s right and pressed forward, threatening the Army of Northern Virginia’s line of retreat. To meet this crisis, Lee used his staff to summon every artillery battery and cannon they could find, and to round up any stragglers they could.\textsuperscript{77} At this point in the battle, Lee had dispatched all of his staff officers, and resorted to borrowing Adjutant William Owen of the Louisiana Washington Artillery to carry orders for him.\textsuperscript{78} In the end, A. P. Hill arrived barely in time to blunt Burnside’s


\textsuperscript{76} O. R., I, XIX, I, 830. See also Pierro, 341, and Murfin, 211. Note that once again, even when the fate of his army hung in the balance, Lee sent an unranked courier, not a staff officer; this left much dependent on how fast Hill determined to march his men.

\textsuperscript{77} O. R., I, XIX, I, 866, 943, and Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 403, 419. He also sent one, whose identity is unknown, to Jackson urging him to attack the Union right; see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:395.

\textsuperscript{78} Owen, 150-151. He also used Owen to read a courier’s message, as his hands were not sufficiently healed to hold it. See also Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 383
attack, and drove his corps back to the Antietam. Hill threw his division into the fray without receiving any guidance from a staff officer.\textsuperscript{79}

While Lee had sent away all of his staff officers at times during the day at Antietam, he was not habitually without their presence. Long after the war, artillery battalion commander Colonel Stephen D. Lee remarked of the commanding general that at the end of the battle “for once during the day he had some of his staff and escort about him.”\textsuperscript{80} This is a misleading remark, as G. Moxley Sorrel mentioned that Lee had his staff with him early in the action. Likewise, Robert E. Lee, Jr.’s famous account of his father ordering the Rockbridge Artillery back into the action during the action against Burnside mentions Lee’s staff as being with him. Finally, Henry Kyd Douglas’ account alleged that Lee left someone, probably a staff officer, at his headquarters to direct inquiries to him even when he was absent. Nevertheless, the myth has persisted, and the Battle of Antietam is often used to support arguments that Lee’s staff did not have enough officers.\textsuperscript{81}

\textit{Antietam Aftermath: Shepherdstown (September 18-19)}

Against the advice of his generals, Lee decided to remain in position the next day, offering battle to the Union Army with his ravaged forces. McClellan declined to attack, and, hearing reports of heavy Federal reinforcements, Lee decided

\textsuperscript{79} O. R., I, XIX, I, 981, and Harsh, \textit{Taken at the Flood}, 420-421.
\textsuperscript{80} Pierro, 366. Several sources indicate that Colonel Lee was highly agitated and driven to desperation on September 17; this or the advance of years may have clouded his judgment and led him to exaggerate. One should also consider the impact of “Lost Cause” myths about the independence and authority of Lee. Charles Marshall denied the accuracy of Stephen Lee’s account.\textsuperscript{81} Sorrel, 111, and Robert E. Lee, \textit{Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee} (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1995), 78, and Douglas, 171. For an example of one such argument, see Krick, “Great Tycoon”, 86-87.
reluctantly to return to Virginia. The army withdrew over the Potomac on the
evening of September 18, staff officers guiding the wagons and artillery across the
treacherous ford. To guard against the possibility of Federal pursuit, Lee had
Colonel Armistead Long of his staff assist Pendleton by placing several artillery
batteries in position to reinforce those of the reserve artillery covering the
Shepherdstown Ford. Lee then had Longstreet loan Pendleton two infantry brigades
to support the artillery, and moved most of the army towards Martinsburg. He issued
orders through Chilton to guard the ford.

Later that night, portions of Major General Fitz-John Porter’s Union V Corps
crossed the Potomac and overran Pendleton’s guns. The infantry support, tired and
badly depleted from the recent battle, soon fled, and Pendleton himself barely
escaped. The army artillery chief then wandered from camp to camp attempting to
locate Lee. In a demonstration of staff failure, none of Lee’s subordinates knew his
whereabouts. When Pendleton finally found Lee, he claimed that the Union Army
had crossed the river and captured his entire artillery reserve. Lee and his staff did
not react well to this news; one staff officer whose name is lost to history reportedly
stomped off, overcome with emotion, and Lee himself seemed paralyzed. He did
not send any message to Jackson, whose troops were closest to the Shepherdstown

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82 Owen, 160. Owen did not say whose staff officers guided the wagons; most likely, a variety of
officers of various generals’ staffs all assisted in this endeavor.
84 For a more detailed account of this action, see Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 430-465.
85 Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:407. Henderson claimed that the army’s generals did not know each other’s
positions that night; see Henderson, 2:268-269.
Ford, but instead ordered Pendleton to get some sleep and assured him that the matter would be straightened out in the morning.

By the next morning, Jackson had heard of Pendleton’s plight, and ordered A. P. Hill to countermarch his division to the ford. After belatedly receiving an order from Lee, he directed Hill to attack the Federals there. Hill obeyed, and soon repulsed the Union threat, driving Porter’s men back across the Potomac. The Confederates then discovered that Pendleton had panicked unnecessarily; the Federals had only captured four of his cannons, not all sixty-four. Nevertheless, this incident represented the only time during the campaign that Lee was slow to communicate with his subordinates during a crisis. Whereas previously during the campaign the commanding general had always promptly dispatched a courier to inform his generals of developments or orders, on September 19 did not even dispatch a courier until Jackson had already left for the Shepherdstown Ford. Quite possibly, fatigue was to blame for this failure.86

**Conclusion**

Overall, the Maryland Campaign represents the evolution of Lee’s staff and its relation to his command and control of the Army of Northern Virginia. The staff had made mistakes, most notably having to do with Special Orders No. 191, but had performed commendably otherwise. It had committed Lee’s orders to paper and carried them well, maintaining the commanding general’s communications with the

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86 Robertson, 621-622. By far the most detailed analysis of Lee’s indecision at Shepherdstown can be found in Bridges, 128-141. See also Harsh, *Sounding the Shallows*, 218-220.
scattered portions of his army. Especially during the battle of Antietam, it had observed Lee’s subordinates as they carried out tasks out of his sight, and had reported back to Lee, keeping him fully informed. Thus, Freeman and Krick are correct in asserting that the army’s staff usage had improved since the Seven Days.

However, for all this, Lee remained very reluctant to permit his staff the latitude to issue orders in his name. In part, this may have stemmed from Chilton’s poor performance in doing so during the Seven Days’ Battles, in which the chief of staff had issued misleading and poorly worded orders that had led to disastrous results at Savage’s Station and Malvern Hill.87 This may have had even more to do, though, with Lee’s injured hands. Unable to ride a horse, write, or even care for himself, Lee may have wished to ensure that no one in the Army of Northern Virginia would be following any orders but his own, especially while he was unable to personally go and correct inevitable errors. Such limited use of staff officers as “highly-paid couriers” violated nineteenth-century military theory, which held that staff officers, especially the chief of staff, had the authority to issue orders in the names of their generals. Certainly Chilton felt that his position had been snubbed; after the campaign, he wrote to President Davis and requested a transfer, claiming that his authority was “not being respected”, and that he was “performing duties which with General Lee’s attention to the merest detail’, any officer could accomplish.”88

87 At Savage’s Station (June 29), Chilton’s order led Jackson to mistakenly believe that he was not to support John Magruder’s attack on the Union rear guard. At Malvern Hill, Chilton had issued a very vague attack order and had not responsibly supervised its execution; see Chapter 1.
88 Lynda Lasswell Crist, Mary Seaton Dix, and Kenneth H. Williams (eds.), *The Papers of Jefferson Davis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1995), 8:404. Unfortunately, the papers only contain
Chilton likely felt the perceived slight more acutely than his colleagues since he was chief of staff, but all of Lee’s staff officers could have made similar claims.

When viewed as a whole, then, Lee’s staff usage had improved since the Seven Days’ Battles, but had not reached the levels prescribed by Jomini. Unlike the previous engagement, Lee had used his officers and couriers in a timely fashion to communicate with his subordinates. On the other hand, he still did not use his staff officers fully as extensions of himself, and did not take advantage of their authority to issue orders in his name or to supervise subordinates while they executed those orders. The staff officers themselves had performed well. True, they had at least a peripheral role in a great intelligence fiasco, but had otherwise discharged their assigned duties with speed and diligence.
Chapter IV: Gettysburg: The Limits of Staff Improvement

No battle in United States history has received the scholarly attention directed toward Gettysburg. For three days, July 1-3, 1863, the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia clashed, suffering between them the highest casualties in any engagement of the Civil War.\(^1\) By the end of the third day’s fighting, General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia had been repulsed and critically weakened. The battle was certainly the turning point in the Eastern Theater of the war, as the Confederacy could never replace either the generals or the manpower lost at Gettysburg.

Because of the importance of the battle, after the war, former Confederates engaged in protracted and bitter debate over who was responsible for the defeat. General James Longstreet was repeatedly attacked in print by Jubal Early and William Pendleton, both of whom accused him of having lost the battle by disobeying Lee’s orders. Longstreet replied with equal spite, alleging that Lee had lost his “equipoise” at Gettysburg, and that the commanding general admitted as much after the battle. Edward Porter Alexander, while restraining himself from making the caustic comments of Longstreet, also criticized Lee’s decisions at Gettysburg, especially the commanding general’s decision to press the attack on July 2 and 3.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Most sources estimate combined losses at Gettysburg at about 51,000, 28,000 of them Confederate.

Lee’s staff officers, as expected, defended their general’s decisions, writing at far greater length about Gettysburg than any other engagement. Taylor, Marshall, Long, Talcott, and Venable all supported Lee in their writings, and while they did not vilify Longstreet with the zeal of Early, they nevertheless held him partially responsible for Lee’s defeat. Mostly, though, Lee’s staff officers blamed Major General J. E. B. Stuart and his decision to ride around the Union army for the loss of the battle. For historians seeking to assess Lee’s usage of his personal staff, the protracted debate has both advantages and drawbacks. In their efforts to place themselves and their general at this, the most famous battle of the Civil War, Lee’s staff referred to their own actions more times than in most of Lee’s campaigns. However, the very polemical nature of much of the postwar controversy over Gettysburg reduces the reliability of much of the primary source material on that battle. Typically, the staff officers’ accounts focused on Lee’s activities and not their own.3

In spite of the extensive body of works on Gettysburg, no study of Lee’s staff at the great battle has yet appeared.4 The existing primary and secondary source

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literature that pertains to the staff is, as usual, uncomplimentary. For example, in his postwar writings, Alexander repeatedly alleged that Gettysburg was lost because the Confederate line was too long; in having to curl around the famous Federal “fishhook,” it had to stretch very thin, and accordingly could not be managed by Lee’s inadequate staff. To Alexander, Gettysburg proved that the Confederate Army needed more competent staff officers:

That is just one illustration of how time may be lost in handling troops, and of the need of an abundance of competent staff officers by the generals in command. Scarcely any of our generals had half of what they needed to keep a constant & close supervision on the execution of important orders. And that ought always to be done. An army is like a great machine, and in putting it into battle it is not enough for its commander to merely issue the necessary orders. He should have a staff ample to supervise the execution of each step, & to promptly report any difficulty or misunderstanding.5

Similarly, Douglas Southall Freeman, examining the Confederate coordination failures of July 2 and 3, declared that the Army of Northern Virginia had reverted to the staff performance of the Seven Days’ Campaign.6 Edwin Coddington claimed that “slovenly staff work…plagued the Confederate high command during the campaign.”7 Lee himself declared that the army’s failure to properly coordinate its attacks cost the Confederates the battle, but he did not hold his staff responsible for this shortcoming.8

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5 Gallagher (ed.), Fighting, 236 (italics in original).
6 In another writing, Freeman wrote that “Co-ordination of attack was almost impossible with a limited staff,” and that the staff “was always too small;” see Douglas Southall Freeman, “Why Was Gettysburg Lost?”, in Lee the Soldier, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 447-474, 456, 459.
7 Coddington, The Gettysburg Campaign, 187. He supported this allegation by referring to Jubal Early’s desire to seize a bridge over the Susquehanna on June 27, contrary to Lee’s instructions. Early’s most recent biographer, though, claims this incident stemmed from Early’s own willfulness; see Charles C. Osborne, Jubal: The Life and Times of General Jubal A. Early, C. S. A., Defender of the Lost Cause (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1992), 182-183.
8 Lee praised his staff in his official report (O. R., I, XXVII, II, 325). After the campaign, Lee wrote President Davis and offered to resign, citing “embarrassment in using the eyes of others.” While this
This chapter will proceed chronologically through the Gettysburg Campaign (June 3-August 3, 1863), focusing on the three-day Battle of Gettysburg. Rather than representing a total failure of command and control, the Gettysburg Campaign is better understood as revealing many improvements in Lee’s usage of his personal staff. Although Lee was again physically unwell, during this campaign he did not keep his staff close to him.\(^9\) Instead, he used them extensively to communicate his intentions to his subordinates and to make surveys of the battlefield. Although the army was widely scattered across three states during the early part of the campaign, Lee kept careful control over each of its component parts, with the notable exception of Stuart’s cavalry, throughout the campaign. On the battlefield, Lee used his staff repeatedly to survey the terrain.

Lee had improved his willingness to delegate authority to his staff. Some of Lee’s staff officers besides Chilton were now permitted to issue orders in his name. In particular, Lee used Armistead Long to give crucial orders concerning the artillery. Crucially, Lee also allowed his staff officers to consult with and discuss the prospects of success with his generals. Lee’s staff officers positioned some units and rallied others during the battle. Overall, the Gettysburg Campaign reveals that Lee had made considerable strides in using his personal staff to command and control his army.

\(^9\) This time, Lee had still not fully recovered from the onset of angina pectoris, a heart condition that would eventually kill him in 1870. For more details, see Emory M. Thomas, Robert E. Lee: A Biography (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 277-279. As late as June 13, Lee sent Long to Richmond to explain his views to Secretary of War Seddon; see O. R., I, XXVII, III, 886.
Importantly, in addition to showing better overall staff usage, the Gettysburg Campaign also demonstrated the limits of Lee’s staff improvement. Although Lee usually maintained communication with and control over his subordinates, his occasional lapses came at the most inopportune times for his army. Stuart’s ride has often been correctly described as the most obvious of these mistakes, but others possessed dire consequences also. In instances in which his plans had obviously miscarried, Lee seldom sent staff officers or couriers to correct the situations or ascertain the causes of failure. As in previous campaigns, with the periodic exception of Colonel Long and the artillery, Lee failed to use his staff to supervise his subordinates, even less-experienced ones.

This chapter will not discuss the many well-known controversies surrounding Confederate leadership during the battle, except insofar as Lee’s personal staff was involved in them. It will show that, except for the cavalry, Lee did an exceptional job communicating with his subordinates, allowing them enough discretion to react to local conditions while maintaining firm control over their actions. It will make clear that Lee used his staff officers frequently to survey the battlefield and carry important messages. It will also show, however, that at critical moments, Lee did not use his staff to coordinate his attacks or to correct situations in which his plans were obviously unraveling. This chapter suggests that Lee’s staff work had improved, but not enough to alleviate continued and serious shortcomings.
Army Organization

The Army of Northern Virginia embarked on the Gettysburg Campaign with a streamlined, efficient organizational structure. Shortly after the Maryland Campaign, the Confederate Congress finally authorized army corps, and created the corresponding rank of lieutenant general to fill the new positions. In October 1862, Lee accordingly replaced the loose structure of independent divisions and informal “commands” by establishing two corps, one of five divisions and the other of four, commanded respectively by Lieutenant Generals James Longstreet and Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. Jackson was mortally wounded by his own men at the Battle of Chancellorsville on May 2, 1863, and left no obvious successor. Lee’s solution to this problem was to reduce the First and Second Corps to three divisions each, and to create a new Third Corps, also of three divisions. Richard S. Ewell and Ambrose P. Hill, both promising division commanders, were elevated to command the Second and Third Corps. Neither Ewell or Hill had ever commanded an army corps before, and Lee appreciated the need to provide them with guidance, if not staff supervision.10

Many of the divisional commanders were also new to their responsibilities. Longstreet had three experienced division commanders in Major Generals Lafayette

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10 As Lee expressed it to William Allan after the war, “Gen. Lee had feared the old habit of E. [Ewell, of timidity] when he assigned him to the Corps, but had hoped he had gotten over it, & talked long and earnestly with him when he assumed command.” See William Allan, “Memoranda of Conversations with General Robert E. Lee,” in Lee the Soldier, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 7-24, 11. During the campaign, Lee maintained almost daily correspondence with Hill whenever he was separated from the Third Corps commander; see O. R., I, XXVII, III, 869, 896. See also Sears, Gettysburg, 43-58, and Jeffrey D. Wert, General James Longstreet: The Confederacy’s Most Controversial Soldier: A Biography (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 247-250.
McLaws, John Bell Hood, and George E. Pickett. Ewell had one experienced division leader in Major General Jubal A. Early, but his other two, Major Generals Robert E. Rodes and Edward Johnson, were new to their rank. Likewise, A. P. Hill had one experienced division commander, Major General Richard H. Anderson, and two newcomers to divisional command, Major Generals William D. Pender and Henry Heth. With so much inexperience, Lee and his staff recognized the need to exercise closer control and supervision than in the past.11

The army’s artillery also possessed a more streamlined organizational structure. All artillery batteries were detached from the infantry brigades, and grouped into battalions, usually composed of four batteries each. The battalions were assigned to specific infantry divisions, with each of the three army corps possessing an additional two reserve battalions. The army’s chief of artillery, Brigadier General Pendleton, continued in a mainly administrative capacity. Corps chiefs of artillery were now supposedly able to concentrate batteries and firepower much more rapidly and efficiently.12

11 For example, during the campaign, Lee directed Ewell to leave a staff officer with Jenkins’ cavalry brigade to ensure its complicity to orders; see O. R., I, XXVII, III, 914. See Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), 8-17. Freeman refers to the new three-corps organization as “the reorganization that explains Gettysburg.”
12 Although the artillery battalions were assigned to specific infantry divisions very late (June 15, for example), they were mainly to be controlled by the corps artillery chiefs in any case; see O. R., I, XXVII, II, 493, 635, 652. Third Corps chief Reuben L. Walker did not join the army until June 30; see O. R., I, XXVII, II, 610. Chilton drafted the order creating the new artillery organization, and Taylor wrote the one assigning the respective corps’ artillery chiefs; see O. R., I, LI, II, 721, and I, XXVII, III, 859. Peter S. Carmichael has insisted that this system was still too cumbersome to allow easy cooperation between the three corps’ chiefs of artillery, and that the ensuing failure to coordinate artillery fire would have disastrous consequences on July 3; see Peter S. Carmichael, “‘Every Map of the Field Cries Out about It’: The Failure of Confederate Artillery at Pickett’s Charge,” in Three Days at Gettysburg: Essays on Union and Confederate Leadership, ed. Gary Gallagher (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1999), 270-283.
As a result of these changes, the Army of Northern Virginia was more efficiently organized than ever before on the eve of the Gettysburg Campaign. Lee’s staff usually only had to prepare five sets of orders; instead of issuing orders to each division commander, the staff now sent orders to three infantry corps commanders, to cavalry chief J. E. B. Stuart, and to Brigadier General John D. Imboden, whose brigade-sized independent command was made subject to Lee’s direct orders during the campaign. The corps and division commanders were now held responsible for transmitting Lee’s orders to their subordinates in turn.13

Lee’s staff officers themselves had learned their responsibilities well. Although Captain Mason had returned to Joseph E. Johnston, the other six officers remained, including Chilton, who was still dissatisfied with the limited scope of his duties. Indeed, since the Maryland Campaign, perhaps recognizing the chief of staff’s limitations as a source of battlefield orders, Lee relegated him to primarily administrative functions.14 Whatever the reason for Chilton’s reassignment, Lee’s staff system was working- Lieutenant Colonel Sir Arthur Freemantle, a British observer accompanying the army, compared the procedures and overall competence of Lee’s staff favorably with contemporary British staff practice:

13 There are numerous references to the corps commanders’ responsibilities to copy Lee’s written orders for their own subordinates. With especially inexperienced or unreliable commanders such as Albert Jenkins, they were even to send staff officers of their own to supervise the execution of Lee’s orders. For examples, see Jubal A. Early, Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1994), 255, 263, and Harry W. Pfanz, Gettysburg: The First Day, 11, 227-228.

14 Chilton is not found at all in the voluminous writings on Gettysburg; his name appears on assorted administrative “General Orders”; for an example, see O. R., I, XXVII, III, 912-913, 1006. Robert E. K. Krick argues that “there is no evidence [Lee] ever tried to ease out unwelcome or marginally inept officers from his staff.” See Robert E. K. Krick, “The ‘Great Tycoon’ Forges a Staff System,” in Audacity Personified: The Generalship of Robert E. Lee, ed. Peter S. Carmichael (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2004), 82-106, 105.
Having lived at the headquarters of all the principal Confederate Generals, I am able to affirm that the relation between their Staffs and themselves, and the way the duty is carried on, is very similar to what it is in the British army. All the generals—Johnston, Bragg, Polk, Hardee, Longstreet, and Lee—are thorough soldiers, and their Staffs are composed of gentlemen of position and education, who have now been trained into excellent and zealous Staff officers.  

Admittedly, the British army was not the finest army in Europe, but Freemantle’s testimony strongly contradicts many later writers who have described Lee’s staff as inept.

**Prelude to Gettysburg**

As the Army of Northern Virginia marched northward, Lee demonstrated his determination to maintain tighter control over his subordinates than he had during the previous invasion of Maryland. Instead of issuing general directives like Special Orders, No. 191, for distant operations over long periods of time, Lee conducted his advance in carefully controlled phases, moving his three infantry corps short distances at a time, and constantly maintaining communications. He also kept up near-daily written control over Imboden’s command. Crucially, though, he failed to maintain contact with J. E. B. Stuart and his cavalry.

On June 3, 1863, Ewell’s Second Corps broke camp behind the Rappahannock River and marched northward towards the Shenandoah Valley. Lee remained at Fredericksburg with Longstreet’s and Hill’s corps for the time being, but continually communicated with Ewell, Imboden, and Brigadier General Albert

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Jenkins.\textsuperscript{18} Owing to such close control, Lee was able to order Ewell to halt almost immediately on June 6, when the Federal Army appeared threatening, and then to direct him to resume his march promptly when the Union move was discovered to be merely a feint.\textsuperscript{19}

Once Ewell crossed the Blue Ridge into the Shenandoah, Lee adopted a hands-off command approach while still maintaining contact with him:

I request you will keep me advised of your progress, and, as far as you can, notify me of the different stages of your march as you proceed. General Jenkins is establishing a line of couriers between the Valley and my headquarters; their positions you will probably ascertain on your route.\textsuperscript{20}

Lee did not interfere with Ewell’s plans to capture the Federal garrisons at Winchester and Martinsburg, but he resumed his tight control over the Second Corps’ movements immediately after these operations were concluded.\textsuperscript{21} On June 16, Lee himself set out with Longstreet’s Corps, leaving detailed instructions for A. P. Hill to maintain communications with him.\textsuperscript{22} By June 22, the First and Third Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia were inside the Shenandoah Valley, Ewell’s Second Corps and Imboden’s command were in Pennsylvania, and J. E. B. Stuart’s cavalry was screening the infantry’s movements. Lee had maintained strict control over each of the components of his army, ordering the daily marches and destinations of each

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III, 879. Once Ewell entered the valley, Lee used these couriers to contact him also.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III, 865, 879. Lee recalled after the war that “he had sent him [Ewell] ahead confiding in his judgment, and that he must be guided by his own judgment in any unforeseen emergency; ”see Allen, “Memoranda,” 11.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III, 900-901, 905. Ewell won a stunning victory at Winchester on June 13-15, capturing over 4,000 Federals, but the Martinsburg garrison escaped.
\textsuperscript{22} Lee also stressed to Hill where he could be found; see \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III, 896. See also William Woods Hassler, \textit{A. P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1962), 147, and Coddington, \textit{The Gettysburg Campaign}, 73-74, 104-105.
corps and division, thus demonstrating marked improvement over his lax control during the Maryland Campaign.\textsuperscript{23}

On June 22, Lee presided over his first major failure to command and control his army in the campaign. Until this time, Stuart had been “in constant communication with the commanding general,” guarding the passes in the Blue Ridge and screening Lee’s infantry from the Federals.\textsuperscript{24} However, Stuart had been surprised and very nearly defeated in the cavalry Battle of Brandy Station on June 9, and was eager for a chance at public redemption. Guarding mountain passes proved, at best, unglamorous work; to achieve his aim, Stuart proposed to ride around the Union army again, just as he had twice previously.\textsuperscript{25} Through couriers, Stuart conversed with both Lee and Longstreet about the idea, and by June 22 and 23, Lee voiced cautious approval:

If General Hooker’s army remains inactive, you can leave two brigades to watch him, and withdraw the three others, but should he not appear to be moving northward, I think you had better withdraw this side of the mountain to-morrow night, cross at Shepherdstown next day, and move over to Fredericktown. You will, however, be able to judge whether you can pass around their army without hinderance, doing them all the damage you can, and cross the river east of the mountains. In either case, after crossing the river, you must move on and fell the right of General Ewell’s troops, collecting information, provisions, etc. Give instructions to the commander of the brigades left behind, to watch the flank and rear of the army, and (in the event of the enemy leaving their front) retire from the mountains west of the Shenandoah, leaving sufficient pickets to guard the passes, and bringing everything clean along the Valley, closing upon the rear of the army.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{23} He also kept his subordinates aware of each other’s locations; see \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III, 890-891, 896, 900-901, 905, 914-915.
\textsuperscript{24} This phrase is from Stuart’s very lengthy report, in which he stressed his services to the army on its retreat from Gettysburg; see \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, II, 691-692.
\textsuperscript{25} During the battle, Lee had Venable maintain communications with Stuart; see \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III, 876. For a detailed account of Stuart’s public humiliation at Brandy Station, see Emory M. Thomas, \textit{Bold Dragoon: The Life of J. E. B. Stuart} (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 227-234.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III, 923.
Major Marshall of Lee’s staff originally composed this famous, highly discretionary order. He recalled that Lee made him read it aloud to him several times, perfecting the wording of the order before Taylor had a courier take it to Stuart, thus making Lee and not his staff directly responsible for the contents of the order.\textsuperscript{27} In spite of this, many historians have used this order as an example of the ineptness of Lee’s personal staff; even Sir Frederick Maurice, who edited Marshall’s papers for publication, argued that Lee and his staff shared responsibility for the order.\textsuperscript{28} In any event, Marshall pointed out that the order was clear enough to hold Stuart responsible for his subsequent failure to maintain communications with the army.\textsuperscript{29}

Using the order drafted by Marshall as justification, Stuart then prepared to ride around the Union army and cross the Potomac between the Federals and Washington. Pursuant to the order, he left strict instructions for the ranking officer left behind to observe the Federals and then cross in the army’s rear. Stuart decided to take his three best brigades and their commanders with him, leaving two poorly-trained brigades under a known incompetent, Brigadier General Beverley H. Robertson, to remain with the army, ignoring Longstreet’s order to leave experienced,

\textsuperscript{27} Marshall wrote two orders for Stuart, on each on June 22 and 23, and Lee reviewed both of them before they were sent; see Maurice (ed.), 202-203, 207-209. See also John S. Mosby, “Stuart in the Gettysburg Campaign: A Defense of the Cavalry Commander,” in Southern Historical Society Papers 38 (1910): 184-196, 187-188. Mosby vigorous attacked Lee’s staff.

\textsuperscript{28} Maurice (ed.), Aide-de-Camp, 224 n. 18. Surprisingly, Freeman did not hold Marshall fully responsible, but stated that “it is possible that Marshall was less careful than he should have been in drafting this letter because he was confident that Stuart had been told what to do;” see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3:48.

\textsuperscript{29} Maurice (ed.), Aide-de-Camp, 240-243. Maurice did not provide clear grounds for this claim, but implied that Marshall shared responsibility because he wrote the order, even though Lee repeatedly reviewed it. After the campaign, Marshall allegedly urged Lee to court-martial Stuart; see Thomas, Bold Dragoon, 458. Likewise, Wert (James Longstreet, 281) contends that Marshall wanted Stuart to be shot! Marshall’s papers do not, as these authors claim, support this contention. After the war, Lee held Stuart responsible for “failure to carry out his instructions,”; see Allen, “Memoranda,” 14.
capable Brigadier General Wade Hampton behind to command the remaining cavalry. In the coming ten days, Stuart and Robertson both disregarded Lee’s orders as well. Stuart was delayed in circling the moving Union Army, and would not rejoin the Army of Northern Virginia until the afternoon of July 2 at Gettysburg. Robertson never crossed the Potomac until Lee belatedly summoned him on June 30, and his two brigades arrived on July 3, too late to be of any use in the battle. In the meantime, the Army of Northern Virginia was left virtually bereft of information provided by reconnoitering cavalry. Although he had maintained tight control over his infantry corps, Lee had neglected to communicate and exercise effective command over his cavalry, and this failure proved very costly.

On June 21 and 22, through Marshall, Lee sent Ewell further orders to advance on Harrisburg via Carlisle and York, and to take that city if it fell within his “means,” while the other two corps massed near Chambersburg, ready to follow if

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30 Robertson had recently been involved in an extended formal dispute with Stuart regarding his questionable decisions at Brandy Station; see O. R., I, XXVII, II, 733-736. Jenkins’ cavalry brigade accompanied Ewell’s corps, but had already demonstrated its unreliability; see Rodes’ report in O. R., I, XXVII, II, 547-550. See also Thomas, Bold Dragoon, 240-241, and O. R., I, XXVII, III, 927-928.
33 See Walter H. Taylor, Four Years with General Lee, ed. James I. Robertson, Jr. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1996), 93.
34 Coddington (The Gettysburg Campaign, 108) expressed it best: “[Lee’s] orders were more in the nature of suggestions than commands…Regardless of the merits and shortcomings of this system of command, if orders or suggestions are conditional, the conditions upon which they are based should be made clear. Lee’s orders to Stuart did not meet this standard.”
possible.\textsuperscript{35} As a result of Lee’s instructions, his army scattered over a wide arc, with Ewell and two divisions at Carlisle, Early’s division of Ewell’s corps at York, and Longstreet’s and Hill’s corps at Chambersburg. Unbeknownst to Lee, the Army of the Potomac had crossed the Potomac by this time, and was concentrating in the vicinity of Frederick, Maryland, under its new commander, Major General George G. Meade.\textsuperscript{36}

On June 28, a spy brought Lee news of the close proximity of the Federal army. Lee and his staff reacted promptly. At once, Lee sent orders through Venable for Ewell to abandon the advance on Harrisburg and concentrate with the other two corps near Cashtown, between Chambersburg and Gettysburg. Ewell was to inform Early to follow him there. Later in the day, Lee had his staff send another order to Ewell urging him to move towards Cashtown or Gettysburg “as circumstances might dictate.”\textsuperscript{37} This order produced another oft-quoted negative anecdote about Lee’s staff. Supposedly, upon receipt of the order, Ewell read it aloud several times before exclaiming, “Why can’t a commanding general have someone on his staff who can write an intelligible order?” Many historians reviewing this account have suspected


\textsuperscript{36} \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, II, 443.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III, 943-944. Earlier that day, Lee had Marshall compose and send an order for Ewell to take Harrisburg; the new order canceled the earlier one; see Maurice (ed.), \textit{Aide-de-Camp}, 218. See also Robertson, ed, \textit{Four Years, 93-94, O. R.}, I, XXVII, II, 444, and McKim, 212-215. There is a longstanding historiographical dispute over whether Lee’s first order recalling Ewell was sent on June 28 or 29. Venable, who logged the order as sent on June 28 in the army’s record book, stated that he copied the date many days later “from memory.” This, along with the testimony of Lee’s other staff officers and subordinates, has led most Confederate veterans and historians to conclude that the order was sent on June 29. For a more thorough discussion, see Coddington, \textit{The Gettysburg Campaign}, 188-190. Ewell’s staff copied Lee’s order for Early.
that Ewell was unhappy receiving such discretionary orders; he had served previously 
under Jackson, whose orders were always very specific and preemptory, and was 
therefore dissatisfied with the discretionary instructions Lee customarily provided.38

Meanwhile, to make room for the rest of the army and its supply trains, Lee 
had Marshall issue orders for Hill to move the Third Corps to Cashtown, leaving 
Longstreet’s First Corps in Chambersburg.39 Hill sent a lone brigade under Brigadier 
General James J. Pettigrew to Gettysburg to obtain some supplies reportedly there. 
Pettigrew encountered Brigadier General John Buford’s Union cavalry division on the 
outskirts of Gettysburg, and withdrew without fighting. Both Hill and Pettigrew’s 
division commander, Major General Heth, dismissed all ideas that the Union cavalry 
could possibly be at Gettysburg, and determined to send Heth’s entire division, 
supported by Pender’s division, into the town the next day on a “reconnaissance in 
force.” Hill informed Lee of his plans, and Lee approved, but sent orders reminding 
Hill to avoid forcing a major engagement before the Army of Northern Virginia was 
properly concentrated.40 Hill likewise sent a courier informing Ewell of his march to 
Gettysburg, and Ewell decided on his own initiative to meet the Third Corps there.41

was also dissatisfied with Lee’s orders, referring to their “gross lack of precision.” (The Gettysburg 
Campaign, 193) Robert E. K. Krick uses this example to claim that “clearly the headquarters of the 
Army of Northern Virginia cannot be said to have been a smoothly functioning military machine.” See 
Krick, “Great Tycoon,” 105. To be sure, it was expected for corps commanders to show greater 
individual initiative than division leaders. Lee had held some doubts about Ewell’s ability to handle 
greater discretion and responsibilities; see Allan, “Memoranda,” 11.

39 Maurice (ed.), Aide-de-Camp, 220.

40 Lee likely issued Hill a verbal warning. See Walter H. Taylor, “Second Paper on Causes of Lee’s 
Defeat at Gettysburg,” in Southern Historical Society Papers 4 (1877): 124-144, 126. Some writers, 
notably Stephen W. Sears, have chastised Hill for ordering so many men on this “reconnaissance” that 
he was bound to precipitate a battle; see Sears, Gettysburg, 160-165, 179. Hassler argues, somewhat 
convincingly, that Hill did not believe the Federal army was anywhere near Gettysburg; see Hassler, A.
Thus far, Lee had conducted a well-coordinated invasion of Union territory. Although his three infantry corps were scattered across three states at one point, he maintained firm control over each segment of his army. He allowed his generals some individual initiative while firmly establishing their overall objectives. He had used his staff officers and couriers to react quickly to unforeseen developments. His only glaring lapse had been his failure to control his cavalry. Lee’s and Marshall’s discretionary orders allowed Stuart to ride around the Union army and lose contact with the infantry; by allowing Stuart the choice whether to ride around the Union army and neglecting to stress the necessity of speedy reunion with the infantry, the orders allowed Stuart to interpret them very liberally. Furthermore, neither Lee nor his staff contacted Robertson to provide cavalry; instead, they resorted to questioning returning Confederate convalescents and even Pennsylvanians civilians about the location of Stuart and his three missing brigades.

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41 Robertson, Jr, ed., Four Years, 92-93, and O. R., I, XXVII, II, 444, 607. 
42 For example, Hill reported that his original instructions to help seize Harrisburg in cooperation with Ewell had also authorized him to act “as circumstances might require.” (O. R., I, XXVII, II, 606) 
43 After the campaign, when Marshall pressed Stuart to submit his official report, Stuart attempted to defend himself to Marshall, claiming he had followed orders. Marshall did not accept his excuse; see Maurice (ed), Aide-de-Camp, 214-215. Lee himself criticized Stuart in his report, but admitted that his cavalry chief had acted “in the exercise of the discretion given him;” see O. R., I, XXVII, II, 321. 
July 1: Gettysburg, Day 1\textsuperscript{45}

When Heth advanced on Gettysburg, he soon encountered Buford’s cavalry on Herr Ridge northwest of town. Upon pushing the Federal troopers back, Heth’s Division was suddenly attacked by the arriving I Corps of the Army of the Potomac and driven back with heavy losses. Heth called for support and formed his entire division in line of battle, while Pender arrived behind Heth’s Division and followed suit. Lee and his staff were still at Chambersburg with Longstreet’s Corps when the battle opened, and they could hear the booms of artillery. Rather than sending a staff officer forward to find out what was transpiring, Lee personally ordered Longstreet to hurry his corps forward and then set out himself with his staff toward Gettysburg. Reaching Cashtown, Lee queried Hill on the morning’s events. Hill was very ill on July 1, and was himself preparing to mount his horse and go to survey the action; accordingly, he could tell Lee very little. Lee then sent a messenger to hurry forward Anderson’s Division before going to Gettysburg himself, accompanied by his staff.\textsuperscript{46} Lee was “very much disturbed” at the prospect of fighting an enemy of unknown size with his army divided.\textsuperscript{47}

Just east of Cashtown, Major G. Campbell Brown of Ewell’s staff galloped up to Lee and announced that Ewell was nearing Gettysburg from the north. Lee sent

\textsuperscript{45} The most recent and detailed study of the fighting on July 1 is Harry W. Pfanz, \textit{Gettysburg: The First Day}.


\textsuperscript{47} Longstreet, \textit{Manassas to Appomattox}, 357. Here, Longstreet quotes a letter from R. H. Anderson.
Brown back to Ewell with a repetition of his standing order to avoid forcing a major engagement until the army was concentrated. Notably, Ewell had sent his staff officer to Lee, instead of the reverse; it can be questioned whether Lee would have sent a staff officer if Ewell had not.48 When Lee reached the outskirts of Gettysburg, Major Andrew Venable (no relation to Lee’s staff officer), one of Stuart’s staff officers, rode up to him. Lee sent him back to Stuart ordering Stuart to Gettysburg. Once again, Lee used another general’s staff officer, but in this case, Lee had no idea where Stuart was.49 When Ewell, with Rodes’ Division, neared Gettysburg, the two generals surveyed Hill’s battle lines northwest of town, and the line of the Union I Corps facing it on McPherson’s Ridge. They had not yet received Lee’s renewed order against precipitating a full-scale battle, and the Union flank before them was too tempting a target to pass up.50 Accordingly, Rodes deployed three of his five brigades and attacked southward. The Federals, consisting of the right wing of the I Corps and the newly-arriving XI Corps, repulsed Rodes’ attack, inflicting very heavy casualties and nearly destroying Brigadier General Alfred Iverson’s Brigade.

Lee could see Rodes’ attack, but remained strangely inactive. He did not send any staff officer or courier to stop Rodes. At the same time, though, when Heth, seeing Rodes’ predicament, pleaded with Lee for permission to attack, Lee again refused, explaining, “No; I am not prepared to bring on a general engagement to-day-

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49 *O. R.*, I, XXVII, II, 697. See also Sears, *Gettysburg*, 196-197.
50 Rodes stressed in his report that Ewell did not inform him of Lee’s order against bringing on a general battle until his attack was too far advanced to be recalled; see *O. R.*, I, XXVII, II, 555. See also Donald C. Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier’s Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), 303-305.
Longstreet is not up.” Perhaps to induce Longstreet to come “up” faster, Lee then dispatched an unnamed staff officer to the rear to hurry Anderson forward.51

Rodes’ Division was saved by the opportune arrival of Early’s Division from the northeast. By coincidence, Early’s line of march brought his division squarely across the flank of the XI Corps north of Gettysburg. Without waiting for orders, Early formed his four brigades and attacked. The Federals collapsed quickly. Upon receiving reports that Early had attacked and was driving the enemy, Lee finally ordered Heth to attack. Heth surged forward, taking heavy casualties, but forcing the Federals off McPherson’s Ridge. Pender’s Division followed, and with Rodes’ assistance, pried the Federals from their strong position on Seminary Ridge and drove them through the streets of Gettysburg. Between them, Ewell’s and Hill’s Corps captured over 4,000 prisoners. The Federals regrouped on Cemetery Hill, immediately south of town.52

The Army of Northern Virginia had stumbled into a battle with a Federal force of unknown size, and had very nearly lost the day’s engagement.53 Lee had exerted almost no control over his corps commanders as they neared the battlefield, and had scarcely used his staff at all. Instead, he reverted in part to his Seven Days’ behavior, personally riding to first Hill and then Heth to issue orders in person. While it was natural and expected for an army commander to be at the scene of

53 In Heth’s words, “The fight at Gettysburg on July 1 was without order or system, the several divisions attacking the enemy on their front as they arrived on the battlefield.” See Heth, “Letter,” 159.
combat, Lee’s army might have been better served had he remained in the rear to organize the march of reinforcements, as his counterpart General Meade was doing, and sent a trusted subordinate or staff officer to keep him informed of events at the front. As it was, even after he arrived on the battlefield, Lee seemed only to take Hill’s place, issuing orders directly to Heth and failing to seize the initiative in communicating with Ewell. 54 Only the timely arrival of Early’s Division at the opportune place had prevented defeat. Lee might have wanted a battle with the Army of the Potomac, but probably not with his army divided in enemy territory without his cavalry. Even if he did desire to clash with the Federals on July 1, as Alan T. Nolan alleges, he took few measures to control his army in the developing battle. 55

Although victorious, Ewell’s and Hill’s men were exhausted and disorganized by the battle. They had driven the Federals into an obviously strong position, where they rallied around a fresh Union brigade previously held in reserve. Considering the disorganized condition of their men and the apparent strength of the new Union position, Ewell and Hill halted their men in the streets of Gettysburg. Lee observed the Cemetery Hill position from a distance, and agreed with Hill that the latter’s men were too badly bloodied to attempt another assault. 56 Nevertheless, Lee desired a

54 Early claimed (Autobiographical Essay, 278) that “there was no communication” between the Second and Third Corps during the fighting. This contradicts Fremantle’s testimony (Three Months, 255). See also Gary Gallagher, “Confederate Corps Leadership on the First Day at Gettysburg: A. P. Hill and Richard S. Ewell in a Difficult Debut,” in Three Days at Gettysburg: Essays on Union and Confederate Leadership, ed. Gary Gallagher (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1999), 25-43.
55 Alan T. Nolan, “R. E. Lee and July 1 at Gettysburg,” in Lee the Soldier, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 475-498, 482-491. See also Sears, Gettysburg, 196-197, 201
56 Oddly, Lee did not consider using Anderson’s Division, which had just arrived; instead, he sent a courier ordering it to break camp for the night. See Coddington, 315-317, Gary Gallagher, “‘If the Enemy Is There, We Must Attack Him’: R. E. Lee and the Second Day at Gettysburg,” in Lee the
closer look at the enemy position, and sent Colonel Armistead Long of his staff to
examine the hill and its defenders more thoroughly. Long returned, reporting
correctly that the Federals held an exceedingly strong position crowned with forty
pieces of artillery.57

Before Long returned, Lee sent Major Walter Taylor to Ewell in Gettysburg
with perhaps the most famous order he ever carried. Taylor remembered this order
differently in his various retellings, suggesting that it was verbal. It apparently
claimed that the Federals had withdrawn in confusion, and that it was only necessary
to push them further in order to take Cemetery Hill. Ewell was to assault and take the
hill “if practicable.”58 However, he was also again cautioned against precipitating a
full-scale engagement before the entire army was concentrated.59 In Taylor’s words,

In obedience to these instructions, I proceeded immediately to General Ewell and delivered
the order of General Lee; and after receiving from him some message for the commanding
general in regard to the prisoners captured, returned to the latter and reported that his order
had been delivered. General Ewell did not express any objection, or indicate the existence of
any impediment, to the execution of the order conveyed to him, but left the impression on my
mind that it would be executed.60

Soldier, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 497-520, 509-513, and Harry W.
Papers 4 (1877): 66-68. William Allen claimed this reconnaissance helped dissuade Ewell from
attacking; see William Allan, “The Strategy of the Gettysburg Campaign: Objects, Progress, Results,”
Society Papers 4 (1877): 80-87, 83. In his report (O. R., I, XXVII, II, 445), Ewell stated that the order
required him to attack “if I could do so to advantage.” It is not known when the notion that the
Federals were “confused” began; see Harry T. Pfanz, Gettysburg: Culp’s Hill and Cemetery Hill
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993), 45-70.
59 At the time, Ewell alluded to this requirement as justification for his subsequent failure to attack,
claiming Lee was at Cashtown, and he did “not feel like advancing and making an attack without
orders from him,”; see Henry Kyd Douglas, I Rode With Stonewall, Being chiefly the war experiences
of the youngest member of Jackson’s staff from the John Brown Raid to the hanging of Mrs. Surratt
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1940), 241.
60 Robertson, ed., Four Years, 95.
Taylor’s account implies that Lee sent him with the order and desired him to supervise its execution, or at least verify that it would be carried out before he returned to Lee.

En route to Ewell, Taylor passed James Power Smith, who bore a request from Ewell to Lee and Hill requesting support for an attempt to take the hill. Lee, after consulting with General Hill and Colonel Long, told Smith that Hill’s men were in no condition to assault Cemetery Hill, and that, moreover, the enemy position was too strong for an attack from Hill’s location to have any chance of succeeding. When Smith bore news that Ewell would be alone if he attacked, the general hesitated. He finally decided, to the immense disappointment of his staff and subordinates, not to order an attack. Ewell’s failure to attack on the evening of July 1 has been called the “greatest ‘what-if’” of Gettysburg, but Lee’s staff was not responsible for his decision.61

Lee was not through planning for July 2, however. Very late in the evening, Lee sent Major Marshall to survey the Cemetery Hill position again, this time in front of Ewell’s lines south of Gettysburg. Without waiting for Marshall, Lee then personally rode to Ewell’s headquarters to converse with the corps commander. He found a frustrating situation, with Ewell virtually silent as to what his corps should do next. By contrast, Jubal Early was quite vocal in his recommendations. According to

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61 James Power Smith, “General Lee at Gettysburg: A Paper Read Before the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, on the Fourth of April, 1905,” in Southern Historical Society Papers 33 (1905): 135-160, 142-144. Alexander claimed (Military Memoirs, 385) that Lee “took no steps to see that the order was obeyed.” However, in-depth analysis of the problems facing Ewell, such as that provided by Donald C. Pfanz, Ewell, 308-315, reveals that Ewell was not simply timid on July 1, but had very valid reasons for not attacking the Cemetery Hill position.
Early, the Second Corps could not successfully assault the Federal position on Cemetery Hill, but neither should it withdraw through Gettysburg to allow Lee to lengthen his right down Seminary Ridge. Instead, Early argued that the other two corps should attack the Union right flank on Cemetery Ridge, just south of Cemetery Hill. The Second Corps would then attack the Federals as they retreated, completing the destruction of Meade’s army. Lee reluctantly agreed to leave the Second Corps in its present location.\footnote{Early, “The Campaigns of Gen. Robert E. Lee,” in \textit{Lee the Soldier}, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 37-74, 59-60. See also Early, \textit{Autobiographical Sketch}, 271, and Coddington, 363-365. It is not known what effect, if any, Marshall’s reconnaissance had on the plan.}

Later that night, Lee changed his mind and decided to move the Second Corps to Seminary Ridge. He accordingly sent Major Marshall back to Ewell with an order for him to withdraw his corps from Gettysburg. Ewell vigorously protested the order, riding back with Marshall to see Lee at his headquarters. Ewell informed Lee that his own staff had reported that Culp’s Hill, to the immediate southeast of Cemetery Hill, was clear of Federals. With Lee’s permission, Ewell proposed to move Johnson’s newly-arrived division to occupy Culp’s Hill and thus render Cemetery Hill untenable to the Federals. Lee agreed, and Ewell returned to his headquarters to order Johnson forward. Unfortunately for the Confederates, by the time Johnson neared Culp’s Hill, the Union XII Corps already occupied it in force, and the plan was accordingly abandoned.\footnote{\textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, II, 446, and James Longstreet, “Lee in Pennsylvania”, in \textit{Lee the Soldier}, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 381-414, 405. See also Coddington, \textit{The Gettysburg Campaign}, 365-367. Coddington points out that “Very likely Ewell had received the report of the reconnaissance mission to Culp’s Hill before Lee’s withdrawal order reached him, but he did nothing about it until the commanding general’s message galvanized him into action.” (366)}
Crucially, Lee sent no staff officer to Lieutenant General Longstreet to urge the First Corps forward or to notify Longstreet of its role in the assault planned for July 2. Longstreet was highly resentful of Lee’s decision to continue to attack the Federal army at Gettysburg, and had sullenly returned to his corps at Cashtown after consulting with Lee. It was about eight-thirty in the morning on July 2 before most of Hood’s and McLaws’ Divisions reached the vicinity of Gettysburg, and Lee was disappointed in the tardiness of Longstreet’s arrival. A major postwar controversy erupted over whether Lee ordered Longstreet to have the First Corps at Gettysburg, ready to attack, at sunrise on July 2. Both Longstreet and Lee’s staff officers voiced their respective opinions, but both agreed that Lee sent no staff officer or courier to hasten the First Corps.

Lee used his staff adequately on July 1. Although he had not utilized his staff officers or couriers much during the fighting that day, Lee had employed them extensively during the evening hours. He sent them to scout the enemy position, to deliver orders, and even, within bounds, to supervise their execution. This reflected a marked improvement over his utilization of his staff in previous battles, but glaring

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64 Longstreet claimed that “On the night of the 1st I left him without any orders at all;” see Longstreet, “Lee in Pennsylvania,” 389. If true, this renders Lee’s failure to send a staff officer or courier even more glaring. Alexander pointed this out; see Gallagher (ed.), Fighting, 234.

65 Walter Taylor admitted that “I cannot say that he [Longstreet] was notified, on the night of the 1st, of the attack proposed to be made on the morning of the second, and the part his corps was to take therein.” (Robertson, ed., Four Years, 99), but insisted that Longstreet should have understood the underlying need to get his men to the battlefield as quickly as possible. After the war, Longstreet cited letters from Taylor, Marshall, Long, and Venable to prove that no such order was sent to him; see Longstreet, “Lee in Pennsylvania,” 404-405. Early bitterly rejected the staff officers’ testimonies, claiming they “amount to nothing”, and insisting that Lee ordered Longstreet to attack at sunrise; see Jubal A. Early, “Reply to General Longstreet,” in Lee the Soldier, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 415-434, 421-429. See also Robertson, ed., Four Years, 99-101, and Coddington, The Gettysburg Campaign, 370-371. In one account, Taylor claimed such orders were sent to Longstreet, but this is at variance from all others examined; see Taylor, “Letter”, 84.
defects remained. Lee seemingly felt that he should use his staff to maintain close control over inexperienced Ewell and Hill, but not the veteran Longstreet. There was logic to this selective staff usage, but during subsequent events, Lee failed to use his staff to correct Longstreet’s defiance of Lee’s directives.

**July 2: Gettysburg, Day 2**

As July 2 began, Lee continued to make use of his staff. He dispatched Colonel Long to make another reconnaissance of the Union lines on Cemetery Ridge. He also entrusted Long with the power to position the artillery of Hill’s Corps on Seminary Ridge. Long rode toward the Confederate left, accompanied part of the way by the army’s chief of artillery, Brigadier General William Pendleton, and reported back to Lee. Lee sent another scouting party under Captain Samuel Johnston of his general staff much farther to the Union left, toward the Round Tops. Johnston was to locate the Union flank and find a covered route by which Longstreet’s attacking corps could approach the Federal lines undetected. Unaccountably, Johnston failed to spot the Union II and III Corps, both of which were near the Round Tops, and reported back to Lee that the hills were totally clear of Federals. This has caused many writers to accuse “Lee’s staff” of a crucial blunder at Gettysburg, but such authors have failed to distinguish between Lee’s *personal* staff and his *general* staff.

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66 The most detailed account of the fighting on the Confederate left is Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*. For the Confederate right, see Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp’s Hill and Cemetery Hill.


Irritated by Longstreet’s delay, Lee sent Major Venable back to Ewell’s headquarters to reevaluate the Second Corps’ position. He gave Venable authority to inspect the lines and to consult with Ewell about his prospects. Ewell requested that Venable accompany him on an inspection ride over his lines, and the major agreed. In the meantime, Lee discussed his plans to attack the Union left with Longstreet, who had ridden ahead of his corps. When Lee left Longstreet, the commanding general was under the impression that the First Corps would march at once. He then rode to see Ewell, who returned shortly with Major Venable. The two generals, together with Major Venable and the recently-returned Colonel Long, then discussed the outlook on the Second Corps’ front. Ewell remained adamantly opposed to either attack or withdraw from his current position. While they conversed, Lee waited anxiously for signs that Longstreet had moved to engage the Union left. He heard nothing, and showed signs of frustration.

Rather than dispatching a staff officer to Longstreet to see what was delaying the offensive, Lee left Ewell and rode back towards his own headquarters searching for Longstreet. Despite a message Lee received to the contrary, Longstreet had not moved his corps at all; it remained on McPherson’s Ridge behind Hill’s Corps. Lee peremptorily ordered Longstreet to attack, and again left him for his own headquarters. When yet more time passed and the First Corps had still not moved, a

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71 Long, “Letter,” 67-68, and Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3:92-94. It is not known who sent this message, or whether Lee’s staff was involved.
very frustrated Lee again rode to see Longstreet personally instead of sending a staff officer. Longstreet begged leave to delay his march until Evander Law’s detached brigade of Hood’s Division rejoined the corps, and Lee reluctantly agreed. In the end, it was past noon when Longstreet finally moved the First Corps toward the Confederate right flank. As Longstreet moved out, Lee rode with him, perhaps to ensure that his instructions were being executed. He soon left Longstreet again to return to his own headquarters, and did not leave a single staff officer to supervise the First Corps. Lee ordered Captain Johnston of the engineers to guide the two-division column, while Longstreet placed himself between the two divisions and bitterly refused to give orders to the leading division, claiming that it was now under Johnston’s command. This situation soon led to another lengthy delay in Longstreet’s attack, as the Confederates discovered that Johnston’s supposedly concealed route was in fact highly visible to Union signalmen on Little Round Top. Although his corps artillery, under Colonel Alexander, had previously found a much shorter concealed route to the Union left, Longstreet refused to give any orders or to

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73 Although Wert (James Longstreet, 272) cites unpublished sources that place Lee with Longstreet when the attack finally commenced, it is certain that neither Lee nor any of his personal staff accompanied Longstreet on the unnecessarily lengthy march to the First Corps’ attack positions. Perhaps Lee did eventually ride over to observe Longstreet’s attack begin; if he did, according to Fremantle, he did not long remain there, and made no further attempt to communicate with Longstreet afterward.
74 After the war, he still claimed “Colonel” Johnston had been placed in command of the column; see Longstreet, “Lee in Pennsylvania”, 390.
75 See Sorrel, 168. Sorrel held Johnston responsible for the delay in the attack, and many historians have followed his lead. For example, Coddington described this fiasco as demonstrating (The Gettysburg Campaign, 380) “an inherent weakness in Lee’s system of command,” and providing an “example of how time could be lost in handling troops, and how generals needed many competent staff officers.” It should be remembered, though, that Johnston was on Lee’s general staff, not his personal staff. For more on this important distinction, see Introduction, 6-9.
send to Lee to obtain guidance in this situation. Instead, the entire column was halted and countermarched, the two divisions becoming tangled in the process, as the column took a roundabout route farther away from the Union lines to avoid being seen. By the time Longstreet finally attacked, it was four o’clock in the afternoon, and the Federals were firmly in position on Cemetery Ridge.

Although Lee placed great trust in Longstreet, in this instance he failed to use his staff to maintain his control over his openly sulking subordinate. After his three previous failures to obey Lee’s orders, Longstreet was obviously reluctant to follow instructions, and he should have been supervised. A staff officer from Lee would have been able to authorize the infantry to take Alexander’s route, or at least could have sent a courier back to Lee requesting such authorization. Lee lost control over Longstreet’s Corps, and did nothing to regain it.

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76 Alexander, Military Memoirs, 391-392. In Alexander’s words (Gallagher, ed., Fighting, 237), “Longstreet did not wish to take the offensive. His objection to it was not based at all upon the peculiar strength of the enemy’s position for that was not yet recognized, but solely on general principles.” Although postwar accounts of Longstreet’s service at Gettysburg were often highly polemical and hence unreliable for establishing objective assessments, Longstreet’s own subordinates who usually supported his actions, such as Sorrel and Alexander, agreed that he acted poorly on the march to the attack of July 2.

77 For a strongly-worded account of Longstreet’s insubordinate behavior, see Robert K. Krick, “‘If James Longstreet Says So, It Is Most Likely Not True’: James Longstreet and the Second Day at Gettysburg,” in Three Days at Gettysburg: Essays on Union and Confederate Leadership, ed. Gary Gallagher (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1999), 147-168, 156-163. Longstreet’s most recent biographer, Jeffrey D. Wert, admits that “Longstreet deserves censure for his performance on the morning of July 2. He allowed his disagreement with Lee’s decision to affect his conduct.” (James Longstreet, 268). See also Wert, 268-269.

78 In Sorrel’s words (Recollections, 166-167), “Communications were in the main between Lee and Longstreet, verbally, or occasionally by note direct…As Longstreet was not to be made willing [to attack] and Lee refused to change or could not change, the former failed to conceal some anger. There was apparent apathy in his movements. They lacked the fire and point of his usual bearing on the battlefield.” Krick claimed Lee did not accompany Longstreet “because he came to Gettysburg with two brand-new corps commanders and neither of them was James Longstreet” (“If Longstreet Says So,” 159).

79 In Freeman’s words (“Gettysburg,” 457), “Lee virtually surrendered to Longstreet.”
After the delayed assault began, Longstreet took no measures to communicate with Lee, and Lee neglected to supervise the attack.\textsuperscript{80} When Hood repeatedly insisted that he had found a way to turn the Federal left flank, Longstreet sullenly refused, insisting that “we must follow the orders of General Lee.” He sent no staff officer to Lee, and Lee had left no personal staff officer with him; in either case, he could have quickly communicated Hood’s discovery to the commanding general, and received appropriate instructions.\textsuperscript{81} In fact, Longstreet sent only one message to Lee all day, even as his two divisions battled ferociously in the Wheatfield, the Devil’s Den, Little Round Top, the Peach Orchard, and Cemetery Ridge, achieving only modest gains for very heavy casualties. When the day’s battle ended, Longstreet did not bother to report to Lee’s headquarters, and Lee did not summon him. Lee sent a message to Longstreet ordering him to renew the attack at daybreak on July 3, but apparently did not entrust his messenger to inspect Longstreet’s corps and advanced position.\textsuperscript{82}

In the assault, Anderson’s Division of Hill’s Corps was supposed to attack on Longstreet’s immediate left in support. Only three of Anderson’s five brigades advanced as ordered; the fourth, under Brigadier General Carnot Posey, was too entangled in heavy skirmishing to form its battle line in time, and the commander of the fifth, Brigadier General William Mahone, refused repeated orders from Anderson


\textsuperscript{82} Coddington, \textit{The Gettysburg Campaign}, 455-456., and Sears, \textit{Gettysburg}, 346-347. The messenger’s identity is unknown. Longstreet sent a courier to Lee to report on the day’s fighting; it is possible that even at this point, Lee did not use his own staff, but sent Longstreet’s courier back to him with the order. See Longstreet, “Lee in Pennsylvania,” 393.
to move his unit at all. Maintaining communication between different corps was naturally a job for Lee’s staff, yet there is scant evidence that Lee used his staff at all during the afternoon of July 2. Freemantle, who spent the day at Lee’s headquarters, observed:

So soon as the firing began, General Lee joined Hill just below our tree, and he remained there nearly all the time, looking through his field-glass- sometimes talking to Hill and sometimes to Colonel Long of his Staff. But generally he sat quite alone on the stump of a tree. What I remarked especially was, that during the whole time the firing continued, he sent only one message, and received only one report. It is evidently his system to arrange the plan thoroughly with the three corps commanders, and then leave to them the duty of modifying and carrying it out to the best of their abilities.

Fremantle accurately described Lee’s usual command system, and while Lee improved his control over his generals for most of the period since the Seven Days’ Battles, on July 2 he reverted to his earlier performance. Neither Lee nor Hill intervened in Anderson’s attack on Cemetery Ridge, even after it became manifestly clear that the attack was not being supported as ordered. In the end, Anderson’s men actually gained the crest of the ridge momentarily, but without support, they were soon forced to withdraw.

Similarly, although Ewell’s corps converted its “demonstration” into a full-fledged assault, it did not coincide with Longstreet’s, and was uncoordinated.

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83 Posey claimed (O. R., I, XXVII, II, 633) that Anderson had ordered only two regiments of his brigade to advance, and then in skirmish formation. Anderson’s report is silent regarding Mahone’s actions. Mahone blandly stated that “The brigade took no special or active part in the actions of that battle beyond that which fell to the lot of its line of skirmishers.” (O. R., I, XXVII, II, 621). His report is far shorter than any other Confederate general’s.

84 Freemantle, Three Months, 260-261. See also Sears, Gettysburg, 305-306. As Freeman points out (R. E. Lee, 3:140 n.36), it was about the time of Gettysburg when Lee described his command philosophy to Scheibert; see Introduction, 12. See also C. S. Venable, “Notice of Major Scheibert’s Book,” in Southern Historical Society Papers 4 (1877): 88-91.

85 Hassler, A. P. Hill, 161-162, and Coddington, The Gettysburg Campaign, 420-421, 445. The commanders of the three attacking brigades were understandably very bitter about this in their reports; see O. R., I, XXVII, II, 618, 622-624, 632.
Johnson’s Division occupied some abandoned breastworks, but failed to drive the enemy from most of Culp’s Hill. As the sun was setting, Early sent two brigades directly at Cemetery Hill from the north. Although they seized several cannons and some prisoners, they were forced to withdraw by heavy Union reinforcements. Rodes, who was to have attacked Cemetery Hill from the west, took so long in extricating his men from the streets of Gettysburg that Early’s battle was over before his division was in position. Pender’s Division had lost its commander earlier in the day to a shell fragment, and failed to advance. Once again, Lee did not use his staff to supervise any of these movements, but he sent a message late that evening ordering Ewell to renew the attack at dawn.

On July 2, the Army of Northern Virginia came close to verifying Freeman’s claim that it had “slipped back a year.” The army’s divisions had either failed to attack at all or had advanced in piecemeal, uncoordinated fashion. Lee completely failed to use his staff to control his army, whether to make sure Longstreet followed his orders or to coordinate the actions of his three corps commanders. It is true that the Army of Northern Virginia occupied the exterior line at Gettysburg, which complicated efforts to coordinate troop movements. However, the problem was not,

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87 As Alexander remarked about the official reports of the Second Corps’ generals, “Between the lines the apparent absence of supervision excites constant wonder.” See Alexander, Military Memoirs, 408. See also Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3:101-102, and Sears, Gettysburg, 347.
88 See Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944) 3:106-140. He used a modification of this phrase as his chapter title for July 2. One year previously, Lee’s army had fought the Seven Days’ Battles.
89 In Walter Taylor’s words, “The whole affair was disjointed. There was an utter absence of accord in the movements of the several commands, and no decisive result attended the operations of the second day.” (Robertson, ed., Four Years, 99)
as Alexander claimed, that the Confederate line was “too long” for effective coordination or staff control:

I attribute it partially to the fact that our staff organizations were never sufficiently extensive and perfect to enable the Commanding-General to be practically present everywhere and to thoroughly handle a large force on an extended field, but principally it was due to the exceedingly difficult shape in which our line was formed, the enemy occupying a center and we a semi-circumference, with poor and exposed communications along it. 90

If anything, the communication difficulties posed by occupying the exterior line made good staff usage even more important for Lee than usual. Lee had neglected to use the staff he had to carry and supervise the execution of his orders. 91 As Coddington phrased it, “Supervision was hardly the word to have used in describing Lee’s activities on the afternoon and evening of July 2.” 92 After all, Lee’s staff of six officers assisted by couriers should have been enough to supervise three corps commanders. 93 In any event, Lee did not attempt to utilize them. He had made excellent use of his personal staff during the morning hours, but had ceased to do so as the day progressed. By the end of the day, in Henry Kyd Douglas’ words, “General Lee was not in good humor over the miscarriage of his plans and his orders.” 94 However, the commanding general had contributed to this failure. 95

91 Alexander, “Letter”, 445-446, and Gallagher (ed.), Fighting, 236-237. Elsewhere, Alexander admitted that “there had been little supervision” of Lee’s subordinates without referring to the length of the Confederate line; see Alexander, Military Memoirs, 393.
92 Coddington, 444. Similarly, George A. Bruce declared, “If there was ever an occasion where, on the part of the commander of an army, there was need to do more than issue an order to begin a battle, it was here and now.” See George A. Bruce, “Lee and the Strategy of the Civil War,” in Lee the Soldier, ed. Gary Gallagher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996), 111-138, 121-122.
93 In Coddington’s words (The Gettysburg Campaign, 445), “two of his three corps commanders were serving in that capacity for the first time, and they could bear close watching and the benefit of his advice.”
94 Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, 249.
**July 3: Gettysburg, Day 3**

Although Lee expected Longstreet to renew his offensive at dawn on July 3, the corps commander failed to carry out Lee’s orders. Longstreet did not attack with Hood’s (now Law’s) and McLaws’ Divisions, nor did he order Pickett’s newly arrived division to the front. Once again, rather than sending a staff officer to ascertain the reason for Longstreet’s delay, Lee went in person to see him.96 When he saw that the First Corps was not prepared to resume the offensive, Lee sent a courier to Ewell ordering him to suspend his attack until five o’clock in the morning. The courier arrived too late, for the Second Corps had been fighting a hopeless battle on Culp’s Hill since approximately four o’clock in the morning. The Army of Northern Virginia had again failed to attack in concert.97

Lee now determined to risk everything on a desperate, all-out assault on the Union center. Originally, Lee wanted Longstreet to advance his entire corps against the Federal position on Cemetery Ridge. Upon being dissuaded from this idea by Longstreet, Lee ordered Longstreet to make the attack with Pickett’s fresh division along with Heth’s Division and two brigades of Pender’s Division of Hill’s Corps, commanded respectively by Brigadier General James J. Pettigrew and Major General Issac R. Trimble. The attack was to be preceded by a terrific bombardment from massed Confederate artillery, which was to pound the Cemetery Ridge area with

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95 As Freeman phrased it (“Gettysburg,” 457), “It is scarcely too much to say that on July 2 the Army of Northern Virginia was without a commander.”

96 Sears, *Gettysburg*, 349. Lee had communicated directly with Pickett on July 2, using one of Pickett’s staff officers.

converging fire from over one hundred cannons, destroying or driving away the Federal artillery. Once the artillery had pulverized the Union center, the infantry was to advance over a mile of open ground between the lines, storm the Union center, and split the Army of the Potomac in two. The rest of the army would be available to exploit any breakthrough and to support the attackers. At the same time, Stuart’s recently-returned cavalry was to circle behind the Federals and position itself in their rear.

Lee actively involved his staff in the preparation for this attack. He began by riding along Longstreet’s and Hill’s lines to inspect the armies’ positions personally, taking his staff officers and General Longstreet. Afterward, the generals and Lee’s staff engaged in planning session to plan the attack. Walter Taylor, Charles Venable, and Armistead Long were all present, and contributed comments. In particular, Long, as the artillery expert on Lee’s staff, offered his assessment on the possible effect of Federal artillery on Little Round Top on the attacking infantry. He insisted that Confederate artillery could certainly silence the Union gunners on that hill, and espoused supreme confidence in the plan, as did the other staff officers and the commanding general himself. Lee used his staff to help position the divisions for

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98 Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3:107-109. While it has been hotly debated ever since the war whether Lee intended the rest of the army to follow Longstreet’s assault, Rodes mentioned receiving an order to be “on the lookout for another favorable opportunity to co-operate.” (O. R., I, XXVII, II, 557) Hill was likewise ordered to support Longstreet with the remainder of his corps; see O. R., I, XXVII, II, 608. Lee’s staff insisted that the rest of the army was ready itself to support Pickett; see Long, Memoirs, 293-294.

99 This too is uncertain, but remains the most likely explanation for Stuart’s movements; see Thomas, Bold Dragoon, 247.

100 Fremantle, Three Months, 262. Hill and Heth were also present, along with Longstreet.

the planned assault. Neither Lee nor his staff noticed several glaring weaknesses in the Confederate preparations. Heth’s Division had been so dreadfully mangled on July 1 that a day’s rest had not restored it to battle readiness. The same was true of Scales’ Brigade of Pender’s Division, one of the two selected from that division to make the attack. All of these units lost very heavily in officers on July 1, and were led by inexperienced commanders. Pettigrew was new both to the army and to divisional command, while Trimble was both inexperienced at divisional leadership and unknown to his men; he assumed command literally minutes before the bombardment began. As Peter S. Carmichael has well demonstrated, there was little attempt to supervise the placement of the massed cannons for the bombardment, and no measures were taken to ensure communication and coordination between the artillerists of the First, Second, and Third Corps. Once again, Lee neglected to use his staff to supervise either Longstreet or Hill, or to make sure that the army’s other six and one-half divisions understood the orders to advance if the main charge broke through the enemy’s line. Finally, Lee sent no staff officer to accompany Stuart; when Stuart neared his assigned position, he resorted to firing several wild cannon shots to announce his presence to the rest of the Confederate army. Unfortunately for


103 For example, one of Heth’s brigades had only seven field officers left, and another had only two. Only two of Heth’s original four brigadiers still commanded their brigades, and Heth himself had been wounded. For details, see *O. R.*, I, XXVII, II, 637-651. Scales’ Brigade had lost all but one field officer on July 1; see *O. R.*, I, XXVII, II, 670.

104 Carmichael, “Every Map of the Field,” 273-279. In the event, many of the Second Corps’ batteries did not fire a shot in the bombardment. Alexander lamented this; he saw great potential for them to enfilade the Union line on Cemetery Ridge; see *O. R.*, I, XXVII, II, 495, 544. He blamed this also on “the scarcity of trained staff and reconnoitering officers.” See Alexander, *Military Memoirs*, 417.
Lee, Stuart’s cannon fire also alerted the Federals to Stuart’s location, and they quickly dispatched their own cavalry to check Stuart’s horsemen.¹⁰⁵

As it is known that Lee’s staff was involved in giving some orders to units prior to the assault, it is unknown which units received orders from the staff. Nonetheless, the buildup to “Pickett’s Charge” on July 3 represents the greatest failure of the staff officers themselves during the Gettysburg Campaign. Long was overly optimistic, to say the least, when he assured Longstreet that Confederate artillery would silence the Union cannons on Little Round Top. Lee and his staff seemed utterly ignorant of the condition of Heth’s and Scales’ men, a failure attributable to Taylor, since it was Taylor’s duty to keep abreast of the condition of the army’s units. Finally, after their initial flurry of orders, Lee and his staff simply sat on their horses and observed the subsequent bombardment and charge. Lee sent no messages to either Longstreet or Hill, and made no attempt to coordinate the artillery of the three corps.¹⁰⁶

Considering the inadequate preparations and lack of coordination, the attack commonly known as “Pickett’s Charge” was doomed from the start. The Confederate artillerists fired fiercely, but soon their ammunition was exhausted.¹⁰⁷ Pendleton sent the reserve ordinance trains far to the rear to evade Federal counterbattery fire, and no

¹⁰⁶ Hess, *Pickett’s Charge*, 181-184. Coddington (*The Gettysburg Campaign*, 461) correctly cites this as an example of “inadequate staff work.”
¹⁰⁷ As Lee admitted in his report, no one had informed him how low the ammunition reserve was, even though Longstreet knew it, thus representing another failure by Lee to use his staff to supervise; see *O. R.*, I, XXVII, II, 321, and Maurice (ed.), *Aide-de-Camp*, 240. The Third Corps artillery had wasted much of its ammunition in a fruitless long-range duel before the charge; Alexander had refused to let the First Corps’ guns participate; see Gallagher (ed.), *Fighting*, 250-251.
staff officer was left to supervise them. For similar reasons, the army’ artillery chief also ordered away the short-range howitzers Colonel Alexander had originally planned to advance to support the infantry.\textsuperscript{108} Once the infantry assault was underway, the two and one-half divisions advanced virtually alone. Despite Lee’s orders for the rest of the army to support the charging troops, only two of Anderson’s brigades ever advanced, and then they were too late to have any effect on the outcome.\textsuperscript{109} Longstreet and Hill failed to communicate with each other, and Lee did not use his staff to facilitate their cooperation. In less than an hour, the attack was over, at a cost of more than half of the troops who made the attack. After the attack, Lee and his staff attempted to rally the survivors, with only limited success.\textsuperscript{110} Lee’s failure to use his staff to supervise had borne bitter fruit.

\textit{Conclusion}

The Gettysburg Campaign represented the limits of the staff reforms of Robert E. Lee. Before the battle at Gettysburg, Lee demonstrated that he had learned from previous command mistakes. He kept in close contact with his infantry corps commanders, establishing their objectives while allowing them some room for

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\textsuperscript{109} Robertson, ed., \textit{Rour Years}, 104-108. Anderson reported (\textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, II, 615) that he attempted to advance with two more of his brigades, but that Longstreet stopped him, correctly reasoning that any further attack was suicide. He does not address, though, what might have been if his brigades had attacked \textit{sooner}, in closer support of Pickett and Pettigrew. By the time the two previous supporting brigades from Anderson were committed, it was already too late, as one of their commanders testified that he could not even see Pickett’s men, but simply proceeded over “the ground over which Pickett’s division had moved,” (\textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, II, 620). See also Freeman, “Gettysburg,” 457-459.
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initiative and discretion. Thus, Lee was able to react quickly when he learned the Federal army was in close proximity.

Lee utilized his staff more extensively than he had in previous engagements. He still used them as “highly-paid couriers” at times, but the officers themselves were now authorized to survey and inspect the lines in addition to simply delivering messages. They were repeatedly included in planning sessions along with Lee’s subordinate generals, and thus entrusted with knowledge of the commanding general’s plans. Finally, Armistead Long was recognized as a staff artillery expert, and endowed with appropriate authority to issue orders in Lee’s name to battery and battalion commanders. Overall, in some aspects, Lee actually used his personal staff better at Gettysburg than he had in earlier battles.

Nevertheless, in Lee’s words, the Army of Northern Virginia lost at Gettysburg because the army “could not be gotten to act in concert.” This failure to cooperate largely stemmed from Lee’s failure to use his personal staff either to carry orders or to supervise at key times during the battle. Although Lee used Marshall and Venable to consult with Ewell, and he personally remained with Hill, Lee left Longstreet very much to his own devices once the battle opened. Although Longstreet was Lee’s only experienced corps commander, his sulking and desultory performance should have been corrected. Lee had the means to prod Longstreet into obedience, and failed to use them. Several times, Lee rode away from Longstreet...
expecting the First Corps commander to carry out his instructions, only to be
dissatisfied when time passed and Longstreet had not budged. As in the Seven Days,
Lee and his staff simply waited for something to happen. Finally, Lee went himself
to correct Longstreet. While Lee may have treated Longstreet with special courtesy
because he valued his advice, he allowed the First Corps commander excessive
latitude, especially once it became clear that his orders were not being followed.
Having failed to use his staff proactively, to ensure obedience, Lee neglected to use
his staff retroactively, to correct the actions or mistakes of his subordinates.112 As
Stephen W. Sears expressed it, “it was Robert E. Lee’s inability to manage his
generals that went to the heart of the failed campaign.”113

Lee used his staff fairly well during the campaign. Although he failed to use
his staff only infrequently, his lapses came at the worst possible moments.114 The
staff officers still carried his orders and made observations of the battlefield, but, with
the periodic exception of Colonel Long, they were still not entrusted with the power
to supervise the execution of Lee’s orders. Gettysburg was not the total reversion to
the Seven Days’ staff failures that Freeman alleged, but it still revealed the limits of
Lee’s progress in staff improvement.

112 In Sears’ words (Gettysburg, 238), Gettysburg was Lee’s “first experience with recalcitrant
subordinates. He seemed deeply troubled by this unexpected development, and initially uncertain how
to handle it.” Some historians, such as Wert (James Longstreet, 278-279), and Sears (Gettysburg, 305-
307) have compared Lee unfavorably with Meade in this respect. A comparison of the army
commanders’ command styles is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the above examples are highly
interesting.
113 Sears, Gettysburg, 504.
114 As Coddington phrased it (The Gettysburg Campaign, 573), “The mistakes of the Confederates
which in any other battle would have been mere slips of the tongue, so to speak, became fatal at
Gettysburg.”
Conclusion

In a year of army command, Lee had improved his use of his staff to maintain communications, but Gettysburg demonstrated that he was far from realization of the Jominian ideal. To Jomini, the emergence of mass armies of non-professional soldiers had both enlarged the scale of battles and further necessitated good efforts by commanders to control their armies. The great military theorist accordingly wrote that since commanders could not directly observe all their units at once, they should utilize their staff officers and couriers to deliver messages for them and supervise units out of their personal presence. Jomini further argued that staff officers should be entrusted with authority to issue battlefield orders in the names of their generals, helping to ensure that the commanders’ expressed objectives were being pursued.¹

General Robert E. Lee improved his usage of his personal staff during his first year in command of the Army of Northern Virginia, but his progress was incomplete. By July 1863, despite closer communication and coordination between subordinate units and army headquarters, execution of plans still often went awry. While some confusion and command slowness was inevitable given the limitations of mid-nineteenth century military technology, the evidence suggests that often Lee did not use the means he had to ameliorate this problem.²

² For more on mid-nineteenth century theories on staff usage, see Introduction, 6-9.
Lee demonstrated marked improvement in the use of his staff as a carrier of orders. Early on, Lee seemingly left his army to manage itself, issuing orders to his commanders in person, and then riding away. He neglected to communicate with them afterwards, even when they were clearly not meeting his assigned timetable. By September 1862, Lee used his staff to maintain daily communication with most of his principal subordinates, receiving updates on their progress and issuing orders in turn. Even during the disastrous Gettysburg Campaign, Lee kept in contact with his subordinates most of the time, only relaxing his control on the battlefield itself.\(^3\) Overall, communications in the Army of Northern Virginia improved substantially between June 1862 and July 1863.

Throughout this period, however, Lee consistently failed to use his staff to issue orders in his name or to have its officers supervise the execution of his orders.\(^4\) Clearly, Lee assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia expecting his staff to issue some battlefield orders in his name. During the Seven Days, Lee had Chilton issue orders in his name and supervise forces out of his personal oversight. The chief of staff performed very poorly in this capacity. As measured in the number and importance of dispatches preserved in the *Official Records* and other sources, Chilton’s role as a source of battlefield orders steadily diminished. There is little direct evidence that Lee openly shifted Chilton to wholly administrative matters as the chief of staff’s limitations became clearer, but the available primary sources

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\(^3\) Admittedly, this had terrible results for his army.

\(^4\) Lee consistently involved his personal staff in the issuing of administrative orders in his name, such as general regulations, supply and transfer matters, and court-martial proceedings.
suggest this occurred.\textsuperscript{5} As of the Gettysburg Campaign, Lee had not delegated the power to issue large-scale battlefield orders to any of his other staff officers, preferring to issue such instructions himself.\textsuperscript{6}

Very seldom did Lee allow his staff officers to accompany a subordinate general to ensure that his orders were being carried out. During the Maryland and Gettysburg campaigns, Lee’s staff officers largely remained “highly-paid couriers” whose main job was to deliver messages. At Gettysburg, Lee’s failure to enforce his will on Longstreet through the use of staff officers in a supervisory role probably contributed to Confederate defeat. There is evidence that Lee believed that staff officers should not supervise field generals. However, prevailing military theory held that such was precisely the function of personal staff members, because they were supposed to function as extensions and tools of the commanding general to enforce his will on the army.\textsuperscript{7}

There were exceptions to Lee’s pattern of staff usage. At Gettysburg, Lee frequently involved his staff officers in tactical discussions both with himself and with his corps commanders. He expected the staff officers to familiarize themselves with the overall tactical situation, and be ready to offer advice if solicited. In particular, Lee utilized Armistead Long as staff artillery expert. Long frequently placed and supervised artillery operations at Lee’s request. Lee and Longstreet also

\textsuperscript{5} For example, see the number and subject of the orders bearing Chilton’s signature preserved in \textit{O. R.}, I, XI, II; \textit{O. R.}, I, XIX, II; and \textit{O. R.}, I, XXVII, III.

\textsuperscript{6} See discussion in Chapter 3.

called on Long to give his professional artillerist’s opinion on the strength of the Federal positions and the feasibility of Confederate artillery success. Neither Long nor any of the other officers on Lee’s personal staff evolved into modern-day staff “specialists,” but they were clearly seen as capable and valuable tools to assist Lee in commanding and controlling the army.

The Seven Days’ Battles of late June-early July 1862 were Robert E. Lee’s first as army commander, and they demonstrated the nadir of his staff usage and battlefield management. Lee’s subordinates repeatedly disobeyed his orders, or failed to execute them because of unforeseen circumstances. The army’s overly complex organizational structure exacerbated the situation by further taxing the command burden on Lee and his staff. Lee failed to anticipate such complications, neglecting to send staff officers or couriers to correct the situations in which his plans were obviously not being executed. Instead, the army commander and his staff frittered away crucial hours in fruitless waiting for something to happen on parts of the battlefield beyond their sight. When Lee did use his staff during the campaign, his chief of staff, Colonel Chilton, repeatedly issued vague and confusing instructions that arguably worsened the confusion and resulted in higher Confederate casualties.

By the Maryland Campaign, Lee had improved his staff management. He was no longer content with merely having his staff draft and distribute orders; he now expected to maintain constant avenues of communication with his principal subordinates. Now, Lee expected his generals to keep him apprised of their progress

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8 See Chapter 3.
9 See Chapter 2.
and any complications that arose in fulfilling their objectives. Although injured and thus dependent on the physical proximity of his staff officers, Lee still strove to maintain control over his widely-dispersed army by using couriers. As a result of Lee’s improved command system, when the Federal army neared, the commanding general was able to quickly notify his subordinates of the situation and rapidly reassemble the Army of Northern Virginia to meet the Union host. Although Lee failed to use his staff well at the Battle of South Mountain, he employed his personal staff officers with precision at Antietam (Sharpsburg).10

By June 1863, Lee regularly used his staff to carry messages and maintain communications with his subordinates. The army commander was seldom left uninformed of the locations or situations facing his units. He directed the daily marches of distant detachments and specified their objectives, all while allowing sufficient initiative to his subordinate generals to enable them to react to local developments. He erred in allowing Stuart’s cavalry to ride around the Union army, thus breaking contact with him and forcing the Confederate army to march into enemy territory bereft of quality reconnaissance. With this notable exception, Lee managed the army very well. During the battle of Gettysburg, Lee used his staff better than he had during the Seven Days, but not as well as he had at Antietam. Lee did not exercise initiative in communicating with his corps commanders on July 1, allowing Ewell and Hill to manage their respective engagements without overall coordination or guidance. After the fighting, however, Lee promptly communicated

10 See Chapter 2.
with Ewell, sending his well-known discretionary order to attack Cemetery Hill, and used his staff officers to reconnoiter the battlefield. Throughout the controversial Confederate failure to attack on the evening of July 1, Lee was never out of communication with Ewell.

Lee allowed his control over his army to relax on July 2 and 3, with disastrous consequences. Although he again used his staff to survey the battleground on July 2, Lee seemed highly reluctant to use his staff to prod recalcitrant generals into obeying his attack orders. Instead of sending messages or summons, Lee rode himself to Ewell and then Longstreet to consult with them and issue attack orders. Even after Longstreet had proven himself sullen and uncooperative, Lee took no decisive measure to correct his corps commander. On July 3, Lee involved his staff in the planning for his massive assault on the Union center, but did not use the staff to help manage or bring up support for the attack once it began.

Lee’s overall increase in staff usage and reliance on its officers’ opinions offers a solution to a question that follows naturally from the preponderance of negative historiographical material on the staff. Because most of the works involving Lee’s staff have described it as “inadequate,” “too small,” or “poor,” some may wonder whether Lee used his staff so sparingly because he recognized that its officers were truly incompetent. Conversely, it might be asked whether Lee’s staff officers’ talents were underdeveloped because the commanding general never tested them by
assigning them more challenging battlefield roles requiring personal initiative.\textsuperscript{11} Clearly, Lee believed that his staff was suited to the task of drafting and carrying battlefield orders. It is a more complicated question whether he thought them capable of originating orders in his stead or supervising the execution of his orders. Lee probably used Robert Chilton sparingly because he recognized the chief of staff’s ineptness as a source and supervisor of orders, but evidence on his thoughts concerning the other officers on his personal staff is more scarce. Perhaps revealingly, the only member of Lee’s personal staff besides Chilton ever authorized to issue battlefield orders far from Lee’s presence was Armistead Long, who joined Chilton as the only West Point graduates on the staff.\textsuperscript{12} Lee’s use of such staff officers as Venable and Marshall to survey the battlefield and participate in planning sessions at Gettysburg, though, strongly suggests that Lee believed most of his personal staff officers were capable of understanding and helping to manage large-scale military operations.\textsuperscript{13}

Lee’s reluctance to use his staff, especially to supervise subordinates, likely stemmed in part from the Southern culture of resistance to centralized authority. Because of the doctrine of states’ rights, Lee was required to assign regiments to brigades based on which state they were raised in, grouping regiments from the same states with each other. Lee was also limited in promoting and assigning generals to

\textsuperscript{11} The writer thanks one of his graduate student colleagues, who pointed out this conundrum after reading one of his draft chapters.
\textsuperscript{13} See Chapter 3, Long, Memoirs, 288, and Alexander, Military Memoirs, 416.
command his units; the common soldiers elected regimental officers, and brigadier generals were assigned based on the state they hailed from, as they were required to come from the same state as their men. As a result of these policies, the Army of Northern Virginia contained brigades of grossly unequal strength, under officers often promoted or assigned for political considerations instead of proven military aptitude. This state of affairs further complicated the task of commanding and controlling the army.

Just as President Davis often found it difficult to enforce his will on Southern state governors, so Lee had to consider the political ramifications of his command style. Lee’s subordinate officers had often been lawyers or politicians before the war, and they did not hesitate to write directly to their governors or congressmen if they felt they or their units had been dishonored by higher authorities. They requested public vindication, transfers for themselves or their units, and even politically attacked their commanding officers. In turn, governors such as Joseph E. Brown of Georgia and congressmen like Louis T. Wigfall of Texas often interfered in military affairs. While there is little direct evidence to suggest that Lee was drastically

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14 The Army of Northern Virginia was far from exempt from state-based controversy. James Longstreet in particular complained repeatedly of the scheming of the Virginians, claiming they reserved all important army positions for the Old Dominion’s officers. Many non-Virginians pointed out that, as of Gettysburg, two of the three corps commanders, five of the nine infantry division commanders, and the cavalry chief were all Virginians. While this resentment has been exaggerated by some historians, it influenced the behavior of some of Lee’s subordinates, especially Longstreet, who embraced the Southern ideal of individuality and remained suspicious of authority. See James Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1992), 332, and Jeffry D. Wert, General James Longstreet: The Confederacy’s Most Controversial Soldier: A Biography (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 249.
15 For an example, see O. R., I, XXVII, II, 645-646.
16 Brown resisted every effort Davis made towards centralized governance, withholding thousands of able-bodied Georgians in his State Guard and refusing to release them to Confederate authority, while
affected by fear of political reprisals for his command style, the states’ rights culture was far from conducive to staff supervision of subordinates’ battlefield actions.

Southern culture also contributed to Lee’s command lapses by encouraging overconfidence. Southern men saw themselves as rugged and capable, hardened by outdoors-based, physical lifestyles. By contrast, Southerners looked down upon Northern men as either physically “soft” due to their supposedly easier indoors-based culture, or as “hirelings” whose human mental flexibility and bodily health had been stunted from rote factory labor. Either way, Northern men were supposedly inferior soldiers compared to Southern men, whose cultural emphasis on horseback riding, shooting, and outdoor sports were better-suited to military pursuits. Due to this alleged innate superiority, Southern commanders and their soldiers were often dangerously overconfident. Superior soldiers did not require careful command and control to beat vastly overmatched adversaries.\(^{17}\)

As Stephen W. Sears points out, by the Gettysburg Campaign, this belief in innate Southern martial superiority had been reinforced by the Army of Northern Virginia’s astonishing series of battlefield successes.\(^{18}\) Between June 1862 and July 1863, Lee’s army had repeatedly engaged larger Union armies, and had never suffered a large-scale tactical defeat. Even when the odds were positively forbidding, as in the Battle of Chancellorsville (May 1-4, 1863), the Confederates had

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\(^{17}\) For the classic account of the Southern mindset and its effect on the war, see W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Random House, 1941).

triumphed.19 Lee himself had come to share the belief that his army was invincible, and that its men would “go anywhere and do anything if properly led.”20 To Lee, being “properly led” did not mean close staff supervision; it meant selecting the right subordinate generals for the task and letting them manage the tactical details of battle. Lee’s staff shared his beliefs, talking of the impending battle with supreme confidence.21 This attitude contributed to Lee’s lapses of command at critical points during the Battle of Gettysburg, and hence to Southern defeat.

On the whole, then, Lee’s personal staff seems to have been underutilized rather than incompetent. Historians have heretofore either largely ignored the staff or attacked its officers as inept. This thesis suggests that this evaluation needs to be reassessed. The staff needs to be examined in greater detail. Since J. D. Hittle and Russell Weigley declared Civil War staff work to be inept, historians have seemed reluctant to revisit the histories of staff officers.22 Lack of scholarly work on the subject has reinforced popular misconceptions about staff work being “boring,” or worse yet, “unimportant.” Historians need to recognize the critical role staff officers played in the Civil War. When they do, they will better understand why and how Civil War armies functioned as they did. In turn, this may lead to reappraisals of the generals, the armies, the common soldiers, and the battles.

When discussing Civil War staffs, historians must recognize that while mid-nineteenth-century staffs were simpler than their present-day counterparts, they were still complicated organizations. In particular, scholars should pay closer attention to the distinction between personal staff and general staff as they were defined during the Civil War, and then clearly indicate which group of officers and men they are examining. Much of the criticism directed at “Lee’s staff” focuses on the staff’s ability to maintain the army’s supplies, especially food, clothing, and ammunition, forgetting that such tasks were the responsibility of general staff officers.\(^{23}\) Few historians have been willing to criticize the personal staff officers by name, except for Robert Chilton; They simply state that the staff was “inadequate” without giving specific names or examples. For instance, even Douglas Southall Freeman asserted that Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall, and Charles Venable had all earned “well-deserved promotions” by the end of the war.\(^{24}\) Recognizing the distinction between personal and general staff officers would result in clearer and better-considered studies of the staff.

Studies on Confederate Army staffs are beginning to emerge. Robert E. K. Krick’s “The ‘Great Tycoon’ Forges a Staff System” has been accompanied by numerous other works. Richard L. DeNardo’s article, “Southern By the Grace of God But Prussian By Common Sense: General James Longstreet and the Exercise of

\(^{23}\) Examples of these criticisms are widespread, usually occurring whenever the “staff” is mentioned. General staff officers are beyond the scope of this thesis, but Bartholomees argues convincingly that these “department heads” also performed their tasks well under very trying circumstances; see Bartholomees, *Buff Facings*, 81-122.

Command in the U. S. Civil War,” provides analysis of Longstreet’s usage of his personal staff and comments on the need for further studies on other generals’ staffs. 25 Robert J. Trout’s They Followed the Plume and With Pen and Saber provide biographical information about J. E. B. Stuart’s personal staff. 26 J. Boone Bartholomees’ Buff Facings and Gilt Buttons will likely serve as the definitive work on the administrative aspect of staff work in the Army of Northern Virginia, but it focuses on overall army administration, not any particular general’s staff, and it contains few battlefield case studies. Considering the voluminous information written by staff officers, whether in their official capacity or after the war, further scholastic inquiries into Confederate staff work, particularly that of General Robert E. Lee’s personal staff, should prove quite fruitful. 27

Much still remains to be written about Confederate staffs and how their generals utilized them. For example, virtually nothing has been written about staff work in the Army of Tennessee, or in the far-flung Trans-Mississippi Department, where Edmund Kirby Smith was heavily reliant on very distant subordinates to keep him informed of developments in three states. A comparative study across Confederate armies would be very interesting. For example, one might contrast the

27 This material is being published at an astonishing rate. Taylor’s personal letters and Ezra Carman’s manuscript are the latest staff-related materials to be published, but new supplements to the Official Records are also being printed.
soft-spoken Robert E. Lee with the cantankerous Braxton Bragg, noting how their personality differences affected their staff usages. Lee could usually count on his subordinates at least attempting to obey his orders, but the heavily-despised Bragg could not. Additionally, historians could compare Lee’s staff usage with that of his opposite numbers who commanded the Union Army of the Potomac. The works of Stephen W. Sears, Edwin Coddington, and others contain many details about Union personal staffs at work, but they have not focused on them or compared them to their Confederate counterparts.

Overall, Robert E. Lee’s personal staff remains a misunderstood and little-researched part of Civil War historiography. Further studies on the staff would help scholars better comprehend both the staff members and the war as a whole. Such studies will likely both expunge the records of Lee’s staff and fill an important gap in the enormous literature on America’s bloodiest conflict.
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