The dissertation examines the role of the six main officers who served on General Robert E. Lee’s personal staff during the American Civil War. Historians have largely either ignored these men or dismissed them somewhat offhandedly as ill-trained incompetents who were more of a hindrance to General Lee than a help to him as he attempted to command and control the Army of Northern Virginia. The dissertation thus helps fill a gap in the voluminous historiography of the Civil War by examining a little-studied group of officers whose role was vital for the smooth and correct functioning of the Confederacy’s most important army, and assessing their aptitude in fulfilling their assigned duties. It utilizes both period and modern staff criteria for evaluating their performance, and in so doing contributes to scholarly knowledge both about the staff officers and General Lee himself.

In addition to answering these questions concerning military history, the dissertation analyzes the reasons why, as they wrote of the war years, Lee’s staff consciously subverted their own roles and sometimes literally disappeared in the shadow of their former commander. In articles, memoirs, and speeches, Lee’s former staff officers seldom mentioned themselves; they instead commented at length on Lee, in the most extreme cases implying that Lee wrote their postwar works. The dissertation answers why these former staff officers sacrificed their own reputations for Lee, and in the process analyzes the emergence of the Lee cult and its accompanying Lost Cause tradition in the 1870s.
The dissertation begins with a brief outline of Lee’s own staff service in the Mexican-American War as a means to assess what he experienced as a staff officer and what he could reasonably have expected his staff to do in the Civil War. It also succinctly surveys the prewar backgrounds of Lee’s six principal personal staff officers, noting their socioeconomic positions within antebellum southern society. The project then proceeds chronologically through the Civil War, analyzing how Lee used his personal staff to command and control his army, and thus assesses the staff’s effectiveness in battle. In order to demonstrate how Lee’s staff subordinated their own reputations for that of their former chief, it is necessary to show that they were not the inept bunglers they have often been depicted or dismissed as.

The project follows Lee’s former staff officers into their postbellum careers as they helped formulate the Virginia-dominated Lost Cause legend. It examines their roles in Jubal Early’s Southern Historical Society, and complements Caroline E. Janney’s work on the Ladies’ Memorial Associations by demonstrating the gendered struggle over who would be the guardians of Confederate memory. It also examines the gradual emergence of the myth itself, and take special note of instances in which the staff was highly praised in wartime reports, but largely vanishes in postwar recollections of the same events.

In the end, the dissertation argues that General Lee’s personal staff was not as inept as it is usually depicted. Lee’s staff officers were largely untrained, but they usually did their jobs well. It also shows how these men and their former comrades consciously downgraded their roles in order to construct the cult of Robert E. Lee as an infallible commander whose defeat resulted from enemy material superiority and the failures of his own officers. Thus, the project answers questions about General Lee and his army in wartime as well as the creation and development of the Lost Cause tradition and its effect on Civil War memory.
SACRIFICING FOR THE LOST CAUSE:  
GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE’S PERSONAL STAFF

A dissertation submitted

to Kent State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Introduction: Rescuing the Staff from Obscurity and Infamy

Despite the voluminous writings on the American Civil War, there has been very little written about staff officers, especially in the Confederate army.\(^1\) This omission is highly unfortunate. Civil War staff officers were the vital link that connected the commanding generals to their subordinates and ultimately to the men in the ranks. Staffers did the vital paperwork that kept the armies in the field and as well-supplied as they were, and they assisted their generals with commanding and controlling their armies in the field and on the battlefield by transmitting orders and supervising their execution. No general could function adequately without staff officers, but their vital work is too often passed over or simply dismissed as tedious bureaucratic pencil-pushing duties.\(^2\) Nothing could be further from the truth; staff officers often risked their lives and were wounded and killed assisting their generals, and their voluminous paperwork was necessary to keep the front-line men supplied enough to keep fighting. When Confederate staff officers are mentioned, writers have usually cited the chronic shortages of men and material in the Confederate army and implied that because they failed to keep the southern armies adequately fed, all Confederate staffers were incompetent.

The personal staff of General Robert E. Lee is no exception to this trend. While General Lee has been the subject of a four-volume biography by Douglas Southall Freeman and single-volume biographical works by Emory M. Thomas, Elizabeth Brown Pryor, and others, there have been no secondary works at all which center on the commanding general’s staff officers. To date, there have only been three monographs on Confederate Army staffs: Robert J. Trout’s *They Followed the Plume: The Story of J. E. B. Stuart and His Staff*, J. Boone Bartholomees’ *Buff Facings and Gilt Buttons: Staff and Headquarters Operations in the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865*, and Robert K. Krick’s *Staff Officers in Gray: A Biographical Register of*
To date, Trout’s book is the only secondary work that deals with an individual Confederate general’s staff. Both of the other works examine staffers throughout the army, and neither focuses on Lee’s staff. Bartholomees’ work is based entirely on published primary sources and Carlisle Barracks archival materials; it explains the basic definitions and functions of Confederate staff officers and explicitly labels itself as an introduction whose topic awaits further scholarly and archival analysis. Krick’s book is a reference work of sketchy biographical entries on all Army of Northern Virginia staff officers, and offers no details concerning their lives or duties at all. Thus, despite some interest from scholars in the last ten years, a historiographical gap remains.

Part of the reason for the omission of Lee’s staff from the literature stems from confusion over the terms “general staff” and “personal staff.” “General staff” officers performed the duties typically associated with army staffs; they served in bureaucracies, such as the Ordinance Department, the Quartermaster Department, the Commissary Department and the Medical Department, and spent most of their time dealing with logistical matters and handling copious amounts of paperwork. They were technically responsible to their respective bureau chiefs in Richmond, and were not attached to the general officers under whom they served. The Army of Northern Virginia’s chief ordinance officer was thus assigned not to Joseph E. Johnston or to Lee when he replaced Johnston, but to the army itself, and therefore was not reassigned when the army had a new commander. While these officers were used to carry messages in the heat of battle, they almost always had no personal connection with their commanding generals and did not directly assist them in the everyday control over their units. Because most Confederate supply services were notoriously poor, much of the criticism directed at “Lee’s staff” has been
actually based on logistical matters, claiming that the whole staff was not performing adequately when in fact only the general staff, not Lee’s personal staff, directly dealt with supply shortages.

In contrast to general staff officers, members of a general’s personal staff were attached specifically to that commanding general. If he were reassigned, promoted, transferred, or relieved, his staff accompanied him. If he were wounded or killed, his staff officers were often expected to accompany him in his recovery even if doing so took them out of the army for a period. After escorting the bodies of dead generals to their homes, these staff officers either found work with another general or lost their commissions. These officers were thus usually selected by the generals whom they served, and too often were personal friends and family members whose military skills were severely lacking. The Confederate army lacked a precise definition of how many officers could be on a general’s personal staff, or even if some staff officers such as chiefs-of-staff and assistant adjutant-generals should be considered as personal or general staff officers, but aides-de-camp and military secretaries were always regarded as personal staff officers. These officers were charged with assisting their commanders with maintaining command and control over their units, and dealing such army paperwork such as personnel reports and official operations reports during the periods between battles. These men thus worked continually in close proximity to their generals, and were expected to demonstrate great loyalty to them. These officers were empowered by theory and practice to give orders in the name of their commanders, even to subordinate generals who outranked them. Much of the attention given to Lee’s staff has focused on the general staff, but the personal staff officers were actually far more significant to Lee himself and to his control over his army.

European authors had devoted more attention to staff functions than Americans had. In particular, Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini’s writings emphasized the necessity for trained
personal staff officers to assist their commanders in maintaining command and control over widely dispersed units. After extensive study of the campaigns of Frederick the Great and Napoleon, Jomini published his *Precis de l’Art de Guerre* in 1838. By 1861, Jomini had been translated into English, and his book was widely read by Civil War officers.

Jomini placed a heavy emphasis on the proper formation and usage of military staffs, likening the staff’s job to the army commander’s. Jomini wrote of the usage of personal and general staffs to communicate and supervise the execution of orders as an accomplished fact, writing of it as though every army in the Western world was using personal staff officers this way and no further discussion on this point was necessary. According to Jomini, this included everything from coordinating the marching routes of an army’s units and arranging for their supplies, to issuing orders and notifying subordinates of their objectives, to collecting military intelligence. Staff officers were to assist their generals with virtually every aspect of both administration and command, relieving them of minutiae so they could focus on the larger strategic matters of their campaigns. As Jomini concluded,

> This truth I announced some time ago; and it is for the very purpose of permitting the general-in-chief to give his whole attention to the supreme direction of the operations that he ought to be provided with staff officers competent to relieve him of the details of execution. Their functions are therefore necessarily very intimately connected; and woe to an army where these authorities cease to act in concert!

Jomini thus sketched out the basic functions and the role of the staff as commonly understood in the nineteenth century and stressed that they might determine the success of entire armies.

To fill such important positions, Jomini insisted that staff officers should be chosen very carefully. The chief of staff should be “a man of high ability, of open and faithful character” who could be trusted to act capably to help carry out the commanding general’s orders. Staff officers should perform much of the work to maintain the army’s command structure, and should
ideally be competent to assume command of a corps or even of the army should the need arise. If a staff was good enough, its officers could even compensate for an incompetent general.\textsuperscript{10} While Jomini thus placed heavy emphasis on selecting the right men for a general’s staff, he also insisted that the general himself should have limited input into the choice to better ensure proper harmony.\textsuperscript{11} Federal and later Confederate generals followed these practices, selecting their own personal staff officers and as a result often having dozens of men in their “military families.”

In contrast to other generals’ staffs, which were notoriously large in number, only six men served as Lee’s principal staff officers: Robert Hall Chilton, Walter Herron Taylor, Charles Marshall, Armistead Lindsay Long, Charles Scott Venable, and Thomas Manning Randolph Talcott. These men came from varied backgrounds. Three of them had significant antebellum military experience; Chilton and Long were West Point graduates, while Taylor had studied roughly one year at the Virginia Military Institute but had been forced to withdraw in order to support his large family of siblings after his father’s death. Marshall had been a lawyer in Baltimore, while Venable was a mathematician and academic of some repute. Talcott had followed in his father’s footsteps as an engineer, although he had not attended West Point like his father had. All of these men qualified as part of the southern middle class, and all had at least some education, but they had few other common attributes. Chilton, Long, and Venable were older than the others, as Marshall was thirty-two, and Taylor and Talcott were only twenty-two.

Contrary to some writings, Lee did not fill his personal staff with friends and family, as many other generals did. Lee knew only two of these six men before the war. He was a good friend of Chilton and his wife, and spent a lot of his time in Texas with them; they later named their first child after him. While Thomas M. R. Talcott had never served in the antebellum army, his father, Andrew Talcott, had been Lee’s first commanding officer as a young engineer in the
1830s and had been a very close friend of the future Confederate general. Taylor explicitly recorded that he never met Lee until May 1861 after Lee took command of Virginia’s state forces, while Long stated that he did not meet Lee until he and future general William Wing Loring stood in Lee’s Richmond office in 1861 to report for their assignment; Loring was sent to Western Virginia, with Long as his chief of artillery. There is no evidence that Lee knew Marshall or Venable before they were assigned to him. Although Chilton was appointed Lee’s chief of staff when he assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee did not specifically ask for his friend, only for a “chief of staff.” At least twice during the war, Lee denied his sons a place on his staff; when his eldest son, George W. C. Lee, expressed his desire to join his father’s “military family,” Lee refused, citing his son’s lack of field experience and the importance of his current position on the staff of President Jefferson Davis. Lee also refused his wife’s request that he take his youngest son, Robert E. Lee, Jr. onto his staff.12

Of these six men, only three served on Lee’s staff for the duration. By the end of April 1864, Chilton, Long, and Talcott had left for other assignments, leaving only Taylor, Marshall, and Venable. Although Lee used other officers like Henry McClellan and Giles B. Cooke temporarily on his staff, this diminished group remained the core until Appomattox. This tiny size of Lee’s staff has been another source of controversy, as Freeman and others have argued convincingly that the staff was simply too small. Conceding this point, however, does not require admission that the remaining staff officers themselves were incompetent.

The limited writings concerning Lee’s staff have not been complimentary. Douglas Southall Freeman personally knew four of Lee’s surviving staff officers or their descendants, and he cited either conversations with them or the papers their families provided as sources for his works with his “warmest thanks.”13 Despite this relationship, Freeman was harshly critical of
Lee’s staff; while he seldom directly criticized individual staff officers, Freeman repeatedly described the entire personal staff in highly unflattering language and gave the impression that Lee had achieved his remarkable successes in spite of his staff, not with their help. He asserted later in his famous biography of Lee that the general “never had an adequate personal staff.” While Freeman declared that the staff gave Lee “devoted” service and stated that much of its inadequacy came from its small size, he left the impression that the staffers’ performance was inept. Freeman’s writings have been highly influential on later historians.14

In a series of lectures at the United States Army War College in the late 1930s, Freeman employed even harsher language. In his first lecture, Freeman described Lee’s “military family” as a “staff organization of incompetents.” He did not relent in his subsequent addresses, using the words “wretched,” “clumsy,” “defective,” “incompetent,” and “inexperienced” to assess the staff, and declaring that Lee enjoyed success despite its members’ ineptitude.15 In 1938, Freeman argued that future U. S. Army leaders needed to “study the methods by which General Lee was able to maintain morale and operate and administer the army in spite of the inadequacy of his staff.”16 Freeman even committed a rare direct factual error when, emphasizing the incomplete training of Lee’s staff, he claimed that “General Lee was never privileged, at any time during his command of the Army of Northern Virginia, to have on his staff more than one West Point officer; and that West Point officer, who incidentally had been a paymaster before the war, was not a man who gave himself with special cooperative spirit to his duties.”17

Claiming to speak with authority on the subject since he had known three of Lee’s staff officers or their immediate descendants, Freeman declared that Lee’s staff did not love him while the war still raged because he demanded so much from them:

General Lee was not popular with his own staff…The heirs of one of his staff officers possess letters in which General Lee is several times condemned vigorously by the staff officer…What was the reason? He
was a little disposed to be indolent, and laziness General Lee would never countenance. He demanded more of his staff officers than he did of his line officers. He demanded that his staff officers give themselves as fully to the service as he did.\textsuperscript{18}

Elsewhere, he claimed that “it was only when the war was over that they got over these little things and had for him the admiration and affection that they later cherished. They admired him as a magnificent man, but they did not love him.”\textsuperscript{19} Freeman simply dismissed the staff officers’ complaints as the common grumblings of staffers everywhere who were too focused on their workloads and problems to see the greater purpose for which they were laboring.\textsuperscript{20} Freeman thus simultaneously praised Lee’s tireless devotion to duty and gave the impression that his staff officers simply failed to measure up to or fully appreciate their commander’s greatness.

When they mentioned Lee’s staff at all, later scholars largely followed Freeman’s lead, dismissing it as utterly inept or emphasizing its small size and lack of antebellum professional military training or experience. Many of them inferred that the staff was terrible when Lee took command, and that it remained as poor in 1865 as it had been in June 1862. Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones wrote of Lee’s staff in scathing terms, arguing that “In part they failed because they had an inadequate chief…Colonel R. H. Chilton, a comrade of Lee’s Texas days in the old army, but a misfit in his present position, served as Lee’s chief of staff.”\textsuperscript{21} Hattaway and Jones thus advanced Freeman’s criticism of the staff even farther. Freeman never claimed that Lee’s staff officers did not “appreciate” the nature of their jobs; he had only stated that they had not been adequately trained. Furthermore, Hattaway and Jones flatly accused Lee’s personal staff of deserting their posts, while Freeman had made no such contention. Finally, while these writers agreed with Freeman that Chilton was not suited to his responsibilities, they led readers to believe that all of Lee’s personal staff officers were similarly inept.

Most recent scholars have not been as condemning as Hattaway and Jones. They have still been highly critical, however, and in large part, they have not examined Lee’s staff after its
apparent failure in the Seven Days Campaign of June 1862, Lee’s first as commander of the
Army of Northern Virginia. Emory M. Thomas, in his biography of Lee, never discussed the
general’s staff in detail, he briefly described it as “small” and implied that it was inadequate to its
duties; he asserted that Lee never expanded or “reformed” his personal staff after the Seven Days
because Lee believed the war would not last long enough for this to be necessary or practical. 22
Similarly, James I. Robertson, Jr. wrote that “the lack of a competent general staff left Lee out of
touch with the pieces” of his army during the Seven Days operations. 23 Joseph T. Glatthaar’s
book surveyed the entire history of the Army of Northern Virginia, but it barely mentioned Lee’s
staff after noting its “lack of effective support and poor staff work” during the Seven Days. 24
Finally, Gary Gallagher recorded that “Lee had attempted to execute complicated plans with
inadequate staff support” during the Seven Days and never mentioned Lee’s staff again. 25

Opinions have been divided among the few historians who have examined Lee’s personal
staff after the Seven Days. Richard DiNardo, one of the few writers to explicitly examine a
Confederate general’s staff, argued at length that Lee’s method of choosing staff officers was
inferior to James Longstreet’s. He insinuated that Lee chose family members and personal
friends in contrast to Longstreet, whom DiNardo applauded for his “trial and error” method of
finding effective staff officers. DiNardo claimed that Lee was unwilling to delegate important
responsibilities to his personal staff, while Longstreet used his staff as independent professionals
who could be entrusted with issuing orders and commanding troops in their own right. Thus,
DiNardo agreed with J. F. C. Fuller and T. Harry Williams, who did not examine Lee’s staff
officers in detail, but asserted that Lee’s staff methods were “premodern.” 26

While his book did not focus on any particular general’s staff, Bartholomees was largely
noncommittal about the quality of Lee’s staff officers. He pointed out that while Lee did possess
a small staff, postwar members and observers of it like Walter Taylor exaggerated its smallness to enhance the legend of Lee’s greatness; they implied that Lee had achieved his great victories with practically no one to help him maintain and command his army. Bartholomewes disagreed with Freeman and Thomas, insisting that Lee’s personal staff was adequately sized to operate his loose “hands-off” style of command. Bartholomewes was less strident in his defense of Lee’s staff than he was of the Army of Northern Virginia staffs as a whole, stating that “in accordance with basic staff theory, the commander will always be key to how his staff behaves and what they do. If a staff performed poorly, the commander deserves the blame unless he asked for more and the staff did not deliver. Lee never asked his staff for more.” Thus, Bartholomewes disputed Freeman’s contention that Lee placed particularly heavy demands on his staff, and was somewhat implicitly in accord with his views on the staff officers’ competence.

Even as it challenged many long-held assumptions about Lee himself, Elizabeth Brown Pryor’s Reading the Man questioned the traditional historiographical evaluation of his personal staff. She praised Lee for his selection of staff officers, stating that “within days of beginning his service in 1861, he made it clear that his staff would be small and professional,” but admitted that “the personal staff he created was a cozy Virginia clique.” She addressed the commonly-raised issue of the limited number of Lee’s personal staff officers by admitting that “Lee has been criticized for underdeveloping his staff, and indeed he never gave it priority.” In this, Pryor claimed that Lee simply followed Winfield Scott’s Mexican-American War example.

Pryor depicted Lee as a deeply flawed administrator whose fierce temper and unrealistic expectations rendered his staff officers less effective than they should have been. She asserted that Lee’s staff officers were overworked and lived in squalor as a result of their commander’s
reluctance to locate his headquarters in civilian buildings. In contrast to Freeman, Pryor depicted Lee as an often-unreasonable taskmaster:

In addition to overwork and bleak surroundings, the staff suffered Lee’s difficult temperament, with some audible sighs. He was quick to censure and slow to praise or recommend his team for promotion, causing several aides to cast around for better opportunities. Lee’s indifference to staff recognition was not quite as pronounced as they maintained, but their feeling of undervaluation is revealing. He also had difficulty in accepting personal blame and sometimes rebuked aides for his shortcomings…An uninitiated staff member found that everyone around the general was afraid of him, and though the newcomer had known Lee before the war, he soon felt the same way. Some of it was Lee’s unpredictable temper…but it was also the way Lee constantly tested the men against his impossible standards and ridiculed them on sensitive points, joking not with them, but at their expense.  

In this work, Lee’s staff emerged as the victims of their chief, who quashed most individual initiative and did not let them use their professional qualities to their fullest. Lee’s staff officers sometimes failed to assist him with command and control as they should have, but like Bartolomees, Pryor stated that this was Lee’s failing, not necessarily that of the staff officers. Most recently, D. Scott Hartwick has examined Lee’s personal staff as part of his larger study on the Maryland Campaign of 1862 and the opposing armies that participated in it. His evaluation of Lee’s personal staff was mostly negative. He claimed that “since the best officers were needed to command combat units, none of Lee’s personal staff were gifted leaders or possessed charismatic, powerful personalities,” thus directly stating that the staff officers were less qualified and able than the average officers in the Army of Northern Virginia. Echoing many other writers before him, Hartwick concluded that “an overall assessment of Lee’s personal and general staff on the eve of the Maryland Campaign is that they were generally competent, but there were not enough of them.”

Somewhat awkwardly, though, Hartwick praised Lee’s individual personal staff officers. While he acknowledged Chilton’s shortcomings, he noted Long’s extensive experience and expertise with artillery. He called Talcott a “capable soldier,” and described Taylor, Marshall,
and Venable as “capable, bright, energetic men.” He emphasized that Taylor was a tireless worker, and that both Marshall and Venable were well-educated men of some repute in legal and academic circles, respectively. This apparent contradiction involved in describing individual staff members as competent while denouncing them collectively as inept dated back to Freeman, and it does not hold up to close scholarly scrutiny. It does, however, demonstrate the effect of the “Lee Legend” that holds the general as a nearly infallible leader who overcame an inept staff.

The emergence of the “Lee Legend” contributed greatly to the staff’s historical obscurity. After the Civil War, former Confederates, especially Virginians, sought explanations for their defeat. Lee had been a great general whose victories had inspired considerable loyalty from his men, but he then became a larger-than-life figure whose moral character was unimpeachable, whose decisions were nearly always perfect, and whose judgment was well-nigh infallible. Despite these apparent saintly qualities, Lee still lost the war; such former Confederates insisted that the only way such a man could have lost while fighting for an allegedly righteous cause was that he faced “overwhelming numbers and resources.” Additionally, many former Confederates argued that because some battles had been lost through southern errors, these errors could not have been Lee’s. Blaming ordinary soldiers was usually considered ungracious to the memory of the fallen and to the emerging “Lost Cause,” so many ex-Confederate writers asserted that Lee’s subordinate officers had failed him at crucial points. The “Lost Cause,” with a legendary Lee as its central and infallible patron saint, thus emerged through the 1870s and afterward through the writings of Jubal A. Early and other Virginians who dominated postwar memory.

Lee’s staff actively contributed to their own disappearance from the historical record by helping to create the “Lee Legend.” In the introductions to their books, Walter Taylor and Armistead Long each stated that they wrote their books to help shed light on Lee’s career, not
their own; Long even titled his account of the conflict *The Memoirs of Robert E. Lee* as though Lee himself had survived to write it, and Taylor scarcely mentioned himself at all in his first book, revealingly titled *Four Years with General Lee*. Four of Lee’s former personal staff officers, Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall, Charles Venable, and Thomas M. R. Talcott, were active in Early’s Association of the Army of Northern Virginia, and Taylor, Long, and Talcott contributed to his *Southern Historical Society Papers*, which actively promoted the “Lee Legend.” In the *Papers*, Lee’s former staffers fiercely defended their chief’s record and focused their writings on his accomplishments, serving as de facto experts and arbitrators for determining the truth about disputed points concerning Lee. In the twentieth century, Lee’s staff continued to eulogize their former commander while downplaying their own exploits; while Taylor’s second book, *General Lee: His Campaigns in Virginia, 1861-1865, With Personal Reminiscences*, contained a more thorough account of Taylor’s deeds, it kept its focus on Lee. Likewise, although Marshall never finished his memoirs, Sir Frederick Maurice edited and published Marshall’s manuscript after his death in the fittingly-titled *An Aide-de-Camp of Lee.*

To date, most of the existing historiography of the Lost Cause tradition has scarcely mentioned Lee’s former staff officers. When they are referenced, most writers have inferred that their views automatically reflected Jubal Early’s. Although he included a detailed summary of the Battles and Leaders series and Confederate Veteran magazine, Rollin G. Osterweis did not mention the *Southern Historical Society Papers* or Lee’s staff at all. Thomas Connelly and Barbara Bellows listed Marshall and Taylor as part of “an enthusiastic cult of followers in Virginia…devoted to enhancing the reputation of Robert E. Lee.” While they admitted that Taylor and Marshall disagreed with at least part of Early’s efforts to vilify Longstreet for the defeat at Gettysburg, they did not explore this dissent in any detail. Gaines M. Foster similarly
discussed Jubal Early’s efforts in significant depth, but referred to Charles Marshall only once in his main text, and did not mention any of the others by name except in footnotes, stressing that although they may have been reluctant to join the attacks on Longstreet, they eventually did.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, most historians have portrayed Lee’s former staff members as little more than pawns in Early’s efforts to deify Lee and create the Virginia-centric Lost Cause tradition.

In his solo work, \textit{The Marble Man}, Connelly offered extensive details about the activities of Lee’s former staff officers in creating their former general’s image. He depicted them as accomplices of Early, writing that “The dominant military figure of the Lee cult was Jubal Early,” adding that “his chief colleagues were four members of the General’s wartime staff—Colonels Charles Marshall, Walter Taylor, A. L. Long, and Charles Venable.”\textsuperscript{38} Connelly described these officers as “a closely knit cadre of young men who were in daily contact with Lee,” summarizing them as “young, impressionable men, most of them with literary talent, placed in close proximity to a man whom they came to love fiercely.”\textsuperscript{39} He claimed that Lee’s staff helped Early create Lee’s image by destroying the reputations of other former Confederates, most notably James Longstreet. Unfortunately, he concluded, their efforts succeeded; in the white southern mind, Longstreet became the traitor whose failures had doomed the Confederacy.

William Garrett Piston continued Connelly’s criticisms of Lee and defense of Longstreet. Piston briefly analyzed Longstreet’s war record, agreeing with DiNardo that Longstreet’s staff was better-chosen and more competent than Lee’s, describing it as “much more of a cross-section of the Confederacy” than Lee’s all-Virginian staff, and asserting that “Longstreet’s staff has been described as the finest in the Confederacy.”\textsuperscript{40} While Piston repeatedly depicted Taylor, Long, Marshall, and Venable as members of the “anti-Longstreet faction,” he admitted that unlike Jubal Early, John Jones, and William N. Pendleton, Lee’s former staff officers were not
inaugural members of the postbellum movement against his former ranking subordinate. While Lee’s former staff members certainly did not sympathize with Longstreet’s Republican politics, they only joined the cadre of anti-Longstreet writers because they were outraged over his foolish assumption of much of the credit for Lee’s triumphs. In fact, Piston recorded that Lee’s former staff officers initially sided with Longstreet against Early’s and Pendleton’s charges over his conduct at Gettysburg. Only after Longstreet began publically assaultsing Lee’s record to bolster his own did Lee’s former staffers turn against him. As Piston admitted, “Longstreet seemed to be setting himself up as the brains behind Lee, taking credit for Lee’s victories…in the wake of Longstreet’s apparent egotism they [the staffers] enthusiastically joined Early’s campaign to vilify Longstreet.” Piston then summarized Taylor’s, Long’s, Venable’s, and Marshall’s writings as works intended to create the Lee Legend by destroying Longstreet’s reputation.

While Piston’s analysis raised several intriguing questions about the role of Lee’s former staff officers in creating the Lee Legend, more work remains to be done in analyzing their specific contributions. Firstly, as Piston admitted, Lee’s former staff officers only joined Early’s movement when Longstreet made misleading claims of his own; this strongly suggests that they did not simply follow Early and Pendleton. Secondly, while Taylor and the others often critiqued Longstreet’s actions at Gettysburg, they never accused him of being a traitor to the Confederate cause. Finally, despite Piston’s claims that Marshall and Venable were “enthusiastic” members of the “anti-Longstreet faction,” Venable published nothing about Gettysburg or Longstreet’s role in the Confederate defeat there, and Marshall’s book spent almost twenty pages placing the entire blame for the battle and its results not on Longstreet, but on cavalry chief J. E. B. Stuart.
This work argues that Lee’s staff officers were not so much “anti-Longstreet” as they were “pro-Lee.” As Piston admitted, to the founders of the Lee Legend, no one’s reputation mattered except Lee’s himself. He stated that Early and Pendleton started the movement in large part to obscure their own mixed wartime records, but he never analyzed the performance of Lee’s staff. The staffers clearly held opinions that did not always coincide with those of Early, Jones, and Pendleton, and while they despised Longstreet’s postwar politics, they were far more interested in focusing attention upon Lee and lifting him up than in directly attacking Longstreet.

This work is not a sextuple biography of Lee’s staff officers or a narrative record of the already well-documented events of the American Civil War. It is instead an analysis of the role that these six men played during the war and of their parts in shaping public memory of that conflict. Chapter 1 will utilize archival sources, including letters and school records, to provide an overview of the antebellum lives of the six personal staff officers, demonstrating that they possessed ample qualifications for their positions even though most of them lacked formal military training. Chapters 2-9 of this project will then examine the performance of the staff officers in several of Lee’s most important battles using both published and unpublished primary source materials, ranging from letters to official records to the army’s order and telegraph books, to scholarly monographs. This work will proceed chronologically through the war. It will not provide detailed accounts of the army or its battles, but rather explain and analyze how Lee’s staff officers refined their preexisting talents using their battlefield experience to become even more capable at their jobs. It will demonstrate that while Chilton was out of his depth as chief of staff, the other five members of Lee’s personal staff served their chief well both in maintaining daily administration over the army and helping him to control it.
After a discussion of Lee’s staff officers’ wartime service, in Chapters 12 and 13 this project will continue its chronological narrative into the postbellum years. It will utilize archival primary sources to reconstruct the never-before-examined private lives of Lee’s former staff officers. It will then utilize the staffers’ published recollections of the war both in periodicals and memoirs to demonstrate how they simultaneously resisted blindly following Jubal Early’s dictates and created an image of a nearly-infallible, but still human, Robert E. Lee. Proceeding chronologically, this study will demonstrate that in the immediate postwar years, Lee’s former staffers were far more concerned about personal economic survival than about affixing blame for Confederate defeat. It will show that the staffers’ ample talents served them well; most of them achieved professional and financial success, and had no need to hide their wartime or postwar records behind Lee or anyone else.

This is a work of military and social history. By examining the personal staff of Robert E. Lee, it sheds light on a previously little-studied and chronically-misunderstood group of officers whose contributions were vital to the successes of the Confederacy’s most famous army. It questions previously-held assumptions about the nature of Confederate staff work and reveals the considerable abilities of Lee’s “military family.” At the same time, it also demonstrates how some middle-class Confederate officers contributed to the military fortunes of the Confederacy and consoled themselves after its ultimate defeat. It shows that public memory of key events, however pervasive it may be, is seldom if ever monolithic. This study thus calls into question the extent of Jubal Early’s control over the “Lost Cause” narrative and reveals that there was no single “Virginia” interpretation of James Longstreet, Gettysburg, or Lee.

Accordingly, this project argues that General Robert E. Lee’s personal staff officers were very capable and performed their tasks accordingly. Their services allowed Lee to maintain his
army between his battles. Once battle was joined, they led units into their assigned places and kept Lee fully informed of faraway developments that were often crucial to his army’s survival. Far from being incompetents who never developed their skills as the war progressed, Lee’s staffers became so proficient in their duties that even as the staff shrank to an even smaller size, its remaining members continued to effectively coordinate the army.

This work concludes that although most of Lee’s former staff officers possessed enviable wartime records, they deliberately chose to obscure themselves after the war to help create an idealized image of Lee as a man who was only defeated because he faced overwhelming odds and because his subordinates failed him. If these unsuccessful “subordinates” included the staff, then so be it. Lee’s staffers were mostly successful both during and after the war, but they cared little for their own wartime records. They were not willing to destroy the images of other former Confederates to create a mythological Lee, but they firmly believed in lifting up the memory of all Confederate soldiers. For the staffers, exalting their former commander ennobled them all.

This willingness of Lee’s former staff officers to sacrifice their own reputations to help memorialize him demonstrates the power of memory in southern recollections of the Civil War. It demonstrates the lengths that many Virginians were willing to go to in order to create and maintain the image of Robert E. Lee as a saintly Christian warrior who fought to defend a worthy “Lost Cause.” It also calls for a reappraisal of many prevailing views about the role of staff officers both during and after the war. Lee’s staff played a vital role in helping him to win several victories and stave off eventual defeat, and they also had a crucial part in creating and maintaining his image.
Chapter 1: Selecting the Right Men for the Job

Robert E. Lee, having served in Winfield Scott’s “military cabinet” in Mexico, fully appreciated the importance of choosing the best men for his personal staff. He based his selections on the officers’ demonstrated abilities, not on family loyalty, state pride, political connections, or personal friendship. It is true that Lee chose relatively few men to serve on his personal staff, and often seemingly used them sparingly to correct his generals on the battlefield, but Lee was acutely aware of conditions on a nineteenth-century battlefield and repeatedly praised his staff officers’ performance. Lee enumerated the jobs he expected his staff members to do, he chose the right men for these tasks, and he complemented them on duty well done. They were an effective, intelligent, capable group of men who ably assisted their general in maintaining and commanding the Army of Northern Virginia.

This chapter will reveal that Lee had a very specific set of criteria for selecting his staff officers. In contrast to many other Confederate generals, Lee had high expectations for those wishing to serve on his personal staff. Contrary to Douglas Southall Freeman’s assertion, Lee fully appreciated the importance of trained staff officers, and lamented the Confederacy’s lack of a specialized staff school to train them. Nevertheless, Lee did not simply “settle” for any young officer who desired to serve on his staff, but weighed his choices carefully and chose men with intelligence and some antebellum military experience.

Utilizing archival primary sources, this chapter will briefly survey the antebellum backgrounds of Lee’s six personal staff officers. This examination will show that three of them possessed some military training, another had engineering experience, and that the other two were demonstrably capable professionals. These men had been successful at their chosen vocations and demonstrated aptitude in administrative matters. With the exception of Robert H.
Chilton and possibly Thomas M. R. Talcott, none of them had known Lee before the war. As their testimony reveals, these men knew what their jobs were, and they performed them to the best of their abilities. They were not the totally unprepared amateurs or undistinguished men often described by historians, but a carefully selected “military family” of talented soldiers.

Finally, this chapter will use Lee’s own words both to describe his own assessment of his staff’s wartime performance, and to demonstrate why he still did not use them extensively to monitor his subordinates for the first three years of the Civil War. Although Lee had very high standards, his staff, with the exception of Chilton, satisfied his expectations. He wrote of them expressing his indebtedness to them for their battlefield services. He recommended them for promotions and singled out at least two of them by name for glowing reviews. Despite this, Lee was too used to seeing battlefields on his own to employ them fully as military theory prescribed; he placed a high premium on firsthand knowledge of the battlefield, and thus felt the need to observe far-flung parts of the fields himself instead of using his staff as much as he could have. If Lee could not personally observe the movements and fighting of his army, he usually left battlefield decisions in the hands of trusted subordinate generals who knew far more about conditions in their immediate front than he could hope to. In situations in which he was issuing orders to less-reliable generals, Lee was far more willing to use his staff officers to supervise the execution of his orders. Thus, as the war progressed, Lee’s use of his personal staff adhered more closely to prevailing military theory. His staff, however, was composed of mostly competent and devoted men.³

Lee’s own words and actions belie the idea that he did little or nothing once the fighting began, or that he left his battles entirely to others.⁴ He also had a definite purpose for his staff officers, and expected that they would help him to maintain order and discipline within his army.
He acknowledged that Civil War armies were far larger than the force Winfield Scott had led to victory in Mexico, and that, as a consequence, army and unit commanders in this war were even more reliant on their staff officers to maintain control over their men. He also recognized the utter lack of training for staff work throughout the armies of the Confederacy, proclaiming that “the greatest difficulty I find is in causing orders…to be obeyed.” In a dispatch to President Davis commenting on a proposed Confederate Senate bill to organize a general staff for the entire army, Lee expressed his views bluntly, explaining that “We therefore have need of a corps of officers to teach others their duty, see to the observances of orders, & to the regularity & precision of all movements.”\(^5\) He clearly argued that the purpose of a general’s staff was to ensure that his wishes were carried out by his subordinates.

Contrary to Freeman’s allegation, Lee selected his own staff based on a careful set of criteria. In keeping with the underdeveloped state of United States Army staffs, there were no uniform criteria prescribed throughout the new Confederate Army for the size or selection of personal staff officers.\(^6\) As a result, Confederate generals employed wildly differing methods for selecting their personal staff officers. Throughout the war, Lee resisted the temptation to appoint staff officers for personal reasons and bemoaned those who did. Writing to President Davis about filling staff positions, Lee argued, “If you can then fill these positions with proper officers, not the relatives & social friends of the commds- who however agreeable their Compy are not always the most useful you might hope to have the finest army in the world.”\(^7\) Lee practiced what he preached on staff appointments. In a letter to one of his friends, he simultaneously explained both his refusal to appoint a certain youth to his staff and described his own criteria for selecting staff officers, stating that “It is necessary that persons on my staff should have a knowledge of their duties and an experience of the wants of the service to enable me to attend to
other matters. It would otherwise give me great pleasure to take your nephew. I shall remember him if anything can be done.”

Lee thus sought men with some experience in military matters for his staff, because he wished his staff members to be sufficiently competent in their duties that he could trust them to do their jobs without his direct supervision. His statement also directly contradicted Freeman’s assertion that Lee “did not realize how vast was the difference between trained and untrained staff officers.”

In fact, Lee decried the scarcity of men with prewar military training, claiming that he could not find such men to fill his staff. In a letter to his eldest son, George Washington Custis, he expounded on this problem at length:

I have two officers of the old service as my aids now, but may have to part with them as soon as I can do better for them. I suppose it is vain to expect to keep an instructed officer, there is such demand for their services with troops. I have wished to get one of our young relatives with me if I could find one who can be of service….Who can you recommend to me? I have had numerous applications for the post of aid from citizens, but do not want a revenue around me who seek nominal duty or an excuse to get off of real service elsewhere. I have a great deal of work to do & want men able & willing to do it.

Lee thus described his strict standards for allowing young men to serve on his personal staff, and while he was not averse to appointing family members, even those potential candidates had to be capable of performing competent military service and should not expect an easy assignment. Similarly, two months later, Lee wrote his wife declining to accept two of a friend’s sons, explaining that “if either of them had sufficient experience to assist on my staff, when an opportunity offers I might give them an appointment.” In the same letter, he explicitly stated his requirements for staff officers, reminding his wife that “I require efficient persons about me & I know nothing of any of our young relatives whom I should like to have about me.”

In the end, none of the six men who formed the core of General Robert E. Lee’s personal staff were his “young relatives.” It should be emphasized that Lee wrote the above words before any of the six men who would form the core of his personal staff, except Walter Taylor, had joined him in that
capacity. Thus, Lee did not choose the six men who formed his staff randomly or because of personal connections, but because he felt they were the most capable.

In addition to turning away more distant relatives, General Robert E. Lee also refused requests that two of his sons, George Washington Custis Lee and Robert E. Lee, Jr. serve on his staff, even though this would have pleased their mother. General Lee wanted to have G. W. C. Lee join his staff, but desired his son’s services as the army’s chief engineer, a general staff position, not as a member of his personal staff. Lee apparently felt that a position on his personal staff would not allow his eldest son to establish himself as a capable soldier in his own right. The younger Lee desired just such a position since he did not feel himself capable or experienced enough to exercise even general staff responsibility on his own. As it was, Richmond authorities selected Major General Martin Luther Smith as the army’s chief engineer and G. W. C. Lee remained on President Davis’ staff until April 1865.

Unlike his eldest brother, Robert E. Lee, Jr. did not apply for a position on his father’s personal staff. Although the elder Robert E. Lee was reluctant to have him join the army in any capacity, the younger Lee enlisted as a private in the Rockbridge Artillery. Years later, he wrote that “neither my mother, my family, my friends nor myself expected any other course, and I do not suppose it ever occurred to my father to think of giving me an office, which he could easily have done.” Although this sounds like much of the rest of the younger Lee’s veneration of his late father, General Lee’s own wartime words to his wife bear out his testimony:

In reference to Rob, his company would be a great pleasure & comfort to me & he would be extremely useful to me in various ways. I have written to him to that effect. But I am opposed to officers surrounding themselves with their sons & relatives. It is wrong in principle & in that case the selection for offices would be made from private & social relations, rather than for the public good. Rob’s case is at present rather peculiar & I do not think under the circumstances, it would be improper for him to serve with me.

At the time General Robert E. Lee wrote these words, Robert E. Lee, Jr. was serving on his brother William Henry Fitzhugh Lee’s staff, but W. H. F. Lee had been wounded and then
captured. General Lee refused to offer his youngest son a new staff position. As with his eldest son, General Lee wanted Robert E. Lee, Jr. to establish himself as a capable soldier who could achieve his own virtuous wartime record, not someone who jumped from position to position based clearly on nepotism rather than individual merit. Clearly, Lee chose five of the six men who formed the core of his personal staff based on their individual merit, not their family connections or their political persuasion.

Lee did not select Robert Hall Chilton as his chief of staff. Chilton had spent most of the war’s first year working in the Confederate Adjutant and Inspector General’s Department in Richmond, and joined Lee when he took command of the Army of Northern Virginia. Chilton had graduated from West Point near the bottom of the Class of 1837, and had seen extensive service during the Mexican-American War. In fact, his initial appointment to serve under Adjutant General Samuel Cooper may have stemmed from that earlier conflict, when he had dragged a severely wounded Colonel Jefferson Davis out of the Mexican line of fire at the Battle of Buena Vista, thus saving the future Confederate president’s life. After the Mexican-American War, Chilton became a U. S. Army paymaster, serving the troops scattered across Texas. While he was headquartered at San Antonio, he either formed or renewed a friendship with Robert E. Lee, who was assigned to duty in Texas. Lee repeatedly wrote to his wife in Arlington referring to Chilton and his wife, who apparently hosted him several times during his tenure as lieutenant colonel of the Second United States Cavalry. Lee became very close to the Chiltons during this time and Robert Chilton even named his first son, Robert Lee, after him.

In 1861, Chilton thus possessed seemingly ideal qualifications for becoming the new Confederate Army’s chief of staff. He had both West Point training and Mexican-American War battlefield experience. He was a close friend of the future commanding general of the Army of
Northern Virginia, and well-connected to President Jefferson Davis and Adjutant General Cooper. He even possessed very rare antebellum experience in a staff capacity, having dealt with logistical and personnel matters as an army paymaster on the frontier. Nevertheless, Chilton became the only unqualified failure on General Robert E. Lee’s staff, and his lack of success helped to taint the reputations of Lee’s other five personal staff members.¹⁵

Walter Taylor did not attend West Point, but the young man had some prewar military experience. Taylor hailed from a prosperous Norfolk merchant family and demonstrated a fierce intensity in competition even as a boy. As a teenager, Taylor eagerly sought an appointment to the Virginia Military Institute (V. M. I.), where he proved an able student. At the end of his first year, he stood first in his class of thirty-one, ahead of future Confederate Brigadier General John McCausland.¹⁶ As was typical in military academies during the antebellum period, V. M. I. focused mostly on mathematical and engineering subjects for first-year cadets. Taylor displayed marked scholastic aptitude, placing first in his class in mathematics, second in Latin, and second in drawing. Ironically for one who would write so many of Lee’s dispatches, Taylor was only tenth in his class in “Composition and Declamation.” Finally, Taylor had only twenty-one demerits, by far the fewest in his class. Overall, Taylor’s V. M. I. record revealed that he was highly intelligent and capable of mastering some military skills.¹⁷

Taylor was not always a model cadet, however. During the late summer of 1855, he and his cousin Richard Taylor were court-martialed for “playing unjustifiable tricks upon” (hazing) a plebe. The Taylors pleaded “Not Guilty,” and were acquitted due to lack of evidence.¹⁸ In an interview with V. M. I. Superintendent Francis H. Smith, they admitted they had in fact committed the serious violation of which they had been charged. Smith notified the boys’ parents that he took the case very seriously because both of them were in high academic standing.
and were currently serving as cadet sergeants. Although such “strapping” of freshman cadets was apparently “sport” to many older V. M. I. students, Smith pointed out that the Taylors’ actions were illegal and threatened to “do much injury to the Institute.” Apparently, both Taylors repented of their actions, as Smith recorded his interview with them as “satisfactory.”

After the court-martial, Walter Taylor returned to active duty at the Institute. As he was beginning his second year at V. M. I., his father succumbed to a yellow fever epidemic in Norfolk. The death of Taylor’s father made the young cadet the financial breadwinner for his aging mother, so he reluctantly left the Institute for a career back in his hometown as a bank clerk. Superintendent Smith had been a good friend of the Taylor family and had corresponded with the cadet’s father concerning his mercantile wares; after the tragedy, he promised to help the younger Taylor set his family’s finances in order. Since Taylor had demonstrated military aptitude, Smith offered him the chance to return if he so desired without penalty. Taylor declined, but asked Smith for thirty dollars to help settle his immediate debts, confessing that his family was “short of funds.”

With his formal education cut short, Taylor devoted himself to learning bookkeeping, and through careful financial husbandry, accumulated a modest sum and a respectable position in the Bank of Virginia. As his letters to Smith during the years between 1856 and 1860 reveal, financial necessity forced Taylor to be a very frugal young man who meticulously accounted for every spare dollar and debt. As late as 1857, Taylor still had to be concerned with relatively small amounts of money; he wrote two letters to Smith urging him to settle Taylor’s V. M. I. accounts regarding ten dollars’ worth of textbooks, and stated that he had sold his cadet coat to a fellow cadet to raise another ten dollars with Smith’s special permission. He spent months attempting to get his family’s accounts in order and had largely succeeded by 1861.
brief stint as an auditor on the Norfolk & Western Railroad, he returned to the Norfolk Branch of the Bank of Virginia as an officer, where he remained until the start of the Civil War.24

As a result of John Brown’s failed Harper’s Ferry Raid, Taylor joined Company F of the Virginia Militia, a unit formed in Norfolk to repel any potential slave insurrection. Although this militia unit, like most others of its type, was largely social in nature, it did partake in monthly drills. By April 1861, twenty-one-year-old Walter Taylor had risen to a first lieutenancy in the company and along with his comrades, promptly offered his services to Virginia upon the state’s secession that month. Shortly afterward, Taylor was ordered by Virginia’s Governor Francis Letcher to report to General Lee, then commanding all Virginia forces, for duty as assistant adjutant-general.25 He was recommended to Lee by one of the general’s distant relatives, but he had never met Lee before being introduced to him in his office.26 By then, Taylor had some military training and had demonstrated ability in administrative and financial matters.

Although Armistead Lindsay Long was a distant relative of Lee’s wife, Lee had never met Long before April 1861. While Long had missed the Mexican-American War, he possessed extensive military experience. Between his 1850 graduation from West Point and the outbreak of the Civil War, Long served in Charleston, Boston, Fort Leavenworth, Santa Fe, Baltimore, Pensacola, and Washita. During these years of service, Long had served alongside or under a large number of future Civil War generals including George Thomas, Edwin Sumner, John Pope, John Magruder, Henry Heth, John Sedgwick, Robert Ransom, and Henry Hunt. He was assigned to the artillery at graduation, and he remained there throughout his prewar service.27

Unlike the vast majority of those who served on Civil War staffs, Long had antebellum experience as both a line and as a staff officer. He served briefly as post adjutant in Charleston, and later as a depot quartermaster in the West, in which capacity he performed both commissary
and quartermaster duties for a time, learning that “all soldiers...must be well fed; an empty
commissariat is more demoralizing to them than the bullets of the enemy.” He also possessed
some command experience, being left first in command of Fort Warren in Boston and then the
post of Santa Fe, all while still under the rank of first lieutenant. As a post commandant, Long
had experience in training troops and he did so to Colonel Edwin V. Sumner’s satisfaction. Just
before the outbreak of the Civil War, Long was transferred to Colonel Sumner’s staff.

Long had some campaign experience. He commanded detachments of troops against the
Navajos and Apaches in New Mexico, experiencing irregular warfare and keeping a careful
chronicle of the Indians’ tactics and lifestyles. He subsequently served as part of the army’s
peacekeeping force in “Bleeding Kansas,” where he displayed his partisan sentiments, labeling
John Brown a “fanatic,” and expressing his “serious apprehension...for the safety of the
principle of state sovereignty.” In 1857, he also participated in Colonel Albert S. Johnston’s
campaign against the Mormons. Like Lee, Long was commanding a detachment of United
States troops within the boundaries of a seceded state in 1860-1861; despite some tension,
Georgia authorities allowed him to take his men from Savannah to New York City without
incident. As Lee resigned his commission to follow Virginia out of the Union, so did Long,
bringing the benefit of ten years of extensive service and experience to the Confederate cause.

In contrast to Chilton, Taylor, and Long, neither Charles S. Venable nor Charles Marshall
had any antebellum military training whatsoever, but each was a well-educated and articulate
professional. Marshall was the grand-nephew of Chief Justice John Marshall, and had followed
the family tradition of becoming a lawyer. Born in Warrenton, Virginia, Marshall received his
education at the University of Virginia, where, in a friend’s words, he “received the highest
honors of the university,” graduating in 1848. Immediately after receiving his diploma,
Marshall became a mathematics professor at Indiana University, where he taught for three years. Like many other young southern men, Marshall soon decided on a career as a lawyer, and once he married, he began studying for and passed the bar exam. Although he had married the daughter of an army officer, Marshall had absolutely no prewar military experience. In 1856, Marshall settled in Baltimore, and ever after identified with Maryland as his native state. Although he expressed some hesitancy over the slavery issue, Marshall quickly sided with the Confederacy when the war began and left his adopted state for the South in the spring of 1861.

Like Marshall, Charles S. Venable possessed a keen mind, but he remained in academia, becoming a well-respected mathematician. Educated at Hampden-Sidney College, from whence he graduated at age fifteen, Venable enjoyed an extensive curriculum on subjects ranging from Thucydides to political philosophy. Desiring to continue his education, but uncertain whether to pursue a law career or to teach mathematics, Venable entered the University of Virginia in 1845. While still at Virginia, Venable made his career choice; Hampden-Sidney hired him as an instructor of mathematics. By the time Venable was preparing to graduate from Virginia, he had three years of teaching experience and multiple diplomas demonstrating his accomplishments in subjects ranging from languages to chemistry to junior law. Once he graduated in 1848, Venable immediately took a full-time position as chair of mathematics at Hampden-Sidney.

Venable soon earned a reputation as both a scholar and a teacher, and his services were in high demand. He was popular both with students and faculty members. The University of Virginia’s rector strongly recommended him for a position at the University of Mississippi:

> Of his Mathematical attainments I can only report what I have occasionally heard from Mr. Courtney, the Professorship of Mathematics here, and that plac [sic] places him emphatically in the very front rank of the Alumni of this institution. To the general structure of his intellect I can and do bear a zealous testimony. With one exception he possesses the clearest and most analytical head which it has been my fortune to have under my charge, since I have been in my present post, and I believe him to be equal in these respects to the single exception. Indeed I do not remember ever to have met with his superior in accuracy of perception.
By the early 1850s, Venable was corresponding with colleagues in Switzerland and France, and had traveled to Europe and New York. In 1855, Venable accepted a position as professor of mathematics at the University of Georgia, which meant a notable increase in his income, and he moved to Athens with his new wife, Mary Cantey McDowell. Within a year, his dissatisfaction over his poor living conditions and a dispute over a delinquent student’s grade drove Venable to resign. Despite this resignation, Venable remained highly sought-after, giving a guest lecture at the University of Virginia soon after returning from Georgia.

Venable did not remain unemployed for long. In December 1857, he became a professor of mathematics at South Carolina College in Columbia. Although he was happier here than in Georgia, he still faced a disinterested public and an uphill battle for funding; he expressed frustration that his “project of a university will fail because the public mind is not prepared for it and because I am too feeble to…enforce it….I have not strength left to coagulate my system and have no willing colaborators [sic] here.” Despite the setbacks, Venable’s efforts prevailed; by 1860, he was a well-respected academic and had befriended members of many prominent local families including the Hamptons and the Chesnuts. He had declined an offer to teach in Virginia for $10,000 per year and participated in a United States government expedition to Labrador to observe a solar eclipse. Meanwhile, his only exposure to military matters had been observing European armies march in dress parade. Notwithstanding his near-total lack of a military background, though, Venable clearly had an accomplished theoretical mind in addition to extensive experience in overcoming administrative difficulties.

Similarly, Thomas M. R. Talcott contributed his prewar experience as an engineer to the Confederate cause. His father, Andrew Talcott, was a well-known engineer. Andrew Talcott
had been not only Robert E. Lee’s first commanding officer, but also his close friend, and had instructed the young lieutenant in many aspects of engineering and administration. Andrew had also married into the prominent Randolph Family of Virginia, and accordingly named his second son Thomas Mann Randolph Talcott. Lee likely knew Thomas M. R. Talcott, but their relationship was apparently not very personal; only one letter is known to have survived between the two, and in it, Lee offered Talcott his position on the staff, addressing him as “Randolph.”

Although the younger Talcott did not attend West Point, he still followed in his father’s chosen profession, serving as an engineer for the Ohio & Mississippi Railroad from the age of nineteen. By 1859, the twenty-one-year-old Talcott was working in Mexico for the railroad. He thus possessed ample antebellum experience in engineering, logistics, and administrative issues as well as a competent grasp of abstract and concrete mathematical problems. When the Civil War loomed, Thomas M. R. Talcott found himself in California. Greatly desiring to defend his native state, he hitched a ride on the Pony Express eastward across the desert. As the coach was full of mail bags, his trip was especially uncomfortable. By the time Virginia seceded, Talcott had returned to Richmond, and promptly offered his services to the state’s military forces.

The writings of these six men revealed that they thoroughly understood their jobs. Walter Taylor wrote to his fiancé that he functioned as General Lee’s “representative,” carrying orders and observing all over the battlefield. He complained bitterly about his thankless job as assistant adjutant general, but admitted that dealing with the mountains of army paperwork was a crucial responsibility of his post. In particular, he fully felt the grave responsibility that devolved on him while Lee was absent from army headquarters in Richmond. In this setting, Taylor effectively commanded the Army of Northern Virginia, concluding that “it is such a trial ‘playing commanding general,’ that I have concluded never to accept that position…I only hope...
the General will get back before I forget some serious matter or make any unfortunate blunder.”53 While Taylor was hesitant to assume more public duties because he felt that his age disqualified him from being taken seriously, he clearly understood his functions and their critical importance.54

Taylor also understood the functions of his fellow staff officers and complained to his sweetheart about their faults, using criteria remarkably similar to the prevailing staff theory of his time. Although Taylor complained that Marshall and Venable did not assist him with the army’s paperwork as much as he wanted, he admitted that this was not their responsibility.55 Taylor was much less forgiving of Robert Hall Chilton’s failures as chief of staff. Although it was Chilton’s responsibility to manage the staff and function as Lee’s chief representative according to Jominian theory, Taylor repeatedly emphasized that Chilton actually did very little work. When Lee was absent, Taylor wrote that Chilton did not give him “one single suggestion” about how to manage the Army of Northern Virginia, but would “allow me to continue the performance of my present duties and look on complacently.” Although Chilton may have understood his responsibilities, he failed to act on them, while Taylor both recognized the importance of his job and performed it well.56

In his first postwar book, Walter Taylor did not write at great length of his own deeds, but he hinted at the tasks he had performed during the war. According to Taylor, when he arrived in Richmond in April 1861 to join Lee, the general and his staff “devoted their entire time and energies to the very difficult task of organizing, arming, equipping, and putting into the field the volunteers.”57 Continuing his account, Taylor mentioned staff officers being sent on reconnaissances, copying and distributing orders to Lee’s subordinate generals, and handling the army’s massive amounts of paperwork.58 In fact, although Taylor said little about his own
wartime experiences, he claimed to know the Army of Northern Virginia’s numerical strength better than anyone because he had been preoccupied with its personnel returns from his days as assistant adjutant-general. He even assumed authority over army headquarters when Lee was absent, changing its location in response to developing situations near Petersburg in 1864.

In his later book, *General Lee*, Walter Taylor was far more explicit regarding his duties. In particular, he dwelt at length on the paperwork he managed for Lee:

To one not experienced in such matters, no just conception can be formed of the voluminous character of official papers that find their way to army headquarters whenever a halt is called in active operations and an opportunity is offered the men to present in writing their petitions and grievances…some of these cases were unimportant, some were of more importance as affecting the discipline and efficiency of the army, and some were of a serious character, requiring both skill and tact in the proper disposition to be made of them. The general in command of an army in the field has his mind so occupied in the consideration of matters of greater importance than these as to be unable to consider them all, or to give them any considerable portion of his time and attention. 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 and purposes, and so familiar with army regulations, as to be able to lay down definite principles and lines of action for guidance in determining all matters of army detail that would meet his approval, and to make all decisions of the questions presented to conform to these established principles.

Even as he described himself as Lee’s principal administrative assistant, Taylor alluded to the widespread authority he possessed over army headquarters. His definition of the administrative responsibilities of his position adhered closely both to the scant standards enumerated in army regulations for staff personnel and to Lee’s own requirements. He later explicitly stated that he remained at headquarters for most of his time to manage paperwork and issue orders even while Lee and the other staff officers were absent inspecting various units. Taylor thus put his meticulous personality to effective service and quickly became indispensable to Lee.

Charles Marshall did not leave a single explicit statement of his field duties as Taylor did, but he clearly understood his responsibilities. He matter-of-factly described his writing the Confederate draft law as something Lee asked him to do, and later refers to the staff “observing” the troops in the field. He mentioned the staff drafting orders for the army’s various units to
execute as a matter of routine, but hinted that Lee’s staff officers were often necessarily privy to information not widely available for security reasons. For example, Lee explained his objective for J. E. B. Stuart’s cavalry during the Gettysburg Campaign, and had Marshall compose and send multiple letters to Stuart to explain his wishes, reviewing Marshall’s writing each time to make sure he was transmitting these crucial orders correctly.

Marshall stressed his administrative role as the writer of General Lee’s official reports. More than once, Marshall stated that Lee had conversed with him about the plans he had conceived during his past campaigns in order to give him a clearer picture of them for his reports. The commanding general required that Marshall collect the reports of all of Lee’s subordinate commanders and cross-reference them in order to help compose Lee’s own report:

It was my duty to compile his official reports of operations… I had opportunities of conversing with the authors of these reports, and of getting explanations of what was doubtful, and declining that which was conflicting or contradictory. I had General Lee’s private correspondence with the officers of his army, with the President and Departments, his orders, general and special, public and confidential, and more than all, I had the advantage of full and frank explanations of his own plans and purposes from General Lee himself.

These reports were subject to public scrutiny, and thus important to Confederate authorities. Lee chose Marshall because he was a meticulous professional who did not disappoint him.

In most respects, Long’s account of his duties was similar to Taylor’s first book; he matter-of-facty stated his own official title and those of Lee’s other personal staff officers, and then focused on Lee himself. Like Marshall, when Long mentioned himself or his fellow staff officers, he highlighted the duties he had performed. In his book, Long recorded that he had scouted for Lee, issued orders to Lee’s subordinates, and posted artillery batteries. Long pointed out that “General Lee made in his report honorable mention of his personal staff,” and even credited Chilton with contributing “greatly” to the Army of Northern Virginia’s “high state of discipline.” Overall, while Long certainly had ample reason to highlight the exploits of
himself and his fellow staff officers, he grasped his basic responsibilities as a staff officer as defined by the prevailing military doctrines of his era.

Since Lee’s personal staff officers apparently knew and understood the jobs they were supposed to do, the question remains why Lee used them so sparingly. Given Lee’s statements about what he expected from his staff officers and the testimonies of the former members of Lee’s personal staff about what the commanding general expected of them, it is tempting to conclude that Lee relied on a discretionary style of command because he simply gave up trying to find competent staff officers, as Freeman implied. According to this theory, Lee might have wanted to exercise tighter control over his subordinates, but he never tried to do so because he knew that his staff was too inept to be safely entrusted with such responsibility. If Lee had been able to find better-trained, more capable young men to serve on his personal staff, then he would have been better able to supervise his subordinates and might have enjoyed greater success.

Although Elizabeth Pryor was correct in asserting that Lee was sparing in his praise and open appreciation of his staff officers, when he did discuss their performance of their duties in his official reports, he did so in glowing terms. Although the Seven Days Campaign did not produce the decisive defeat of the Federals that Lee had hoped, he still reported that he was “indebted” to the officers of his personal staff “who were continuously with me in the field.” Lee similarly wrote that “my personal staff were unremittingly engaged in conveying and bringing information from all parts of the field” at Fredericksburg. After the Battle of Chancellorsville, Lee gave his staff an even more glowing review, writing that “to the members of my staff I am greatly indebted for assistance in observing the movements of the enemy, posting troops, and conveying orders….all were called into requisition, and all evinced the greatest energy and zeal.” Finally, even though Gettysburg was not a victory, Lee still praised
his staff, this time even more personally, stating that “my thanks are due to my personal staff for the constant aid afforded me at all times on the march and in the field, and their willing discharge of every duty.”74 As these examples reveal, not only did Lee mention his personal staff in his official reports, he expressed deeper and more personal praise for their services as time passed.

Lee took note of the individual officers on his personal staff as well. After almost two years of observing his devoted service, Lee recommended Walter Taylor for promotion in January 1863, referring to him as “intelligent, industrious and conscientious in his duties and his character unimpeachable,” and insisting that he knew “no better person for the appointment.”75 He repeatedly recommended Long for promotion to brigadier general and independent command of several artillery battalions, considering him “better qualified for these duties than any officer with me,” and concluding that he was “the best man I can name.”76 In his official report of the Battle of Fredericksburg, Lee noted Talcott’s engineering skills, singling his selection of an artillery position as “excellent,” and later noted that “he is a brave & skilful officer & as a gentleman unexceptionable in character or development, adding that “his professional ability, boldness in the field, & systematic industry were conspicuous.”77 Although Lee did not note Chilton, Marshall, or Venable by themselves in surviving correspondence, the fact that he retained Marshall and Venable along with Taylor throughout his command demonstrates that he appreciated their talents and felt they were performing valuable service.

Because many staff functions were administrative in nature, they were less visible during and after the Civil War than more public roles in the army, and thus somewhat less appreciated. While Lee employed his personal staff sparingly to directly supervise his subordinates, he did use them extensively to help maintain the army’s administration and keep it in a fit state to wage war, thus relieving himself of the minutiae of command. Lee was free to concentrate on his
tactical and strategic designs because he had a capable staff to handle routine matters and help him administrate his army. While Lee’s personal staff was not responsible for the army’s chronic supply shortages, its officers ensured that the army’s personnel were accounted for and the proper official reports filed with public authorities. Without competent men surrounding him, Lee would have been too swamped in paperwork to command his army in the field.78

Overall, the evidence indicates that Lee’s personal staff was a group of professional men who were intellectually and administratively competent to perform the duties that Lee assigned to them. Contrary to the views of many historians, Lee understood the crucial importance of having competent personal staff officers. He possessed stringent selection criteria for his personal staff officers, choosing men who possessed either military training or demonstrated skill and intellectual ability. Recognizing their considerable abilities, Lee asked much from them. They clearly grasped the nature and importance of their offices and mostly performed their assigned tasks competently. The next several chapters of this work will use accounts of some of Lee’s greatest battles to demonstrate how he used his staff in the field and show that they usually did their jobs well.
Chapter 2: The Staff Assembles, April 1861-May 1862

Although General Robert E. Lee found Walter Taylor for his personal staff in the first month of the Civil War, he acquired the rest of his “military family” more gradually. As this chapter will demonstrate, the wartime and personal records of Armistead Long, Charles Marshall, Thomas M. R. Talcott, and Charles Venable recommended them to Lee. Observing their ample talents, Lee carefully selected each man for a specific purpose. Before Lee assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia, these men had already proven their professional worth.

During the first several months of 1861, Robert E. Lee used Walter Taylor and a host of short-tenured staff officers trying to construct Virginia’s state forces almost from scratch. Afterward, Virginia’s troops transferred into the Confederate Army, leaving Lee without a command. In July 1861, Lee was sent to command the armies in Western Virginia and ordered to clear the state’s mountainous counties of Federal occupiers. Lee failed at this assignment, and by November 1861, was again without a command. His personal staff officers were all gone except Taylor.¹

In the next seven months, Lee continued his series of mostly thankless postings, first attempting to defend an impossibly long seacoast against the Union navy, and then serving as the president’s military advisor. To assist him, Lee selected new personal staff officers. Unlike their predecessors, the four additional men Lee recruited between November 1861 and May 1862 were both highly competent and would remain in his staff for many months. Lee sought out capable men, and after a careful search, he found them.
Lee and Taylor returned to Richmond by early November, where Lee resumed his previous duties as military advisor to President Davis. On November 6, however, Lee received orders to proceed to South Carolina to assume command of the Department of South Carolina and Georgia, recently threatened by Federal army and naval activities. He left almost immediately, still accompanied only by Taylor and two slaves. He arrived in his new department on November 8, the day after a massive Federal naval assault had captured the large South Carolina harbor of Port Royal. The capture of Port Royal gave the United States Navy a large all-weather harbor and made it impossible for the Confederates to defend the Sea Island plantations along the coasts.2

Having served in the area as a young lieutenant in the United States Army, Lee realized immediately that much of the territory along the coast, consisting of swamps, low-lying islands, and river inlets, was completely helpless against the Union navy. Lee promptly took Taylor and inspected the existing defenses in Savannah, Georgia, while writing to the commander in Charleston, South Carolina to prepare to withdraw all outlying forces to help defend that city. Although no enemy assault was forthcoming, Lee found the Savannah defenses badly neglected, and the situation in Charleston was likewise unfavorable.3

In this unpromising environment, Lee went to work immediately. To assist him, he assembled a new personal staff, retaining Taylor as aide-de-camp and assistant adjutant general and acquiring another assistant adjutant-general, Captain Thornton Washington and another aide-de-camp, Joseph Manigault.4 For the first time, Lee also had a general staff, which included his new chief of artillery and ordinance, Major Armistead Long, who was ordered to report to Lee in December. It was highly likely that Lee specifically asked for Major Long’s services, having seen him in action during the campaigns in western Virginia. Long certainly seems to have held
no great affection for his former superior, General William W. Loring, and was very glad to be assigned to Lee. After all, Loring had recently added the onerous duties of chief quartermaster to Long’s existing role as chief of artillery. Additionally, service in South Carolina would allow him to spend time with his wife. Thus, on December 6, Long was ordered to join Lee.

Although Long had encountered Lee in Richmond and served with him in western Virginia, his reintroduction to Lee in South Carolina was even more memorable, as the two men were forced to flee from their hotel to escape a catastrophic fire that engulfed about half of Charleston. Long and his new commander quickly formed a very close friendship. The next month, Long was the only staffer to accompany Lee when the general visited his father’s grave for the first time. There, Lee displayed his feelings to Long far more openly than he usually did in anyone else’s presence. Although Lee retained a great deal of reserve with Long as he did with almost everyone, he still developed a bond with him stronger than any of his other staff officers. This friendship outlasted the war itself and heavily influenced Long’s postwar writings.

Lee took up headquarters in an abandoned house in Coosawatchie, South Carolina, a small hamlet on the river of the same name that sat astride the vital railroad between Charleston and Savannah, near the enemy-occupied region around Port Royal. Coosawatchie was also in a central position between Charleston and Savannah, able to communicate with either by rail within three hours. Recalling the arduous conditions he had faced with Lee in western Virginia, Taylor remembered the general’s headquarters as “excellent.” Long, however, held a different perspective, remembering them as “unpretending” and “frugal,” and mentioning that Lee often teased staff officers who complained about the Spartan accommodations. Much to the frustration of many staff officers like Taylor, Lee would always prefer very modest camp
equipage, and Taylor may have remembered the Coosawatchie headquarters more fondly because it was one of the very few instances during the war in which Lee located his headquarters inside a permanent building.

Despite the Charleston fire and the opposition of many planters, Lee and his staff continued their difficult task. Although Taylor remembered his service with Lee in South Carolina and Georgia as “a peaceful rest after a period of constant trial and of great hardship” after the failed campaign in western Virginia, he and the other members of Lee’s staff worked very hard on the Atlantic coast. Despite fervent opposition from local planters, Lee insisted on withdrawing Confederate forces from the Sea Islands and other vulnerable sectors, keeping most of his troops in mobile reserve protecting the Charleston-Savannah Railroad and ready to respond to any enemy landing. Lee knew that to have any chance of resisting the Federal Navy, the Confederates had to fortify key points along the coastline. To this end, he urged the construction of forts, defensive lines, and artillery positions near Charleston, Savannah, Coosawatchie, Georgetown, and Pocotaligo. To improve the dismal state of coastal artillery, Lee requested and eventually received more modern cannons, emplacing them in his new defensive works. Lee had about 22,000 men to defend a wide stretch of coastline, with more than half of them tied up in the forts, and thus unavailable to respond to enemy landings elsewhere. Even though Georgia and South Carolina were attempting to raise additional troops, recruits and weapons to arm them were slow in coming in.

As Long remembered, “the extensive line of operations that demanded his attention caused Lee to be almost constantly on the move, first at one place, and then at another, where important work was in progress.” In January 1862, Lee took Long on a tour to inspect the defenses of the Florida Atlantic coast, nominally under his authority. By the end of that month,
Lee was called to Charleston because a Federal fleet had just been spotted near the city. In early February, Lee moved his headquarters to Savannah, in his words, “endeavoring to push forward the work for the defense of the city,” while dealing with reports concerning an imminent Federal attack.\textsuperscript{16}

Lee kept his personal staff as busy as he was attempting to build defenses along the coast. Captain Washington performed his duties as Lee’s adjutant, collecting reports from the district commanders regarding the number of personnel in their areas and the state of the coastal defenses. Lee used Washington to handle routine affairs so that he could focus on improving the fortifications and raising more units for long-term Confederate service.\textsuperscript{17} He worked closely with Lieutenant Colonel John M. Preston of the Adjutant and Inspector General’s office to muster in new recruits and form new units as rapidly as possible. Because of the scarcity of weapons and suitable ammunition, Washington admonished Lee’s subordinates not to allow wasteful shooting and tried to standardize their armaments. He also issued the orders assigning the district commanders to their areas and distributed the mobile forces and fixed artillery pieces within the department among them. By December 1861, Washington had been promoted to major, and was writing to General Roswell S. Ripley on his own authority.\textsuperscript{18} While Lee was inspecting the defenses, Washington wrote to local unit commanders urging them to investigate the assorted rumors of Federal landings at various points along the coast and to maintain vigilance in order to detect real enemy movements. In a similar light, he wrote to Ripley urging him to control civilian movements into and out of Charleston.\textsuperscript{19}

Taylor helped Washington to answer the voluminous correspondence in the department office. He helped assuage the feelings of Lee’s district commanders at the limited numbers of soldiers they led. Most of Lee’s subordinates complained that they did not have nearly enough
men to hold their assigned portions of the coast, and wrote headquarters repeatedly asking for any available units. In particular, they bitterly protested being ordered to relinquish their own troops. At one point, although expressing sympathy for Colonel Arthur M. Manigault’s plight, Taylor reprimanded him for requesting Ripley for troops instead of asking Lee. In mid-February 1862, the Federals landed near the mouth of the Edisto River, and Lee, who was then inspecting the defenses of Savannah, had Taylor coordinate the movement of troops to protect Charleston.

As Lee’s chief of artillery, Long found ample employment. After taking Long on his inspection tour of the southern Georgia and Florida coastal defenses, Lee sent him to inspect the artillery positions at Fort Moultrie in Charleston harbor, a task which stirred memories of antebellum service in the former artillerist. When Lee was recalled to Richmond in early March, Long did not accompany him; he remained in Georgia to finish “preparing and arming the new batteries in the vicinity of Fort Jackson.”

Although Taylor remembered his time serving with Lee in South Carolina and Georgia as one in which “nothing of importance happened,” Long insisted that Lee showed flashes of his legendary command abilities during his tenure. After claiming that Lee’s initial defensive works, which “rose with magical rapidity,” had restored the confidence of the people of the region in the Confederate government, Long asserted that Lee’s lines “proved to be an impenetrable barrier to the combined efforts of the land and naval forces of the enemy constantly employed on the coast.” He then summarized his former commander’s accomplishments in grandiose terms, claiming that Lee’s efforts constituted “a remarkable example of a successful opposition of science and art to mere physical power,” and blasting Lee’s Federal opponents for being preoccupied with providing for fugitive slaves instead of pressing his advantage.
only did Lee’s activities prove his military genius, but they also demonstrated that he knew better than to place the welfare of blacks over white men. As Long concluded in an article he published at about the same time as his book, “We perceive in this campaign of General Lee in Georgia and South Carolina results achieved by a single genius equal to those which could have been accomplished by an incalculable force.”

Thus, Long stressed his former commander’s infallibility to a greater extent than Taylor. While each man rarely mentioned himself and focused on Lee, Taylor refrained from making grandiose claims about what Lee could have accomplished and admitted that his tenure as commander in South Carolina and Georgia had been mostly uneventful. By contrast, Long asserted that Lee saved the agrarian heartland of the Confederacy. Long’s close personal relationship to Lee likely encouraged him to employ such strong language. Taylor, by contrast, rarely claimed a close personal association with Lee either during or after the war. In part, the distance between Taylor and Lee likely stemmed from the large difference in their ages; Taylor was younger than two of General Lee’s sons, while Long was ten years older than Taylor. Additionally, like Lee, Long was a veteran of the prewar United States Army and had experienced its hardships. Since Lee and Long had much more in common, they likely related to each other much more easily than Taylor could with either of them.

Long’s sweeping assertions on behalf of Lee’s efforts in South Carolina and Georgia did not go unchallenged by other former Confederates. Four months after Long published his summary of Lee’s activities as commander of the Department of South Carolina and Georgia, General Thomas Jordan, former chief of staff to General Pierre G. T. Beauregard, answered him in the pages of the \textit{Southern Historical Society Papers}. Since Beauregard, and not Lee, had commanded the defenses of South Carolina when the Federals finally attacked on a large scale in
the summer of 1863, Jordan claimed that Beauregard should be awarded credit for the defense of Charleston and the rest of the coastline. 27 Jordan claimed that Lee’s defensive arrangements, while adequate against the relatively small forces available to the Federals in 1861, were “almost as slight an obstacle as if they had been built of lath and plaster” against the much larger Union army and naval fleet Beauregard faced almost two years later. He also stated that Lee was wrong to place his headquarters at Coosawatchie, claiming that while that rail hub was the geographic center of the department, Charleston was by far the most militarily important point in it. He dubbed Beauregard’s defense of that city “one of the most brilliant achievements in war, and…an admirable study of the art of defensive war reduced to perfect practice in all its ramifications and details, including a perfect military administration.” 28

Sensitive to the almost fanatical devotion Virginians had to Lee’s memory, Jordan qualified his statements. He admitted “that what General Lee did was in character with the ability of that distinguished man, I do not question for an instant,” and blamed Lee’s successor, John C. Pemberton, for the poor state of the coastal defenses when Beauregard assumed departmental command. He concluded with a peace offering to Lee partisans, writing that “General Lee’s own reputation, which rests solidly upon his own resplendent deeds as commander of the superlative Army of Northern Virginia, cannot possibly be enhanced one particle by the attribution of things that do not belong to him.” 29 As Long defended his former commander, so had Jordan. While such devotion by staff officers to their generals was common, it was highly unusual for former staff officers to feud with each other over whose commander should receive credit for past successes. 30

Long replied rapidly to Jordan’s article. He claimed that he had not intended to slight General Beauregard’s record, but merely to “supply an absent link in the military history of
General Lee, which circumstances enabled me to furnish.” Long was therefore not writing or speaking at length of his own accomplishments in South Carolina and Georgia; he only mentioned himself as a witness to Lee’s great deeds. He maintained, however, that “the article of General Jordan would have been of more value as an historical production, if he had more clearly stated in what important points General Lee’s plan of seacoast defence [sic] was changed by his successor.” Long argued that Lee’s basic defensive strategy proved sound throughout the war; although Beauregard had conducted a very able defense of Charleston and coastal South Carolina, he was merely following the plan Lee had devised. Thus, like the other former members of Lee’s personal staff who wrote about the war, Long did not intend to tarnish any other former Confederates’ reputations, but merely to build up Lee’s. While their efforts were not usually politically motivated or overtly malicious, they were uncompromising in their efforts to promote Lee’s memory as an ingenious commander.31

When Lee was ordered back to Richmond in early March 1862, Long did not go with him. In fact, only Taylor accompanied Lee back to the Confederate capital, as the other members of Lee’s staff remained in the Department of South Carolina and Georgia to serve as the staff of Lee’s replacement, General John C. Pemberton.32 Once in Richmond, Lee assumed the newly-created post as unofficial general-in-chief of all the Confederate armies, a post that carried no real power. In reality, he served as President Davis’ military advisor, occasionally issuing orders and suggestions to commanders in remote areas or helping Davis to construct war policies for the Congress to enact.

The congressional act that had created Lee’s new title allowed him a five-man personal staff of one military secretary and four aides-de-camp, and Lee quickly sought to fill these positions. Lee offered Taylor his choice of staff jobs; Taylor told Lee that he preferred to remain
an aide-de-camp instead of serving as an assistant adjutant-general as he wished to avoid being confined to headquarters with “the annoyance and trouble of attending to papers and routine work, and be more on the field.”

Although Taylor had considered leaving Lee’s staff the last time the general had been left without any direct command, there is no indication that he did so this time. Taylor’s new role carried a promotion to major, which undoubtedly influenced his decision.

Although Taylor remained officially Lee’s aide-de-camp, he soon resumed his previous role as acting assistant adjutant general. Lee used Taylor to issue orders to various Confederate field commanders. For example, soon after Lee and Taylor returned to Virginia, Lee had Taylor notify General Magruder on the Virginia Peninsula that a cavalry regiment he had requested could not be made available, and General Benjamin Huger, commanding Confederate forces at Norfolk, that several artillery companies would soon be ready for service. In particular, Lee had Taylor attend to the chronic supply problems facing the Confederates in Virginia; Taylor wrote several letters to the heads of the general staff supply departments requesting additional provisions and issued repeated directives to the field commanders to conserve precious ammunition. Finally, once General George B. McClellan’s massive Union Army of the Potomac landed on the Virginia Peninsula in April 1862, Lee issued orders directly to generals outside General Joseph E. Johnston’s main Confederate army in Virginia and then used Taylor to keep Johnston informed of where the units were being sent. Occasionally, Lee had Taylor draft crucial orders to commanders in more vital sectors for his signature.

In May, through no fault of his own, Taylor was drawn into a dispute regarding General Johnston’s authority. On May 7, Lee was unexpectedly called away from his office while his orders to General Huger were still waiting for his signature. Feeling that his directives could not
wait, Lee had Taylor sign orders in his stead. When he received copies of these orders, General Johnston reacted angrily, writing to Lee on May 8 that he had already issued orders to Huger on the president’s authority, and referring to Taylor in a dismissive tone. He sarcastically asked to be relieved of a “merely nominal geographic command,” complaining that none of the other Confederate commanders in Virginia was keeping him informed about events on their fronts. Lee promptly responded, defending his aide-de-camp and assuring Johnston that Taylor had acted under his orders.39

Taylor, however, still sensed that Johnston resented him because of the incident. When Lee left the office again to supervise the erection of last-minute defenses for the James River, Taylor kept Johnston fully notified of events on his own initiative, telling Johnston that “the general is absent, and I send you the above unofficially, knowing that you would like to hear all that is going on.” Taylor had apparently taken Johnston’s complaints to heart, and did all he could to soothe the general’s feelings. In a subsequent message giving Johnston news from Drewry’s Bluff, Taylor was even more conciliatory, saying that “General Lee has gone down the river again this morning. I will avail myself of this opportunity to disavow any intentional breach of military etiquette in the letters forwarded you from this office some days since, written for General Lee’s signature, and signed informally by me in his absence. I trust his explanation was satisfactory to you.” In both cases, Taylor waited until Lee was absent to send personal messages to Johnston, and seemed very anxious to mend relations with him.40

Ironically, during his time in Richmond, Taylor became well acquainted with Johnston’s nemesis, President Davis, and in his words, “not only learned to admire him greatly, but also to entertain for him a warm personal affection.” Davis conversed freely with the much younger staff officer, and the informality of his speech left Taylor stunned that such a powerful man
would stoop to converse casually with an ordinary young man like himself. Davis made a strong impression on Taylor as “by far the best qualified man of his time available” for the presidency, and the two continued to correspond even after the war ended. Years later, writing about Lee’s tenue in Richmond, Taylor stressed that both Davis and Lee faced nearly impossible tasks as leaders of the undermanned and outgunned Confederate Army, and that Lee’s services to Davis during his tenure as the president’s military advisor had been “invaluable.”

While utilizing Taylor extensively, Lee chose his other aides-de-camp carefully. Although Charles Marshall had left his adopted state of Maryland to join the Confederacy almost immediately after Virginia seceded, his health had prevented him from taking any active role in the Confederate Army. He was an acquaintance of George Mason, the Confederate Minister to Britain; his connections and his academic record recommended him to Lee. On March 21, Lee selected Marshall as an aide-de-camp with the rank of first lieutenant, with a promotion directly to major to follow in April. Lee put Marshall promptly to work answering official communications from President Davis and Secretary of War George W. Randolph, relying on his staff officer’s antebellum legal training to help him craft appropriate responses. As Marshall recalled,

[Lee] was in fact an assistant secretary of war. All papers relating to military matters of any sort received by the President, or by any member of the Cabinet, were referred to him [Lee] to be answered, no matter how unimportant or purely personal might be their nature. I have had to answer great numbers of letters thus referred, which no more belonged to the province of a commander to answer than the most private personal letters.

Marshall served Lee ably in this capacity, building and maintaining relationships with such luminaries as Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin and Texas Senator Louis T. Wigfall. Seeing Marshall’s diplomatic and writing skills, Lee delegated the most tedious office work to him while he concentrated on shaping overall Confederate strategy in light of the recent reverses at Fort Donelson in Tennessee and Union efforts in Virginia.
Soon, Lee entrusted Marshall with extremely confidential information. After the war, Marshall wrote that Lee complained to him after he had spent several hours talking over strategy with Davis that he felt his efforts were “fruitless.” Marshall pointed out that Lee did not mean to disrespect the president, but that he felt that his advice was going unheeded. Furthermore, Lee confided to Marshall his overall strategy to concentrate all available forces in Virginia to defeat the Federal forces there.\(^{45}\) On April 1, Lee entrusted Marshall with drafting the legislation later modified into the Confederate Conscription Act of 1862. Once Marshall had completed his work, Lee submitted it to the president, who helped push it through Congress.\(^{46}\) Marshall’s efforts were thus highly satisfactory.

Lee picked his other aides-de-camp with similar discernment. Thomas Manning Randolph Talcott had proven his own ability since joining the Confederacy in 1861.\(^{47}\) His reputation as a capable young engineer made him a desirable commodity when Virginia seceded. On April 22, 1861, Walter Gwynn, commanding Virginia troops in Norfolk, personally wrote to Talcott requesting his services. By May 24, Talcott was already a captain of Virginia engineers, and his work proved excellent. As Gwynn prepared to turn his forces over to Confederate command, he recommended Talcott for officer rank in glowing terms, stating that he had “discharged the various duties with punctuality, precision and intelligence and to my satisfaction.” Gwynn’s endorsement notwithstanding, there were few openings in the new Confederate Engineers, and Talcott was commissioned a second lieutenant of artillery on October 7, 1861.\(^{48}\)

Talcott’s reduction in rank made little difference to his superiors, who remained consistently impressed by his abilities. On September 14, 1861, Brigadier General Benjamin Huger wrote Talcott asking him to agree to be made chief engineer of the Department of
Norfolk, stating that he would be “much pleased” if he would accept. The following February, Talcott reacquired his old rank, becoming a captain of engineers in the Confederate Army.\textsuperscript{49} That same month, despite Talcott’s low rank, Huger tried to place him in charge of the defenses on woefully undermanned Roanoke Island, but the island fell to the Federals before anything could come of the proposal. On April 7, 1862, Huger formally appointed Talcott as chief engineer of the Department of Norfolk.\textsuperscript{50}

On April 19, 1862, Lee wrote to Talcott asking him to join his growing personal staff. Addressing Talcott as “My dear Randolph,” Lee pointed out that the position entitled Talcott to a promotion to major. While expressing his desire to have the capable young engineer join his “military family,” Lee acknowledged that others desired Talcott’s services, and left the choice up to him, stating that “I have made application for your appointment as my aide-de-camp…with the rank of Major of Cav. You must tell me whether the situation will be agreeable to you, & if it is not, your present duties more to your like, frankly say so. I know you are much wanted where you are.”\textsuperscript{51} After some deliberation, Talcott accepted Lee’s offer on May 2.

Lee’s final choice for aide-de-camp was Charles S. Venable, who had acquired more military experience than the other two combined over the past year. When the Palmetto State seceded in December 1860, many students at South Carolina College rushed to enlist despite the wishes of most faculty members that they remain in school. Venable, by contrast, not only encouraged his mathematics pupils to go but hoped to form a unit composed entirely of college students. When the youths enlisted without him, he joined the state forces anyway as a member of a local patrol. By April 1861, he had joined a militia outfit called the Congaree Rifles and was elected lieutenant. The unit patrolled the seacoast during the bombardment of Fort Sumter, and Venable thus witnessed the historic event. When the Congaree Rifles disbanded shortly
thereafter, Venable was so eager to join the fight that he enlisted as a private in the Second South Carolina Infantry. Serving in the ranks during the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run), Venable was slightly wounded in the knee. Nevertheless, he was jubilant after the battle, even sending his young son Frank a solid shot and a captured U. S. belt buckle.\textsuperscript{52}

The life of a private soldier was apparently unappealing to Venable. Only four days after the First Battle of Manassas, he reported to his friend Wade Hampton for duty as a volunteer aide-de-camp. As Venable remembered, “the summer passed without adventure or feat of arms of any sort,” and that fall, he left the army in Virginia to recuperate from what he later dubbed “camp fever” and to see his newborn daughter, Mary McDowell Venable.\textsuperscript{53} He resumed teaching at South Carolina College even though the number of students had dropped significantly. Whiling away long hours conversing with States Rights Gist, James and Mary Chesnut, and other notables, Venable often expressed both his disgust at the northerners who were waging war against “Christian” slavery and those who sought commissions in the Confederate army behind the lines.\textsuperscript{54} Venable remained in South Carolina until March, when he received a commission as second lieutenant of artillery with a specialty in engineering, and almost immediately thereafter another appointment as captain of engineers. His reputation as a scholar and mathematician, in addition to his connections, gained him very rapid promotion.\textsuperscript{55}

Venable was sent to New Orleans as an engineer on the staff of Major General Mansfield Lovell, commander of the forces defending the South’s largest city. He was assigned to Lovell’s chief engineer, Colonel Martin Luther Smith, who immediately recognized his ample talents and put him in charge of constructing riverine defenses near Carrollton on the outskirts of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{56} When the Federal fleet passed Forts Jackson and St. Philip in late April 1862, thus
dooming the Crescent City to capture, Venable retreated with the rest of the Confederates, expressing his deep disgust at the miserably planned and executed defense.\textsuperscript{57}

Because Venable had arrived in New Orleans just before its capture, he was known to very few inhabitants of the city. Lovell therefore ordered him to go into the city with two other staff officers in civilian clothing and sneak all salvageable military property out before more Federals arrived. With the assistance of a “Committee of Safety” composed of local Confederate civilians, Venable and the others went to work. He stated that “I took charge of the shipment of stores, hiring of laborers, drays, etc.,” claiming that he shipped artillery shells, clothing, blankets, medical supplies, commissary stores, machinery, and new wagons on Lovell’s authority. He confessed that he had been unable to save some artillery pieces, but concluded that “the stores saved were large in value, and so far as my information went, constituted by far the greater proportion of those that were in the city.”\textsuperscript{58} At the time, only a few Federal marines were actually in New Orleans, but Major General Benjamin F. Butler’s occupation army was on its way. Venable and his associates received word of this in dramatic fashion, as he recounted:

One morning I went down to the Town Hall to ask some assistance of the Committee of Safety in hauling some Confederate cannon which were in positions on the shore of Lake Ponchartrain to the station to be shipped. I met two Federal officers coming out of the Hall….I concluded it was high time for us to leave the city. I got a buggy and…drove to the station passing by a body of several hundred Federal Marines who had come with ship Howitzers to take possession of the Town Hall.\textsuperscript{59}

Thus, Venable left New Orleans just as additional Federal troop transports arrived, having proven his worth as a clear-headed and very resourceful staff officer.

Unlike his superior, Venable’s image survived the fall of the Crescent City to the Federals on April 26, 1862. Rejoining Confederate forces north of the city, now commanded by Brigadier General Martin L. Smith, Venable accompanied them to Vicksburg, Mississippi. There, Smith laid out the foundations for the fortifications that would eventually hold out for
months against Ulysses S. Grant’s army. Upon assuming command at Vicksburg on May 5, Smith made Venable his adjutant. Venable’s talents had clearly impressed Smith, whose own considerable engineering skill was well-known. At the same time, Venable was gaining valuable experience as a personal staff officer.\(^6^0\)

By May 1862, Venable had earned himself an enviable reputation.\(^6^1\) The same day that Venable became adjutant at Vicksburg, he received Lee’s offer to join his personal staff. Lee was not the only Confederate official vying for his services, however. On May 20, Governor John Gill Shorter of Alabama wrote to Lovell requesting Captain Venable’s services in a “scientific exploration” of the state’s salt-producing region, claiming that “the attainment…of this valuable officer, it is believed, can greatly promote the success of an enterprise of vital importance to Alabama and to the Confederacy.” The letter concluded by asking Captain Venable to give Alabama “the benefit of his skill and service.”\(^6^2\) Venable weighed his options carefully; Smith was very reluctant to let him go, but as his family was essentially homeless during the war, Venable needed the money a promotion would bring. Desiring a promotion and an assignment closer to his family, Venable accepted Lee’s offer to join his staff as aide-de-camp with the rank of major.\(^6^3\)

To fill the position of military secretary, Lee turned to Armistead Long, whose considerable abilities he had already witnessed. In April, Lee wrote to Long, who was still serving as Pemberton’s chief of artillery, offering him a position as military secretary with the rank of colonel. Long promptly accepted Lee’s offer and traveled to Richmond to join him, arriving in the middle of May.\(^6^4\) Lee promptly put Long to work writing to General John H. Winder, commander of the garrison of Richmond, ordering him to send all available artillery to join Joseph E. Johnston’s army at once. Long also wrote Captain Sidney Smith Lee, his
commanding general’s brother, placing him in charge of the naval forces defending Drewry’s Bluff and assuring him that the army would support him.65

Thus, Lee had assembled a carefully chosen group of mostly tested professionals to serve as his personal staff, and entrusted them with helping him manage the copious amounts of paperwork that poured into his office.66 While Lee assembled and utilized his staff, the Federals had begun a siege of Johnston’s positions at Yorktown, and rather than face McClellan’s heavy siege guns and gunboats, Johnston withdrew to the outskirts of Richmond by the middle of May. On the last day of that month, he launched a surprise attack on the portion of the Union army that was isolated on the south side of the rain-swollen Chickahominy River, thus beginning the Battle of Seven Pines.67

Anxious for the safety of Richmond, Lee and his staff tried to participate in the battle. On May 30, the day before the Confederate attack began, Lee sent Long to Johnston telling him, in Long’s words, “that he would be glad to participate in the battle.” As Long explained, “[Lee] had no desire to interfere with his command, but simply wished to aid him on the field to the best of his ability.” Johnston replied courteously that he would be glad to have Lee’s presence and services, and expressed his desire that Lee would bring reinforcements with him. Whether or not Lee really expressed such an uncharacteristic request to Johnston, it is certain that he demonstrated a marked desire to either participate in the battle or at least to obtain news of the struggle as it unfolded.68 Accompanied by his staff, Lee rode out of Richmond to Johnston’s headquarters, where he met President Davis, who had similarly ridden out to observe the results of the fighting. It was here that the most inexperienced member of Lee’s staff, Marshall, had his first taste of warfare, as he later recollected that this was the first time he had ever heard the sound of musketry.69 As the evening progressed, it soon became apparent that the Confederate
attack had stalled after achieving initial success. Johnston rode out in person to attempt to rectify the situation, and was severely wounded shortly afterward. Command of the Confederate army devolved upon Major General Gustavus W. Smith, but he was manifestly unfit for the position. As President Davis rode back to the capitol with Lee, he confided to the general that he would reassign him to temporarily command Johnston’s army. The next day, Walter Taylor wrote the official orders announcing that General Robert E. Lee was assuming command of the force he officially renamed the Army of Northern Virginia.70

Between April 1861 and May 1862, General Lee had gone through three major assignments, and his personal staff had been reorganized multiple times. As the only officer to serve with Lee throughout this time, Taylor had learned the essential qualities and duties of a staff member. Although his youthful ambition still gnawed at him and he sought a field assignment, he soon accepted his service with Lee and gradually assumed greater responsibilities. He learned to perform reconnaissance duties and to write orders to subordinate commanders in Lee’s name. Additionally, by late 1861, Taylor was signing some orders on his own authority. As head of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, Lee had created his own personal staff. Armistead Long, whose abilities Lee had witnessed firsthand, joined Lee’s staff and became one of the general’s closest friends and most ardent postwar defenders. Together, Taylor, and Long helped Lee to construct formidable defenses and bring order to a neglected department.

Once he was recalled to Richmond in March 1862, Lee assembled the nucleus of the personal staff he was to employ for the rest of the war. He retained Taylor, who had by now matured into a fully capable aide and assistant adjutant-general, and soon asked Long to rejoin him. To complete his staff, Lee selected two men with solid wartime records and another man
who lacked any military experience, but enjoyed favorable political connections and possessed extensive legal writing talent. With this “military family” of five men, Lee ran the armies of the entire Confederacy under President Davis’ supervision, and employed each man’s peculiar talents frequently.

In June 1862, however, Lee and his small personal staff faced a new challenge. Lee endured ridicule as a failure as a field commander in western Virginia and to an extent in South Carolina, and was now entrusted with the command of the largest field army in the Confederacy with its back literally at the walls of its capital city. It remained to be seen if Lee—or his personal staff—could handle the demands and strain of maintaining effective control of a major army over a large force on the battlefield.
Chapter 3: Seven Days of Battle and Missed Opportunities

Lee, having assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia, faced the imposing task of hurling back the enormous Union Army of the Potomac that stood at the gates of the Confederate capital. His efforts to force the enemy back from Richmond, soon dubbed the Seven Days’ Battles, marked the first time that he and his staff had been tasked with commanding and controlling a large army in the field. While McClellan’s army was eventually driven back from Richmond, the Seven Days’ Battles witnessed multiple and alarming instances of very poor battlefield coordination and communication. Some units repeatedly stood idle while others fought themselves to a frazzle in poorly-planned assaults against well-entrenched Federal troops. In the end, although the Seven Days’ Battles were a strategic Confederate victory and saved the capital from capture for over two more years, they were almost as remarkable for missed opportunities for Lee and his generals as they were for their overall military significance.

Attempting to affix blame for these lost opportunities and failures of coordination, writers have differed widely in their assessments of Lee and his subordinates. Although Edward A. Pollard and some other early writers held Lee himself responsible for the Confederate disappointments, such critiques almost entirely vanished until the “Lee cult” took hold after the general’s death.¹ Many, especially former Confederates like Edward P. Alexander, blamed Major General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson for his repeated and bizarre lapses into lethargy and habitual tardiness during the campaign. Others claimed that Lee’s battle plans were simply too complicated for his subordinate generals to manage, and that Lee himself was too inexperienced to realize this until too late. Still others have emphasized the army’s very unwieldy command structure that Lee inherited from Joseph E. Johnston, claiming that the
army’s organization was so inefficient that it seriously hindered any attempt at efficient, coordinated command.

Historians have blamed Lee’s personal staff for the failures of the Seven Days more often than any other individual or group. In fact, critics of Lee’s staff have referred to the Seven Days’ Battles as evidence to support their claims more often than any other of the general’s military actions. Many writers of narrative histories of the Civil War or the Army of Northern Virginia have only referred to Lee’s staff in the context of the Seven Days. In his evaluation of the campaign, Lee’s biographer Douglas Southall Freeman blasted the staff members, referring to their work during the Seven Days as “amateurish and incompetent.” Later, Freeman elaborated on this criticism at length:

The campaign will always remain a tragic monument to defective staff work…The condition was so glaring and so continuous that a detailed list of the errors of the staff would be a review of the campaign….It is hardly too much to say that McClellan owed his escape primarily to the excellence of his staff and to the inefficiency of Lee’s.2

In his subsequent work, Lee’s Lieutenants, Freeman referred to the second phase of the Seven Days in a chapter simply titled, “A Tragedy of Staff,” and claimed that Lee’s army had driven the Federals away from Richmond despite “the worst imaginable staff work.”3 Although Freeman tempered his assessment of individual staff officers, his depiction of Lee’s staff as performing poorly during the Seven Days, like the rest of his writing, has proven highly influential.

Another preeminent historian of the Army of Northern Virginia, Jennings Cropper Wise, similarly censured Lee’s staff while excusing the artillery’s shortcomings during the Seven Days. While admitting that Confederate artillery was very poorly handled throughout the campaign, Wise insisted that the blame rested on Lee’s personal staff officers who failed to “assert themselves” and take responsibility for ordering the heavy guns into position. In particular, although the Confederate failure at Malvern Hill at the end of the Seven Days on July 1 was
partially due to the inability of the southern long arm to compete with its Union counterpart, Wise argued that Lee’s personal staff had not adequately coordinated the planned Confederate attack and had failed to communicate Lee’s plans to the army’s artillery chief, Brigadier General William N. Pendleton, at all.

Feeling the criticism of former Confederates who rebuked Jackson for his flawed performance during the Seven Days, that general’s biographers harshly rebuked Lee’s staff for the campaign’s disappointments. Lieutenant Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, Jr., who conducted extensive interviews with Jackson’s surviving staff members, became convinced that the missed opportunities of the Seven Days were in no way “Stonewall’s” fault. Instead, his biography of Jackson accused Lee’s staff of dereliction of duty in a wide variety of functions from preparing maps of the Chickahominy River Basin to failure to arrange guides for Jackson’s command to simply neglecting to maintain Lee’s communications with his famous subordinate. In part, these criticisms were obviously motivated by Henderson’s desire to exonerate Jackson, but they have had some long-lasting repercussions, especially among scholars of “Stonewall’s” life and career.

James I. Robertson, Jr., for example, similarly faulted Lee’s personal staff for the mishaps of the campaign. Although he cited Freeman as claiming that Lee’s subordinate generals should be held responsible for the mistakes, he argued that Lee and his staff bore much of the blame. In his words, “worst of all, the lack of a competent general staff left Lee out of touch…Basic communication and coordination were sadly missing; and until more control came from the top, the situation was not going to improve.”45 Robertson here confused the duties of the general staff with those of the personal staff, but his overall critique of the failure of command and coordination was similar to Freeman’s. While he did not find as much fault with Lee’s personal staff as Henderson had, his overall tone toward its members was highly critical.
Stephen W. Sears did not dwell at length on the responsibility for the multiple missed Confederate opportunities of the campaign, but he did blame “poor staff work at Lee’s headquarters” for one of them. He also stated that the defeat at Malvern Hill “argued once again for General Lee to write his own orders instead of relying on staff officers to interpret them.” In both cases, Sears referred to mistakes made either by Chilton or by the staff members of Lee’s subordinates, and offered no evaluation of the quality of Lee’s personal staff either individually or collectively. He concluded that Lee learned from the Seven Days “to tailor his tactics to better fit his army and hold more tightly to the reins of command.” Overall, Sears was an interesting and perhaps revealing exception to the prevailing scholarly trend of affixing blame on Lee’s staff.\(^5\)

Sears’ voice, however, has been an isolated one on this issue. In his recent book on the history of the Army of Northern Virginia, Joseph Glatthaar repeated much of Freeman’s assessment of Lee’s personal staff in the Seven Days. While he claimed that Lee’s plans were too complicated, he also insisted that the general’s staff exacerbated a bad situation. As he phrased it, “Although Lee had high hopes for the attack, timing and coordination were so complicated that even a veteran army would have struggled to execute it effectively, and neither his staff nor his key subordinates rose to the challenge.” Glatthaar then stated that “A lack of effective combat support and staff work worsened the problems for Lee and his army….Lee’s staff officers failed to take charge and at times issued confusing orders.”\(^6\)

Even writers whose work is usually more favorable to Lee’s personal staff have heavily criticized its actions during the Seven Days’ Battles. Robert E. K. Krick wrote that although Lee’s staff was mostly composed of able officers, they failed Lee badly during the Seven Days. Similarly, while his book argued overall that Confederate staff officers, including Lee’s, “did
their jobs well,” J. Boone Bartholomees admitted that the Seven Days were a prime example of Lee’s “reluctance to use his staff to supervise.”

While such criticisms are not without foundation, both Lee and his staff were learning how to control a large army for the first time. Freeman realized this; although he condemned Lee’s staff as a group, he softened when assessing them as individuals and accounting for the circumstances they faced:

Colonel Chilton, a West Pointer, was somewhat of a misfit, more than an aide but less than a chief of staff. Major Taylor was an admirable officer, young and diligent, whose only weakness was a longing for field service…Marshall, a Baltimore lawyer, was excellent in drafting papers, Talcott was an able engineer, and Venable a man of most superior intellect, but none of the staff, except Taylor and Long, had been with Lee more than a few months when this campaign opened, and Chilton had been at headquarters only three weeks….Lee, for that matter, was scarcely more adept in handling a staff at this time than the officers were in serving him.

A thorough analysis of the mostly-published primary sources, especially the Official Records, supports Freeman’s assessment. Lee was a brilliant battlefield commander, and his personal staff was almost entirely composed of capable, intelligent men. The multiple squandered chances and neglected possibilities of the Seven Days resulted from a wide variety of causes, but they were not the result of chronic or characteristic ineptitude on the part of Lee or his personal staff. Rather they stemmed from the mutual inexperience at army headquarters combined with the shortcomings of Lee’s subordinates.

Once Lee formally assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia on June 2, he established his headquarters in a vacant home outside Richmond’s city limits. The next day, he took Long on an inspection tour of city’s existing defenses and, as Long recorded, found them very poorly constructed. That afternoon, he called a meeting of the army’s division commanders to ascertain their commands’ conditions. After the conference, Lee confided to
Marshall that many of his generals were in favor of withdrawing even closer to Richmond, and that he strongly opposed such measures.

Lee and his staff were in a highly inauspicious situation. Although the Union lines had been driven back about one mile under the relentless Confederate assaults of May 31, the Army of the Potomac, still over 100,000 strong, was still within five miles of the Confederate capital. Four of the five Union army corps were now entrenching on the south, or Richmond side, of the Chickahominy River. General McClellan was moving his enormous siege cannon to the Union lines straddling the river. From there, they could open an irresistible bombardment and literally blast the Army of Northern Virginia out of its trenches. To oppose this mighty host, Lee had about 66,000 men immediately available and another 14,000 in the Shenandoah Valley under Jackson.¹¹

To compound matters, the Army of Northern Virginia’s organization was badly flawed. It contained six independent infantry divisions and the “Command” of Major General John B. Magruder, comprising three smaller infantry divisions. Its artillery was mostly distributed among the infantry with a small army reserve commanded by Brigadier General William N. Pendleton, and its cavalry was grouped in a single oversize brigade under Brigadier General James E. B. “Jeb” Stuart. “Stonewall” Jackson’s Army of the Valley, with two infantry divisions, was also subject to Lee’s orders. Lee’s personal staff, which had been built around his administrative duties as President Davis’ military advisor, was then tasked with issuing orders directly to all of these commands on the field of battle. Such an inefficient organization was bound to strain even a larger and far more experienced group of staff officers than Taylor, Long, Marshall, Talcott, and Venable. Although Captain A. P. Mason, of Joseph E. Johnston’s staff, remained with Lee and temporarily joined his personal staff, he was not nearly enough.¹²
To make matters even worse, Charles Venable did not arrive in Virginia for weeks. Although Venable had accepted Lee’s offer to join his personal staff, the Federal navy was even then threatening Vicksburg. General Smith did not feel it proper for his adjutant to leave the post while the enemy lurked so near. As a result, Venable did not leave Mississippi until June 15. He did not arrive in Virginia until June 23, and he was completely unfamiliar both with the area of operations near Richmond and Lee’s plans.\(^\text{13}\)

On June 4, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Hall Chilton, of the Adjutant and Inspector General’s Office, was assigned to the Army of Northern Virginia as its Chief of Staff. When Virginia seceded in 1861, Major Chilton resigned his services as army paymaster. On April 29, he offered his services to the Old Dominion, and was commissioned as a lieutenant colonel of cavalry.\(^\text{14}\) Probably because of his administrative background, General Lee’s then-chief of staff, Robert Garnett, assigned Lieutenant Colonel Chilton to duty as superintendent of the Virginia Provisional Army’s recruiting services.

Within a month, Garnett reassigned Chilton to be the commandant of a cavalry instruction camp at Ashland, Virginia, where he relieved Richard S. Ewell for service organizing cavalry at Manassas Junction. Chilton gained the affection of his recruits and junior officers, who referred to him as “Uncle Robert.” He proved an able trainer and administrator, and Garnett relied on him to organize cavalry units and send them to Colonel Magruder, whose forces on the Virginia Peninsula faced Federal incursions from Fortress Monroe. By June 14, 1861, Chilton had accepted a commission as lieutenant colonel in the Confederate army and a position in the Adjutant and Inspector General’s Department in Richmond, under the army’s Adjutant General, Samuel Cooper.\(^\text{15}\) He probably owed his rapid promotion both to his familiarity with President Davis from the Mexican-American War and to his demonstrated bureaucratic aptitude.
Although Cooper held no field command, he was the highest-ranking general in the entire Confederate army almost throughout the war, responsible for the administration of all Confederate forces from Virginia to Florida to Texas. As assistant adjutant general serving under Cooper, Chilton conducted correspondence with General Joseph Johnston at Manassas, Lieutenant Colonel Turner Ashby, in Jefferson County, Virginia, General William W. Loring at Winchester, Virginia, and General Benjamin Huger, in Norfolk, among others. He wrote messages for Cooper, Secretaries of War Leroy P. Walker and Judah P. Benjamin, and for President Davis himself. He possessed a good working relationship with Cooper, whom he referred to as “my warmest friend,” and developed a correspondence with Davis that he maintained for the rest of his life.16

In his first days as chief of staff, Chilton displayed his ample administrative talents. The day he assumed his new post, Chilton issued a well-worded order for work details to build and improve the Richmond defenses, sharing the responsibility for doing so between the various units and providing pay compensation for those men willing to undertake such allegedly “slave” labor. The next day, he issued a general order to improve discipline in the army and reduce the absenteeism always prevalent whenever a Civil War army was in the immediate vicinity of a major city, and soon afterward wrote another general order to monitor the army’s waste of food and ammunition. The new chief of staff also assisted Lee and his subordinate generals as they reorganized the army’s brigades, placing regiments from the same state together as required by a newly-passed Confederate law. Chilton even successfully managed a dispute between cavalry chief Stuart, politically-powerful Colonel Thomas R. R. Cobb, and General Henry Wise over the control of cavalry pickets south of the James River.17
Unfortunately, the Seven Days Campaign would soon demonstrate that Robert H. Chilton was ill-suited to be Lee’s chief of staff. Unlike Taylor, who complained about his workload but soon adapted to perform his demanding tasks with considerable skill, Chilton revealed his limitations very quickly under pressure. His coordination of the army’s subordinate commanders was lacking, and rather than take personal responsibility for misunderstandings as Taylor had done with Joseph Johnston, Chilton blamed others and allowed petty squabbling to undermine his rank and effectiveness as chief of staff. Because of his shortcomings, Chilton provided most of the examples for writers who claimed that Lee’s entire staff was inept.18

With Chilton and Mason, Lee formed his first proper field personal staff. Chilton now officially held the office of chief of staff, and Armistead Long retained his position as military secretary, ostensibly assisting Lee and Chilton with order writing. Walter Taylor was formally redesignated “aide-de-camp,” joining Charles Marshall, Thomas M. R. Talcott, and on June 23, Charles Venable. Having served as assistant adjutant-general under Johnston, A. R. Mason remained as assistant adjutant-general, thus observing the regulations that attached him to the Army of Northern Virginia, not to its commander.19 Allegedly, Mason would be responsible for all personnel and routine paperwork. In Long’s opinion, the Dabbs House headquarters were small, but comfortable and neat:

Our headquarters are very comfortable. The front room on the house floor is the adjutant-general’s office. The general’s private office is in rear of this. There all the confidential business of the army is transacted, the general’s usual attendant being his military secretary or some other member of his personal staff.20 Although Long admitted that Lee’s headquarters were not elaborate, he emphasized that they were pleasant and efficiently organized.

Long’s balmy view of headquarters likely stemmed from his particular function; although he was officially Lee’s military secretary and thus allegedly occupied with office functions, Lee
wisely utilized his extensive experience commanding and inspecting artillery in the field. Just as he had in Georgia and South Carolina, Lee often sent Long on inspection tours of the Confederate lines defending Richmond. As early as June 5, when the Federals suddenly and severely increased their periodic shelling of the defenses, Lee dispatched Long to investigate, trusting him to keep both himself and President Davis informed if anything serious occurred. Sometimes Lee went with Long to reconnoiter the Federal lines, and in other instances, he allowed his secretary to inspect the trenches alone while he attended to office paperwork. On June 10, Long issued a circular in his own name, calling on the division commanders to “cause the utmost care and vigilance to be used in protecting and watching their front.” After reminding Lee’s subordinates of the necessity for gathering intelligence, Long concluded by reminding them of the importance of fortifying their positions and maintaining discipline. Later, Lee had Long issue instructions to both Stuart and the army’s chief engineer, Major Walter H. Stevens, on the placement and garrisoning of troops on the south side of the James River. Lee thus allowed Long to assume great authority and responsibility from the start of his tenure, and relied on his extensive experience.

Long was not alone in his inspection work; in Marshall’s words, when Lee was not present himself to inspect his army’s fortifications, “he sent members of his staff constantly to observe the progress of the work.” While Marshall did not specify which members of his staff Lee sent on these inspection tours, it is likely that since he used the highly inexperienced Marshall for such work, he also utilized experienced engineer Talcott. Such supervision was necessary, for the men resisted performing such menial labor, complaining loudly enough for Marshall and Lee to hear.

In reality, although Lee, Long, Talcott, and Venable all possessed experience in building and evaluating fortifications, neither Lee nor any of his staff officers were prepared for the sheer
volume of office work needed just to maintain a large army in the field. Certainly, the workload was an unpleasant surprise to Taylor. Even fifteen years later, the volume of paperwork at the headquarters of a large field army astonished him. The pressing problem, then, became how to handle such a mountain of tedious official correspondence and free Lee himself to focus on the larger strategic situation. As Taylor remembered, Lee relied on a trial-and-error method, before finally reassigning Taylor to the unofficial job of assistant adjutant-general:

When the staff was first organized…it was his habit to have the members of his staff arranged around him in a semicircle, and as each paper was submitted to him he would pass it to one of the staff, in regular order, with instructions as to how it should be disposed of. This went on for a short time, and then he called me to him and said that he would have to put me back in the office. I knew what he meant, and I acted accordingly. He wished relief from such annoyances; he had real work to do and wished to be rid of these matters of detail.

Although he would not be formally designated as assistant adjutant-general for many months, from this time forward, Taylor handled the vast majority of the Army of Northern Virginia’s official office work.

Leaving Taylor to his new task, Lee formulated his plans to free Richmond from the menacing invaders. In mid-June, he sent cavalry chief Stuart on a reconnaissance mission that revealed that Union right flank did not rest on any natural obstacle and was thus “exposed.” Although Lee had excluded his personal staff from knowledge of Stuart’s ride, he soon deeply involved them in the planning and preparations for his impending offensive. He continued to send Long on inspections of the army’s defenses and joined him in scouting enemy positions. Lee also had his staff spread false rumors of reinforcements being sent to join Jackson’s Army of the Valley for a strike up the Shenandoah towards Washington. To reinforce this deception, Lee had Chilton order three brigades to Jackson by railroad. He used Marshall to further augment the deception, sending him to the depot with detailed instructions to the officer in charge impressing on him the necessity of getting the troops to the Valley as quickly as possible “if they were to be
in time to help Jackson in his advance.” In reality, Lee planned to bring Jackson’s reinforced army to assault McClellan’s vulnerable flank, and had already secretly ordered him to start his troops toward Richmond. In order to prepare the rest of his forces, Lee had Chilton write a general order establishing the command structure, paying special attention to the artillery.29

On June 23, Lee convened a council of his division commanders and the recently-arrived Jackson, who had made a highly secretive ride of over twelve hours to be present at the conference. This meeting was strictly confidential; none of Lee’s staff officers were present, and the commanding general met his ranking subordinates in an upstairs room of the Dabbs House rather than his usual first-floor office. Lee outlined his plans to crush McClellan’s right wing. Having outlined the army’s overall objectives, Lee left the room so his generals could work out the details.30 Once his generals had departed, Lee remained in his upstairs room for most of the day, poring over his plans. Meanwhile, the general kept his staff busy copying and circulating a congratulatory order announcing Stuart’s spectacular successes to the army.31 On June 24, Lee drafted his final battle order; the attack on the Union flank was to commence two days later.

The plan was complicated, calling for six Confederate divisions to attack the Union right in its front, flank, and rear simultaneously. In the meantime, the rest of the army would hold the new defensive lines near Richmond whose construction Long had so carefully supervised. The order even made minute arrangements for supply and road traffic problems, stipulating that the men were to have three days’ cooked rations in their haversacks and that artillery and wagons were to keep to the right of the roads. Lee gave the plans to most of his staff for copying and distribution to his generals, assigning the recently-arrived Venable the task of familiarizing himself with the roads instead.32 As chief of staff, Chilton supervised the reproduction and transmission of the order, but he had no part in its formulation.33 Throughout the coming battles,
although Lee’s battle plans would often prove too complex or unrealistic for his generals to execute properly, they would be his designs, not those of his personal staff.

Having issued his orders, Lee set out for the front with his entire staff, having Chilton notify President Davis where they could be found. They assumed a position near the Union right and anxiously waited for battle sounds to confirm that Jackson had his men in position. As events unfolded, they waited for a very long time; at 4:00 P. M., the Confederates launched a frontal assault without Jackson, and were repulsed with very heavy casualties. Jackson’s troops eventually made their way behind the Federals, but they were several hours too late. Lee’s staff, perhaps failing to consider that Jackson was unfamiliar with the terrain, had failed to provide him with a guide. 34

Lee and his staff had done virtually nothing all day except passively observe the action. They adopted a rather complacent attitude; as Marshall expressed it, “Jackson’s prescribed march should already have made his presence felt on the enemy’s right, unless he had encountered a serious opposition, and it was assumed that, had such been the case, it would have been made known.” Lee did not use his personal staff officers at all until very late in the day, when he ordered that support be sent to the attacking troops and dispatched a message to the Confederates on the south side of the Chickahominy River ordering them to hold their trenches at all costs. 35

Jackson’s biographers reserved their harshest criticisms of Lee’s staff for the Battle of Mechanicsville. G. F. R. Henderson labeled his discussion “Shortcomings of the Staff,” and argued that the “duty of keeping up communications should not have been left to Jackson, but have been seen to at headquarters.” James I. Robertson, Jr. used even stronger language, claiming that “some previous writers are wrong in claiming that Lee’s staff work was poor. It
was nonexistent. Mechanicsville was therefore a shakedown action by a new army seeking experience as an offensive machine.” 36 Despite Jackson’s struggles, Lee’s staff did not perform ineptly; Lee simply never used them, and his army paid a hefty price with over 1,400 casualties. 37

On the morning of June 27, Lee found that the Federals, aware of Jackson’s presence on their right flank, had withdrawn from their position. He finally dispatched Taylor to find Jackson and summon him for a personal conference. 38 To clarify any confusion, Lee met with Jackson at noon, questioned him for some time regarding the events of the previous day, and ordered him to continue his movement around the flank of the new Union position.

Meanwhile, Lee personal staff officers attended to myriad details in and near Mechanicsville. They telegraphed the Confederates once again to hold their lines south of the Chickahominy, arranged retrieval of the salvageable debris from the battlefield, and supervised the repair of the Chickahominy bridges to enable the army’s wings to readily reinforce each other if necessary. 39 Crucially, Lee did not send any of them to scout the new Union position. This failure bore bitter fruit when, after a sluggish pursuit, Lee’s divisions discovered the Federals strongly ensconced behind a sluggish creek near a grist mill known after its owner as Gaines’ Mill. 40 Riding out to examine the enemy position, Lee and his personal staff came under enemy fire, and the staffers urged their commander to withdraw. 41 Lacking precise information about the enemy numbers and placement, Lee remained confident that Jackson would flank this new position and ordered an attack. Once again, the Confederates suffered dreadful casualties. All the while, neither Lee nor his staff had heard from Jackson. 42

With the battle hanging in the balance, Lee finally allowed his personal staff to use their abilities. He sent orders to nearby commanders to join the attack and dispatched Taylor and several other staffers to find Jackson and ascertain what had gone wrong with “Stonewall’s”
After finally locating Jackson, Taylor delivered Lee’s order to attack immediately, but even then, “Stonewall’s” attacks were disjointed and had little effect on the well-positioned Federals. It was now obvious that the enemy lines could not be carried by anything short of a general offensive by all available divisions, and Lee sent all of his personal staff officers away to order various units into line.

By about 7:00 p.m., the united Confederate attack finally began. Lee’s staff and subordinates did a good job coordinating this final offensive; in James Longstreet’s words, “The messages from General Lee were…marked by their prompt and successful execution.” Despite its very strong defensive position, the Federals broke and fled to the rear, giving up thousands of men as prisoners and surrendering fourteen pieces of artillery. Lee had won his first battlefield victory, but at a prohibitively high cost; over 8,000 Confederates had been killed, wounded, or captured. Even counting their heavy losses in prisoners, the Federals still only suffered about 6,000 total casualties.

As a result of Lee’s victory, McClellan lost his connection to his army’s main supply base at White House Landing and was consequently forced to retreat. Lee and his personal staff spent June 28 sending messages and conducting reconnaissance, trying to determine by which route McClellan would retire. In particular, Lee relied on Chilton to communicate with General John B. Magruder, commanding south of the Chickahominy River. Chilton’s correspondence revealed the confusion at army headquarters:

My second note. Seems first was in error, the men turning out to be your own. The possession of that point would seem to liberate all the forces on his left, guarding Garnett’s plateau. They can be used in driving the enemy from his other positions. We shall proceed on this side. How far [does] his right extend up the Chickahominy? Jackson’s division is at Grapevine Bridge; Ewell sent to Dispatch Station. I will communicate whenever I can discover anything of importance; you do the same, and operate on the principle before established- to hold your lines at all hazards, defending the approaches to Richmond, moving against the enemy whenever you can do so to advantage.
Despite Lee’s and Chilton’s repeated instructions to Magruder, that general failed to notice when McClellan pulled most of his army out of its trenches and began moving southward toward the James. In the end, once the Confederates ascertained that the Union army had withdrawn southward on the morning of June 29, Chilton had to write Magruder again to reassure him that the enemy had left his front.48

As McClellan would inevitably be delayed by the nearly impenetrable White Oak Swamp, Lee saw a golden opportunity to trap and destroy the Army of the Potomac in the bogs as it retreated. Lee decided to explain Magruder’s orders in person and dispatched Chilton to summon Magruder. Magruder was to pursue the enemy, delaying the Union rearguard as long as possible. Most of Jackson’s Command was to repair Grapevine Bridge over the Chickahominy and support Magruder’s assault. Meanwhile, the rest of the army would cross the river and attempt to get ahead of the enemy by marching on better roads west of the swamp.49 Lee accompanied Magruder until the latter’s command had crossed over the former Union lines near Seven Pines. Magruder, known to be excitable, was also being heavily medicated for an illness, and the strain of the last few days was extremely apparent to all who saw him. He soon became convinced that the Federals were massing a huge force in front of him to crush his command and sent one of his staff to Lee with a frantic note begging for assistance.50

Meanwhile, Robert Chilton had already revealed his considerable limitations as chief of staff. While Lee had given Jackson his orders in person before crossing the river to Magruder, Chilton had written the day’s instructions for J. E. B. Stuart. To make sure that McClellan was indeed moving southward, it was imperative that Stuart remain north of the Chickahominy. Accordingly, in his order, Chilton expressly forbade the cavalry chief from bringing his troopers over the river, but stressed that they were to picket the river crossings and thus “advise”
Jackson’s Command, “who will hold the crossings until reinforced.” This message strongly implied that Jackson was only supposed to hold the north side of the crossings, and not to cross his men to assist Magruder. “Stonewall” followed his instructions as he understood them, and when one of Magruder’s division commanders wrote to him asking for support, he replied that he had not been ordered to assist him. This was not the last time that Chilton misinterpreted a discretionary order as mandatory, and his errors would prove costly both in this instance and in the future.51

In response to Magruder’s alarm, Lee sent reinforcements back with Magruder’s staff officer and told him to reassure his commander that Jackson had been ordered to support him.52 By now suspecting that something was amiss, Lee also sent Taylor to check on Magruder and Jackson in person. In one of the few instances in which Taylor failed to complete an assignment, he confessed to Magruder that he did not know the way to the Grapevine Bridge, and agreed to hand his note to one of Magruder’s staff members for delivery. Taylor offered to accompany Magruder’s staffer to clarify “Stonewall’s” orders, but decided to return to Lee instead. He arrived as Lee was writing a harsh note to Magruder, and told the commanding general that Magruder believed that Jackson had not been ordered to support him. In response, Lee amended his message, adding that “I learn from Major Taylor that you are under the impression that General Jackson has been ordered not to support you,” and insisted that “on the contrary, he has been ordered to do so, and to push the pursuit vigorously.”53 If Taylor had reached Jackson as he was ordered to do, then he would probably have discovered the mixup in “Stonewall’s” orders and could at least have brought Lee word that Chilton had garbled his instructions. While this would have been too late to allow a combined assault on the Union positions at Savage’s Station, it would have helped save Magruder from the subsequent destruction of his reputation.54 As it
was, Magruder attacked the Federal rear guard alone on June 29, and although he inflicted over 1,000 casualties while suffering only about 400 of his own, he had clearly disappointed Lee.55

Although Lee had missed an opportunity to trap a part of the Union Army at Savage’s Station, June 30 presented him with his best opportunity yet to destroy it. The Army of the Potomac was then deep in White Oak Swamp, where its artillery and wagons jammed the very few roads and hindered its retreat. Lee sent his entire army in pursuit that morning, ordering all of its divisions to converge on the Federals from three separate directions.56 Taking no chances that his instructions would be misunderstood, Lee delivered his orders to Jackson and then Magruder in person. Remembering Magruder’s failures of the previous day, Lee assigned him a local guide and twice sent messages to confirm that he was marching as directed.57 Despite this, the plan again miscarried, as only two of the army’s eleven divisions attacked. After giving Jackson and Magruder their orders, Lee had no contact at all with them the remainder of the day.58 As James Longstreet recalled, although Lee and President Davis and their respective staffs were all with his command, no one was sent to check on Magruder or Jackson. Major Edward P. Alexander, a member of the army’s general staff agreed, remembering that “hours we stood there waiting- waiting for something that never happened.” In later years, while he continued to hold Jackson primarily responsible, Alexander elaborated, writing that “No commander of any army does his whole duty who simply gives orders, however well considered,” and pointedly adding that “he should supervise their execution, either in person or by staff officers, constantly, day & night, so that if the machine balks at any point he may be most promptly informed & may promptly start it to work.”59 The Union Army was allowed to continue its retreat, and Lee had lost his best chance to destroy it.60
Although Lee was guilty of failing to use Taylor, Long, Marshall, Venable, or Talcott to communicate, Chilton had failed him again in communicating with Magruder on June 30. Lee ordered Magruder to reinforce Theophilus Holmes’ Division and gave Chilton the task of guiding him to it. Chilton was ignorant of the terrain, but he unsuccessfully tried to carry out his assignment; as Magruder reported, Chilton led the troops along the road for a short distance before telling Magruder to march his command “diagonally through the woods” to reach its destination. Such an order was virtually impossible for six brigades and their artillery to execute in the heat of a Virginia summer. Magruder reported that he was unable to locate Holmes’ men, adding that his brigadiers found Chilton’s orders impossible to carry out. Chilton did not remain with Magruder or send a message to ensure that Magruder had found the unit he was supposed to support.

While Magruder wandered through the woods, Chilton continued his inept performance. The chief of staff correctly determined that James Longstreet’s force was in much greater need of reinforcement than Holmes’ and ordered Magruder to march his troops back to support him without taking local road routes or conditions into consideration. Magruder and his worn-out men finally reached Longstreet’s position at 2:00 a.m., far too late to participate in the battle. Chilton’s blundering had rendered Magruder’s command useless to the Confederates, who sorely needed reinforcements to press their advantage on this critical day. Similarly, he wrote a misleading dispatch to Stuart late that night, stating that the Federals had been “headed off” in the swamp and expressing Lee’s desire for the cavalry to cross the Chickahominy to aid in the pursuit. Unfortunately for the Confederates, Chilton’s note was impossibly vague. Stuart had to ask the courier who brought it when it was written, as Chilton neglected to indicate this; additionally, because the chief of staff failed to suggest a practical route for Stuart to reach the
battlefield, his cavalry had to retrace its steps for a significant distance looking for a river
crossing and played no role in the next day’s struggle at Malvern Hill.\textsuperscript{63}

On July 1, the Army of the Potomac had escaped from White Oak Swamp and taken a
very strong position at Malvern Hill. Lee finally used his personal staff to control his army,
sending Taylor and Talcott to retrieve and personally conduct two lost divisions to the front.\textsuperscript{64}
The army commander hastily accepted Longstreet’s promise that he could drive the Union forces
into the river with massed artillery. Lee’s plan thus called for a converging artillery barrage to
pound the enemy position simultaneously from both flanks. Once the Confederate cannons had
driven the Federal guns from the hill, six Confederate divisions would storm up the slope and
overwhelm the Union infantry. Feeling unwell, Lee left his headquarters to reconnoiter the
Union right, leaving Chilton in charge of positioning the troops and writing the attack orders.\textsuperscript{65}

Chilton badly mishandled his assignment. His placement of the attacking units was
utterly careless. The chief of staff had to personally position Magruder’s Command, as that
general’s maps and guides were so poor that even after reaching the battlefield, he became lost
again.\textsuperscript{66} Ultimately, Chilton did not finish placing Magruder’s men, but left the job to Magruder
and Longstreet, and left for headquarters to draft the attack order. He did not supervise the
placement of a single battery for the preliminary bombardment, and neglected to mention that
they were to all come into position and open fire at the same time. As a result, the massed
Federal cannon on Malvern Hill simply knocked the Confederate artillery out as it came into
action, one battery at a time. Most crucially of all, Chilton had no part in the positioning of any
infantry units except Magruder’s.\textsuperscript{67}

Chilton’s final attack order reflected the chief-of-staff’s lack of attention to the plan. It
simply 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.” As Bartholomees described it, “This was a poorly-conceived order without a hint of the coordination needed for a multibrigade assault.” The order placed responsibility for ordering the charge on Brigadier General Lewis A. Armistead, whose brigade was the closest to the Union position. “A yell” was a very poor signal for an attack amidst the crash of artillery and rumble of musketry on a Civil War battlefield, and the order did not provide any timetable. Additionally, there was no contingency plan for what to do if the artillery bombardment failed to break the Union lines. The orders lacked any timetable, either of when they were written or when they were supposed to take effect. Finally, Chilton did not specify which units were to “charge with a yell,” or how they were to be supported if they broke through.

Having drafted a fundamentally flawed attack order, Chilton did not even see that it was properly distributed. Although Lewis A. Armistead’s Brigade was the obvious key to the entire attack, Armistead never mentioned getting the order in his official report. His division commander, Benjamin Huger, made it clear that he never received the order. Chilton apparently intended for Magruder to command Huger’s troops during the battle, but he did not make this at all clear to Huger, Magruder, or the brigade commanders. While Magruder did receive Chilton’s order, he never shared it with his subordinates, simply ordering them to support Armistead when he advanced. Likewise, on the Confederate left, although Major General D. H. Hill received the order, he did so through Jackson, not from Chilton. Another division commander never received the order. Overall, the chief of staff’s performance at Malvern Hill smacked of extreme, almost criminal neglect.

Although Lee himself ordered the final Confederate assault, Chilton’s bungling contributed to the costliness of the army commander’s decision. By late afternoon, Lee,
persuaded that the enemy position was too strong to successfully assault, had decided to cancel
the infantry attack. Suddenly, a courier came from Magruder claiming that Armistead’s Brigade
had repulsed a Union offensive. While Armistead had actually only driven a Union skirmish line
back, the message seemingly confirmed that Lee’s plans were succeeding. He sent the
messenger back with orders to attack immediately. The subsequent assault, launched at about
5:00 P.M., was a total disaster. Confederate units were hurled in disjointed, almost piecemeal
fashion into the massed Federal firepower of dozens of cannon and thousands of waiting
muskets. In the end, Lee’s army sustained over 5,000 casualties while inflicting less than a third
as many on the enemy.

While Alexander was technically correct in stating that the doomed attack on Malvern
Hill “was begun by a direct order from Lee given hastily under misapprehension of fact,”
Chilton’s order had laid the groundwork for its results. Because Chilton’s order was so
imprecise, a simple “misapprehension of fact” involving that unit was all that was necessary to
set off the futile assault. In this case Henderson correctly wrote that “unfortunately, through
some mistake on the part of Lee’s staff, the order of attack which had already been issued was
not rescinded.”

The Battle of Malvern Hill was one of the very few times that Lee’s personal staff failed
him. Although none of the staffers kept Lee informed of events on Armistead’s front, most of
the blame rested on Chilton. As chief of staff, he was responsible for knowing his commander’s
battle plans and exerting himself to ensure that they were executed. Even as the bombardment
failed, Chilton continued his streak of malevolent inactivity. He did not change or amend his
orders to reflect the altered circumstances or take responsibility for canceling the attack since the
artillery had clearly been bested. Once the attack began, the chief of staff showed little interest
in directing it; his few messages during the assault were vague and revealed almost total ignorance of the slaughter. His orders placed total responsibility on Magruder for communicating with Huger and Jackson even while Magruder’s men were mounting their costly futile assaults. Certainly, none of Lee’s staff acquitted himself with great distinction on July 1, 1862, but Chilton’s failure tarnished the reputation of the entire staff.\textsuperscript{77}

Perhaps realizing that he had failed to live up to expectations, Chilton blamed Magruder for the disappointments of the Seven Days, especially Malvern Hill. Magruder had made himself troublesome even before the active campaign had begun, badgering Lee and Chilton with a series of letters expressing his objections to their assignments, and his battlefield failures sealed his fate.\textsuperscript{78} Lee was obviously dissatisfied with Magruder and soon arranged for his transfer to the Trans-Mississippi Department, but Chilton took his criticism of Magruder to a vindictive level. Soon after Malvern Hill, Chilton alleged that Magruder had been drinking during the campaign, and therefore could not safely be trusted with any command. Although Magruder’s transfer would remove him from the Army of Northern Virginia, that was not enough for Chilton.

Taking advantage of his connections, Chilton wrote a private letter to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper on July 11 claiming that he was “convinced” of the “sad injustice to be inflicted upon the people of the South West by sending one so utterly incompetent and deficient as is Magruder.” Chilton insolently placed words in his commander’s mouth, insisting that General Lee “concurs in my belief in his incompetency, but will not act unless directly asked by the President for his opinion.” He also alleged that one of Magruder’s division commanders, Brigadier General David R. Jones, “charges him with something worse than incompetency.” After reading this outrageous missive, Cooper showed it to President Davis and informed Chilton
that he had done so. Davis responded by recalling Magruder to Richmond, where he showed him Chilton’s letter.79

Chilton was taken aback by Cooper’s action. Writing to President Davis on July 20, Chilton adopted a very cautious, apologetic tone, quickly disavowing his earlier claim to have been quoting his commander regarding Magruder’s fitness to command:

This letter contained matter personal to myself, & consequently was not intended for your eyes, but as it was sent with the purest motives by my warmest friend, Genl Cooper, I wish, first, to inform you that it was a matter entirely between Genl C. & myself, without the knowledge of Genl. Lee, and any use of Genl. Lee’s name was conjectural, on my part, nor does he know so far as any conversation between ourselves has gone, of its existence.80

Having attempted to distance himself from an insubordinate act, Chilton retreated from his most extreme statements about Magruder, asking Davis for a copy of his letter to Cooper and then resending it. Significantly, he did so after deleting his alleged testimony from General Jones. Since Davis had already shown Magruder the original letter from Chilton, that general already knew of Jones’ allegations, and demanded an explanation. Jones apparently denied making any such claims, although no record exists of his reply.81

Magruder went to great lengths to redeem his reputation, which he claimed had been sabotaged by “strictures which had been made by an officer of inferior rank on my military operations near Richmond.” His official report was almost twice as long as that of any other of Lee’s chief subordinates and he took the unusual step of submitting it to President Davis through Lee several months before Lee submitted his own. Magruder’s report contained no fewer than twenty-six official enclosures, ranging from orders from Lee, Chilton, and Marshall, to statements from his personal physician and subordinates that he was never drunk during the campaign, to testimonies from his guides that they had led him down the roads they understood to be the ones called for in his orders. Magruder pointedly referred to Chilton by name several
times, emphasizing that his alleged errors only resulted from following the orders of the chief of staff. Thus, Magruder insisted, the failures of the campaign were Chilton’s, not his. In the end, while Magruder did not succeed in clearing himself of all blame for the mistakes of the campaign, he was given command of the District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, where he served the rest of the war. Chilton himself wrote the order announcing Magruder’s reassignment, although he was forced to add that the general’s “suspension” had been only “temporary,” because “the circumstances causing [his supervision] having been removed.”

Chilton’s machinations caused tension within the Confederate high command for months. While Magruder’s efforts to salvage his reputation proved largely unsuccessful, Chilton’s scheming permanently damaged his own standing in the army and the capital. As late as August 1862, Secretary of War George W. Randolph realized that “a return of Genl. Magruder to that Army [of Northern Virginia] would be embarrassing in view of the relations between Col Chilton and himself.” Although he had been only partially exonerated, Magruder retained powerful allies in Congress who consistently blocked Chilton’s promotion to brigadier general; only in the spring of 1864 would Chilton get his long-awaited rank.

Although Robert E. Lee seemed satisfied with all of his personal staff, he subtly revealed that he had noticed Chilton’s repeatedly poor performances. Never again did he allow Chilton such extensive authority to craft entire attack orders on his own, and rarely did Chilton operate outside his personal oversight. In addition to diminishing the chief of staff’s battlefield responsibility to virtually nothing, Lee also increasingly relied on Taylor to handle even routine army paperwork, and as a result Chilton almost vanished from the army record. Lee solved the problem of how to handle Chilton in much the same way as he handled many other difficult
personnel issues; he simply relegated the offensive or underperforming subordinate to an increasingly meaningless role.

Among the Confederates, reviews of the performance of Lee’s staff as a whole were mixed. Lee himself commended each member of his personal staff by name in his official report, something he would do in almost all subsequent reports, stating that “To the officers of my staff I am indebted for constant aid during the entire period. Colonels Chilton and Long, Majors Taylor, Venable, Talcott and Marshall, and Captain Mason were continuously with me on the field.”⁸⁵ According to Alexander, Lee placed more blame for the recent disappointments on Jackson than on his personal staff.⁸⁶

Other Confederates, however, questioned whether Lee’s staff was accountable for some of the disappointments of the Seven Days. After the war, former general Richard Taylor, whose brigade had participated in the campaign while he had been absent sick, wrote of the Seven Days in scathing terms, declaring that “the Confederate commanders knew no more about the topography of the country than they did about central Africa…so we blundered on like people trying to read without knowledge of their letters.”⁸⁷ While Taylor did not single out Lee’s staff members for special criticism, he clearly held them responsible. He claimed that the staffers had not made themselves remotely familiar with the theater of operations. Because of this neglect, they could not effectively guide Lee or his subordinates and thus could not fulfill one of their few explicitly proscribed duties as staff members. Thus, Taylor concluded, “Time, when he renders his verdict, will declare the gallant dead who fell at Gaines’s Mill, Cold Harbor, Frazier’s Farm, and Malvern Hill, to have been sacrificed on the altar of the bloodiest of all Molechs-Ignorance.”⁸⁸ Similarly, former president Davis remarked critically on the dearth of reliable maps that Lee possessed, and implied that Lee’s staff was partially to blame.⁸⁹
Such criticisms prompted Lee’s former staff officers to write rare direct defenses of their own conduct. Having drafted Lee’s official report during the war, Marshall simply repeated it in his postwar writings, arguing that, while “the Federal Army should have been destroyed,” it had eluded Lee’s grasp “due to the causes already stated, of which the most prominent was the want of timely and correct information.” He did not elaborate further, but focused instead on Lee’s achievements. Walter Taylor simply stated that the Confederates pursuing McClellan were “greatly hindered and delayed by the character of the country…and by the ignorance of the general staff concerning the roads.” Taylor thus subtly shifted blame from Lee’s personal staff to his general staff, claiming that it was the general staff’s role to provide maps and guides.

Armistead Long authored the most elaborate defense of Lee’s staff in the Seven Days. Having quoted Davis and Richard Taylor, Long refuted their arguments at length:

The blame implied in these remarks in reference to the want of maps should be placed where it properly belongs- with the war-directing authority in Richmond….The blunders complained of were more the result of inattention to orders and want of proper energy on the part of a few subordinate commanders than of lack of knowledge of the country… The inhabitants of that region supplied him with efficient guides, and his staff officers had been employed in making themselves acquainted with the roads and natural features of the country over which his army was likely to operate.

Long apologized too much. While Lee himself was personally familiar with the region, Walter Taylor, Charles Venable, and especially Robert Chilton had displayed ignorance of important roads and bridges. Taylor’s failure to reach Jackson on June 29 may be explicable because of the very late hour and the approaching darkness. Venable had attempted to familiarize himself with the terrain, but only had two days to do so. Chilton, on the other hand, repeatedly demonstrated that he knew virtually nothing about the available roads, both in his orders to Magruder on June 30 and his poor management of Confederate forces on July 1. The chief of staff was simply careless in carrying out his assignments. Even though the Confederate authorities in Richmond had failed miserably to provide reliable maps of the confusing countryside near the capitol, Lee
and his staff had not taken appropriate steps to remedy the situation and make sure the subordinate generals could find their way.93

Aside from Chilton’s obvious shortcomings, though, Lee’s personal staff officers had usually performed very well at their assigned tasks. The fortifications that Long supervised were expanded and used by the Confederate army until the last days of the war in April 1865, thus demonstrating that they had been well placed and constructed. Recognizing Long’s talents, Lee would continue to use him for similar supervisory work in the future. Taylor grew into his job handling the army’s paperwork, and Marshall, Venable, and Talcott each demonstrated their talents more in the next few months. The failures of the Seven Days owed more to Lee’s failure to use the talents of his personal staff than any failure on the part of the officers themselves.94

Despite the multiple Confederate command errors of the Seven Days, Lee had won a great strategic victory over his adversary. McClellan’s huge army had been pushed back from the gates of the capitol and suffered over 15,000 casualties. While the Army of Northern Virginia had over 20,000 of its own men put out of action during the campaign, it had seized the strategic initiative in Virginia. McClellan’s plans were in shambles, and the Confederates had seized immense amounts of supplies that immensely aided the overworked Confederate general staff and supply services. Finally, Lee and his personal staff gained invaluable experience in commanding and controlling their men and themselves in a large-scale campaign.95

In the end, the primary sources reveal that Lee, his personal staff, the Richmond general staff, and Lee’s generals all shared responsibility for the missed opportunities of the Seven Days. Confederates at every level of the chain of command committed serious mistakes during the campaign, but most of them would improve as they grew more acquainted with their roles. While Chilton was an exception to this, the other five members of Lee’s personal staff would get
better as they served in the general’s “military family” for longer periods in the field. They would not have long to better learn their jobs, however. Having saved Richmond from the immediate menace of McClellan’s army, Lee and his personal staff turned to a new challenge: reorganizing the Army of Northern Virginia into a more efficient fighting force while resisting a new Union army threatening the capitol from northern Virginia.
Chapter 4: The Maryland Campaign: The Staff is Tested

Following the Seven Days, Robert E. Lee and his staff coordinated another victory over John Pope’s Army of Virginia at the Second Battle of Manassas from August 28-30, 1862.¹ Soon afterward, Lee wrote to Jefferson Davis, telling him that “the present seems to be the most propitious time since the commencement of the war for the Confederate Army to enter Maryland.”² In carrying the war onto Union soil, Lee hoped to retain the military initiative, forcing the Federals to react to his movements while he put pressure on them to leave the Washington, D. C. fortifications and fight a decisive battle with his army somewhere north of the Potomac. The offensive would also relieve the pressure of enemy occupation on war-ravaged Virginia and might inspire sympathetic Marylanders to join the Army of Northern Virginia.

The Maryland Campaign put extreme pressure on both Lee’s army and his staff. Although flushed with its recent triumph, the army was extremely fatigued after three months of almost incessant marching and fighting. Lee himself had been seriously injured in an accident at the close of the Second Manassas Campaign.³ While Lee’s staff officers were likewise tired, their commander’s injury placed much heavier burdens on them as they assisted him. In addition to their routine assignments, they now had to keep Lee informed of conditions that he was incapable of observing personally. Ultimately, Lee’s invasion of Maryland ended with his army’s withdrawal into Virginia after having very narrowly escaped destruction on two separate occasions and after suffering high casualties. Recriminations began almost immediately after the army retreated back into Virginia over who was responsible for the perilous situations it had just barely survived. As in the Seven Days’ Battles, Colonel Robert H. Chilton was at the center of many of these controversies, and he did very little to diffuse bad feelings, accusing Major
General Lafayette McLaws of slowness in following orders. For the most part, these disputes remained relatively minor during the war.

After the war, when it became widely known that a copy of Lee’s plans, Special Orders No. 191, had fallen into Federal hands at an abandoned Confederate camp, some Confederate veterans strongly criticized both their former commanding general and his personal staff. Widely blamed for losing the “Lost Order,” thus endangering the Confederate Army, Major General Daniel H. Hill insisted that Lee’s personal staff was responsible for allowing Lee’s orders to fall into enemy hands. Lee’s former staff officers defended both Lee’s actions and their own in Maryland very passionately. Charles Marshall’s discussion of the Maryland Campaign was entirely devoted to a defense of Lee’s decisions; he did not mention his own actions.

Similarly, Charles S. Venable insisted to Walter H. Taylor and Armistead Long that Lee’s staff could not have been responsible for the “Lost Order” debacle and later wrote a lengthy defense of the staff’s actions regarding it. The staffers’ writings regarding the Maryland Campaign were consistent with their usual activities in Civil War historiography: they did not usually engage in personal attacks trying to prove that any of Lee’s subordinate generals “lost” the war, but they uncompromisingly defended their former commander’s reputation and resisted when they were directly implicated in failure.

Although the historiography of the Maryland Campaign is extensive, many writers have focused on the Union side, cataloguing the mistakes and hesitation of Union commander George B. McClellan in exacting detail and devoting comparatively little coverage to Lee, his generals, or his personal staff. Ezra Carman was a veteran of the Union Army who spent decades researching the Antietam battlefield and compiled a massive volume only recently published; most of his sources were fellow Union veterans. Later historians, like James D. Murphy and
Stephen W. Sears, focused on explaining how Lee escaped and provided relatively little insight into Confederate command strategy.\textsuperscript{4}

More recent scholarship has offered more details on Lee and his army. Robert K. Krick’s “The Army of Northern Virginia: Its Conditions, Its Circumstances, and Why It Should Not Have Been at Sharpsburg” was one notable example. D. Scott Hartwick’s \textit{To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862} spent 652 pages examining the campaign up until the September 17 Battle of Antietam, providing thorough coverage of both the Union and Confederate armies. Most notably, Joseph P. Harsh’s books on Confederate strategy in the Maryland Campaign contained the most detailed analysis of Lee and his army during September 1862. While Harsh studied seemingly every aspect of the campaign, including the weather and the agricultural output of the Maryland counties the Confederates crossed, he never examined Lee’s staff in detail.\textsuperscript{5}

When these writers did discuss Lee’s “military family,” their comments were not complimentary. G. F. R. Henderson, who based his biography of Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson largely from correspondence with that general’s former staffers, wrote scathingly that Lee’s personal staff in September 1862 was dominated by “ignorance” and claimed that it was “half-trained.”\textsuperscript{6} Krick blamed the staff for the army’s alarming desertion rate in Maryland, claiming that “when Lee made the army his own, and bent its staff functions to his own purposes, acute straggling disappeared.”\textsuperscript{7}

D. Scott Hartwick offered one of the most recent and critical analyses of Lee’s staff during the Maryland Campaign. Before he briefly summarized each of the seven men who comprised the personal staff, Hartwick argued that “since the best officers were needed to command combat units, none of Lee’s personal staff were gifted leaders or possessed
charismatic, powerful personalities.” Despite this claim, Hartwick conceded that “Lee selected them on his judgment of their ability, intelligence, and personality, for he needed men he could get along with.”8 Somewhat confusingly, Hartwick’s analyses of the staff officers as individuals found that they were mostly competent. For example, he observed that Talcott “appears to have been a capable soldier,” and Taylor, Marshall, and Venable were “capable, bright, energetic men.” He concluded that “an overall assessment of Lee’s personal and general staff on the eve of the Maryland Campaign is that they were generally competent, but there were not enough of them.”9

Although Hartwick was careful to distinguish Lee’s personal staff from his general staff, thus relieving the personal staff members from responsibility for the army’s supply shortages, he did not appreciate the vital tasks they performed for Lee especially considering his physical condition.10 By September 1862, Lee’s personal staff had already displayed its abilities to carry out reconnaissance, assist with army paperwork, and transmit orders to subordinates. With both hands in splints, Lee could not write, ride a horse, or even feed or dress himself. His staff now had to write every single dispatch from his dictation, including his regular messages to President Jefferson Davis, in addition to its normal duties. In his recent book on Lee, William C. Davis realized this, pointing out that in Maryland, Lee “made better use of his staff than before, using them to maintain communication among elements of his army during the campaign.”11

The unpublished and published primary sources on the Maryland Campaign support William C. Davis’ assertion. In Maryland, Lee depended on his staff as never before, and with the exception of Chilton, they did not disappoint. By helping their injured commander maintain control over widely-dispersed portions of his army, they helped prevent the Confederate defeat at Antietam from becoming catastrophic. Riding where Lee could temporarily no longer go, they
served as his “eyes and ears” more in Maryland than they ever had before. They made sure that Lee was fully informed, and helped him and his subordinates act on that intelligence. This chapter will demonstrate that by September 1862, Lee’s staffers had already learned their jobs, and performed them effectively under great adversity.

Despite his injury, Lee did not alter his command style at first. Immediately after it happened, he had Chilton notify the Confederate government of the incident and then went back to work leading the army as before. Unable to ride his horse, the general accompanied the troops in an ambulance. As an ambulance could not traverse open terrain or even the roads like a man on horseback, Lee’s mobility was limited, and his staff had to clear roads ahead of his ambulance of troops and vehicles so he could pass. Sensing his newfound limitations, Lee had Chilton issue a circular order to his senior generals reminding them of their duty to keep army headquarters fully informed. Lee kept his staff officers close to him for most of the campaign and only sent them away on urgent matters, communicating with most generals through couriers. He kept his own tent close to Longstreet’s or Jackson’s to facilitate the transmission of orders.

Lee’s personal staff remained unchanged. Although Lee still referred to Chilton as his chief of staff, the latter’s proven unreliability led him to issue most orders through his other staff members. Instead of using Taylor, Lee relied on Mason to issue most of his routine orders during the Maryland Campaign, perhaps because Mason still held the title of assistant adjutant-general he inherited from serving on Joseph E. Johnston’s staff. As Lee’s military secretary, Long was now responsible for taking even more of the general’s dictation than before, and Taylor, Marshall, Venable, and Talcott all had to assist him. Even Chilton was pressed into taking dictation, a job he deeply resented.
By September 4, 1862, the Army of Northern Virginia had assembled at Leesburg, Virginia, and was preparing to cross the Potomac. Utilizing Chilton’s talent for administrative minutiae, Lee had his chief of staff issue General Orders No. 102, which was intended to prepare the army for the invasion. Like Chilton’s other official proclamations, it was filled with strict language, reminding the troops that “any excesses committed will exasperate the people, lead to disastrous results, and enlist the populace on the side of the Federal forces in hostility to our own.” It devoted two sections to stragglers, establishing a provost guard to “follow in rear of the army, arrest stragglers, and punish summarily all depredators.” It concluded with a sweeping moral indictment of stragglers that reflected Chilton’s attitudes more than Lee’s, denouncing them as “useless members of the service” and “unworthy members of an army which has immortalized itself.” In the end, no proclamation could curb the problem; thanks to severe fatigue from three months of almost nonstop marching and fighting and poor discipline by lower-level officers, straggling in the Army of Northern Virginia reached levels during the 1862 Maryland Campaign it never would again until 1865.

As the Army of Northern Virginia began crossing the Potomac, Lee had Marshall telegraph Richmond to inform President Davis. By September 6, the army had reached Frederick, Maryland. Here, Lee utilized Marshall’s legal talents and his identification with Maryland to his advantage, having him distribute a proclamation calling for Marylanders to rise up and overthrow Federal “despotism.” It claimed that Lee’s army had come into the state to “free” it, and that if the state’s people were not willing to welcome the Confederates, “this army will respect your choice, whatever it may be.” Since Marshall’s name did not appear in the proclamation text, it is unclear how many of the words in it came from him and not from Lee.
Although Taylor wrote his sister that “about here I think the population about equally divided in sentiment,” Marshall’s call produced only a few hundred volunteers.22

To deal with the remaining Federal detachments in the northern Shenandoah Valley, Lee had Chilton write Special Orders No. 191. These orders split the Army of Northern Virginia into four pieces. Jackson was to march his three divisions toward Martinsburg and to proceed to Harper’s Ferry if necessary. McLaws would approach Harper’s Ferry from the northeast with his own and Richard Anderson’s divisions. Brigadier General John Walker’s small division was to recross the Potomac and invest Harper’s Ferry from the east. Finally, Lee would remain in Maryland on the west side of South Mountain with the army’s remaining three divisions and Stuart’s cavalry. The plan called for Jackson, McLaws, and Walker to drive out or capture the Federals still in Virginia and reunite with Lee near Boonsboro, Maryland, by September 12.

Special Orders No. 191 was a risky operational plan. It removed about two-thirds of Lee’s army from his personal oversight and placed three divisions under McLaws and Walker, both of whom were untested in independent command. Since Lee was keeping most of his personal staff physically close to him, he had to rely on couriers to maintain communication with his far-flung subordinates, and could not hope to supervise their operations. Worse yet, Lee was dividing his army in the proximity of a numerically superior opposing force, on the assumption that the Union commander, Major General George B. McClellan, would continue to display his customary sluggishness.23

While the prudence of many of Special Orders No. 191’s contents have been debated by Confederate veterans and subsequent scholars almost literally ever since the campaign, one usually-overlooked item within had drastic consequences for Lee’s army. When Lee decided to take his army into Union territory, he had written President Davis asking for his approval, which
he was sure he would give.²⁴ Davis not only approved of Lee’s actions, he responded that he intended to leave Richmond and personally join the Confederate Army in Maryland. This was, as Lee knew, a very rash decision, and he dictated a letter to Davis explaining that northern Virginia would be very unsafe once his army had crossed the Potomac and that the president was exposing himself to capture.

To ensure that the president would not risk himself trying to join the Army of Northern Virginia in Maryland, Lee sent Taylor to intercept him. Taylor had assisted the general during both of his periods in Richmond advising Davis and had developed a working relationship with the president. Although Chilton had once saved Davis’ life in the Mexican-American War and had served in Richmond continually for almost the entire first year of the war, Lee had to have known that Chilton had made himself odious to many in the capital with his conduct during the Magruder controversy. Additionally, Lee’s chief of staff had demonstrated that he could not be relied on to exercise personal initiative and the general had been steadily decreasing his responsibilities. Thus, Lee sent Taylor away from him even while Special Orders No. 191 was being distributed.

Officially, Special Orders No. 191 sent Taylor to “arrange for transportation of the sick and those unable to walk to Winchester,” but Taylor left no doubt as to his most important mission.²⁵ In his postwar writings, he mentioned that Lee sent a letter along with him addressed to Davis. In it, Lee discouraged the president from joining him, claiming that he felt “great uneasiness” for his safety and stating that Davis “will not only encounter the hardships and fatigues of a very disagreeable journey, but also run the risk of capture by the enemy.” He added that Taylor would “explain…the difficulties and dangers of the journey.”²⁶ In the end, Taylor’s
venture proved unnecessary; heeding Lee’s warnings and his own sense of danger, Davis decided to abort his journey, and Taylor had been dispatched on important, but not urgent, business.\textsuperscript{27}

Taylor’s assignment was less important than Special Orders No. 191 had anticipated. As he recalled years later, “I was also charged duty of seeing after the sick and wounded around and about the scene of the recent battles, and of arranging for their transportation to Winchester, which place was made a rendezvous for all the men returning from sick or wounded furlough, and for all stragglers.” Once he arrived in Virginia, Taylor quickly discovered that the wounded men from Second Manassas had already been removed to Winchester. After reporting his mission to Davis via telegraph, Taylor “made all haste to get through the mountains into the Shenandoah Valley, and proceeded directly to Winchester,” where he “found quite a number of men and officers who were returning to their commands and who were in good condition,” in addition to many convalescents who were forbidden by Lee’s orders from rejoining the army until its position was stabilized. The general staff had already performed Taylor’s task.\textsuperscript{28}

His mission finished, Taylor decided to rejoin Lee despite not knowing the army’s precise whereabouts. Taking two other officers, Taylor recrossed the Potomac and rode to Hagerstown, Maryland, just west of South Mountain, arriving late on September 14, where he and his companions narrowly eluded capture:

After we had proceeded some distance in the direction of Sharpsburg, to which point it was stated that General Lee was retiring, we went into a field, picketed our horses some distance from the road, and laid ourselves down under the protection of a hayrick to wait for daylight. We heard nothing unusual while there, but in the morning, when we resumed our journey, we ascertained that a large body of Federal cavalry…had passed along the road, and congratulated ourselves on our narrow escape.\textsuperscript{29} Taylor rejoined Lee on September 15 as the army commander was regrouping his three available divisions and awaiting word from Jackson at Harper’s Ferry.
Taylor would have been far more useful to Lee had he remained with him as Special Orders No. 191 was being distributed. In more than a year of service, Taylor had proven himself an efficient writer and distributor of orders. With him absent, Chilton prepared and issued copies of Lee’s plans to each of the army’s principal commanders. Not only did Chilton send copies to Longstreet and Jackson, but also to McLaws, D. H. Hill, Stuart, and Walker. After Lee’s army had moved westward, the Federals entered Frederick, where they discovered a copy of the order addressed to D. H. Hill in Chilton’s handwriting wrapped around three cigars laying in a field formerly used as D. H. Hill’s campsite. Since Chilton had served many years as a paymaster in the Old Army, a Union staffer was easily able to identify his handwriting, thus proving that the orders were genuine. The Army of Northern Virginia’s plans had been discovered by the enemy, and now McClellan had accurate intelligence of the location of every one of its detachments.

The Confederates remained unaware that their plans had been compromised until McClellan’s official report was published in 1863. When it was, recriminations soon followed. Southern newspaper writers like Edward A. Pollard accused Hill of having carelessly lost it or even having thrown it away. Hill responded that he never saw it, and produced a copy of Special Orders No. 191 he had carefully preserved in Jackson’s handwriting. Hill explained that north of the Potomac, his division had been assigned to Jackson. Special Orders No. 191 detached Hill’s division. Since Hill had reported to him, “Stonewall” duplicated his copy of the order for Hill. Hill insisted that the order from Jackson was the only one received at his division headquarters and speculated that a member of Lee’s personal staff must have been responsible for losing the other copy.

In a recorded conversation, Lee strongly disagreed, claiming that Hill “takes an entirely different view from mine” and adding that “General Hill’s view of the matter was not correct in
Lee directly defended his personal staff, insisting that he was sure it sent Hill a copy of the order and that his staffers could not have lost it, because the couriers who carried written orders from his staff officers to the generals were required to obtain receipts to prove they had safely delivered them. By insisting that the order sent to Hill had been thus accounted for, Lee was defending his personal staff’s war record; if the dispatch was not properly delivered, they should have detected the error and investigated immediately.

Being closely implicated in a controversy with such drastic consequences, Lee’s former staffers broke their usual silence regarding their own activities to explain how the “Lost Dispatch” was misplaced. Attempting to defend himself, Hill wrote to Chilton, Taylor, and Marshall, giving his version of the story. Chilton replied evasively, stating that couriers were trained to obtain receipts for all delivered orders and adding that “this order was so important that violation of that rule would have been noticed, & I think I should certainly recollect if delivery had been omitted.” Marshall quickly accepted Hill’s claim that he never received the dispatch from Chilton, stating that “your simple statement that you never saw it, puts an end to all conjecture as to the way you lost it.” In his first book, Taylor did not try to explain how the dispatch was lost; instead, he described standard headquarters procedure and professed himself baffled by the lost intelligence since Hill had shown him the copy of the dispatch that he still had in his possession. Similarly, Marshall wrote that “unfortunately, by an accident, as yet unexplained, a copy of the general order…fell into McClellan’s hands.” Venable was the first to offer an overall explanation, claiming that since Hill had already received a copy of the order from Jackson, the dispatch from Lee’s headquarters “was undoubtedly left carelessly by some one at General Hill’s headquarters.” Thus, Venable offered an explanation for the “Lost Order” while simultaneously shifting all blame for its loss from Lee’s personal staff to D. H. Hill’s.
Although Hill’s former staff officers vehemently denied ever having received the order, Venable’s explanation was accepted by most Confederate writers and subsequent historians.\textsuperscript{37}

As the years passed, Venable became totally convinced that Hill had personally lost Special Orders No. 191 through sheer apathy. As the dying Venable attempted to write his recollections, he denounced Hill’s alleged carelessness in scathing terms:

\begin{quote}
The order…was copied carefully in the Adjutant’s tent by colonel Taylor and another aid in the camp of Frederick City in the Adjutant’s tent, and sent out to Generals of Divisions by Colonel Taylor to…commanders of Corps and Divisions who were concerned. The couriers in every case brought back receipts from these officers. General Stonewall Jackson sent a separate one in his own handwriting to Genl. D. H. Hill of his corps who already having one dropped the one sent him from army head quarters in his tent.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

Venable thus incorrectly asserted that Taylor was present with the army to supervise the distribution of the order as usual and flatly denied Hill’s statements. Although Venable never finished his memoirs, he added a footnote on the last completed page of his notebook that blasted Hill in even stronger language, claiming that “having two copies he was unfortunately careless of the one sent to him by Col. Taylor from headquarters a receipt for which he sent back by the courier who bore it to him,” pointedly adding that “the copy written out and…the copy sent to him from headquarters and received as was proven by the receipt returned and was found on the spot where his tent was hitched.”\textsuperscript{39} In Venable’s eyes, Hill’s attempts to prove his innocence concerning Special Orders No. 191 only further proved his culpability in losing it. Although Venable never published his incomplete account, Hill’s reputation still suffered.

Although other historians have examined the “Lost Dispatch” from seemingly every angle, a few additional conclusions can be reached regarding the performance of Lee’s personal staff and the distribution of orders. First, it should be remembered that Lee’s staff was already overworked from having to write every single order, dispatch, and letter for the commanding general because of his injury. They were therefore not available to personally deliver any copies
of Special Orders No. 191, even to the highest-ranking of Lee’s subordinates, and had to rely on couriers. Secondly, by this point, most of the army’s orders of this type were distributed through Taylor, who was not present, leaving the often-negligent Chilton to circulate the order. Finally, Lee’s staffers cannot be held responsible for either deliberate espionage or simple carelessness by any member of D. H. Hill’s staff. Under the circumstances, Lee’s overburdened staffers followed established procedure, accepting the signed receipts as proof that the order had been safely promulgated, and that was all they could have reasonably been expected to do.

Unaware that its plans were about to fall into enemy hands, the Army of Northern Virginia began its march westward from Frederick on September 10. As he had during the Second Manassas Campaign, Jackson maintained constant communication with Lee via courier, and thus obtained his approval to march his three divisions to invest Harper’s Ferry from the west. Meanwhile, Walker recrossed the Potomac and moved toward the town from the east. Back in Virginia, Walker was safe from the Federals, and Lee did not expect him to maintain communications. McLaws, by contrast, was not only still in Maryland, but his assignment took him close to the Union forces in Harper’s Ferry and potentially to the Army of the Potomac. Despite this, he failed to keep in contact with army headquarters, and on September 13, Long reprimanded him via letter, pointedly reminding McLaws that “General Lee desires me to say that he has not heard from you since you left the main body of the army,” and stressing that “he is anxious that the object of your expedition be speedily accomplished.” At the end of this short message, Long reminded McLaws that “You are also desired to communicate as frequently as you can with headquarters.” By the time Long wrote, Lee’s directive had assumed even greater importance. In response to rumors of a Union force marching from Pennsylvania, Lee ordered
Longstreet to move his two divisions from Boonsboro to Hagerstown, leaving only D. H. Hill’s Division to watch the nearby South Mountain passes.

Lee did not exchange any messages with cavalry commander Stuart or order the commanders of his detached units to communicate with each other. As a result, Stuart neglected his responsibilities to maintain a cavalry screen to mask the movements of the infantry units. At the same time, McLaws fretted that the combined Federals in Harper’s Ferry were as numerous as his force and was reluctant to commit his men to an attack on the Union position until he knew Jackson’s whereabouts. Normally, Lee’s personal staff might have been available to clarify the objectives and maintain communication between the army’s components, but Lee now needed them constantly by his side and Taylor was still absent. Lee apparently did not give much thought to how or when Taylor was to rejoin the army, as Special Orders No. 191 did not specify this and Taylor’s above-quoted writings strongly implied that he decided to return to Lee on a date and by a route of his own choosing. If the commanding general had considered that Taylor would come back to him from Winchester, he could have ordered his staffer to bring back reports from Jackson and McLaws or had him supervise the operations around Harper’s Ferry, since that town lay between Winchester and Boonsboro.43

Late on the evening of September 13, Lee received word from Stuart that the Federal army was moving toward him far more rapidly than anticipated. Lee promptly grasped the danger and kept his personal staff busy throughout the night. First, he had his staff summon Longstreet to his tent, where Lee gave him instructions to countermarch his two divisions to reinforce D. H. Hill. Next, he had Talcott write a message to McLaws ordering him to accelerate his plans to reduce Harper’s Ferry and then to withdraw to Sharpsburg, Maryland, about two miles from the Potomac. He then dictated a similar message through Chilton to Jackson,
advising “Stonewall” that he might need to abort the siege of Harper’s Ferry and march his men northward to Sharpsburg. Lee still needed to keep his staff close, and so all of the messages went via courier.

After informing Lee that the Federals were rapidly advancing, Stuart misjudged the developing situation at South Mountain, reasoning that the main Union effort would be made at Crampton’s Gap, near Harper’s Ferry. He accordingly took almost all of his cavalry toward Crampton’s Gap, leaving a single regiment to scout for and protect Hill’s flanks. Meanwhile, at Fox’s and Turner’s Gaps near Boonsboro, Hill could plainly see that three entire Federal corps were amassing in the valley below to assault his isolated division. Hill sent Lee a desperate plea for immediate assistance, and resolved to attempt to defend South Mountain with whatever troops he could find.

Accompanying Longstreet’s two divisions, Lee arrived at the western base of South Mountain about noon on September 14, and immediately sent Longstreet’s troops forward to assist. There was no possibility, however, that Lee could personally observe the developing battle. He therefore sent Long, Venable, and probably Marshall and Talcott, to “learn the condition of affairs in front.” He had Chilton summon Brigadier General John Bell Hood, then under arrest for a dispute with his immediate superior, to him for a conference. After conferring with Hood, Lee had Mason write an order formally restoring Hood to the command of his two-brigade division. Aside from this, Lee apparently did not utilize Chilton at all during the day; he probably kept his chief of staff close to him and inactive because he recognized his limitations. Instead of trying to direct the battle from the other side of South Mountain, Lee wisely decided to allow Longstreet to assume command of all available Confederate forces.
Longstreet soon realized that his men were severely outnumbered. He may have sent to Lee for reinforcements, but he must have realized that none were available. According to Venable, Lee instead loaned Longstreet at least two of his staff officers. Longstreet credited Lee’s staff with helping him carry orders and performing valuable service, but their efforts were not enough; the Confederates were too badly outnumbered to do more than barely hold the passes. The Battle of South Mountain was, in the words of Confederate historian William Allen, “badly handled” by all levels of the Army of Northern Virginia’s high command.

Meanwhile, the Federals easily overwhelmed the handful of Confederate defenders at Crampton’s Gap. Lee remained totally unaware of the situation here, but he knew that McLaws’ two divisions faced the imminent danger of being driven into the Potomac. Lee did know that his army had been defeated at Turner’s and Fox’s Gaps and that it must retreat at once. As the battle ended, he had his staff summon Longstreet and Hill to obtain their assessments of the situation. The two generals agreed that holding their current positions was out of the question, and Lee concurred, ordering them to begin withdrawing under the cover of darkness. After briefly halting his men at Keedysville, Lee quickly decided to continue the retreat to Sharpsburg.

Hearing reports of the disaster at Crampton’s Gap, Lee feared for McLaws’ safety. With Taylor still absent, Lee ordered Chilton to find some way to communicate with McLaws and rescue him from his predicament. Chilton did not grasp either the terrain between Harper’s Ferry and Sharpsburg or McLaws’ situation, but he attempted to find a way to extricate his two divisions. First, he wrote Colonel Thomas T. Munford, commanding the cavalry brigade recently driven from Crampton’s Gap, asking him to hold his position and find a road by which McLaws could withdraw to Sharpsburg. Half an hour later, Chilton sent a message to McLaws which revealed his confusion, ordering him to retire to Sharpsburg or Virginia if at all possible.
Unlike most of Chilton’s messages, in this one the chief of staff issued orders in his own name. While he confessed his own ignorance of the possible routes for McLaws to take, Chilton’s intent was clear: McLaws must withdraw at once by any route possible. While McLaws eventually received this message, soon communication between Keedysville and his position was virtually cut off. McLaws attempted to send a message back to Lee, but his staff officer was intercepted by Federals and forced to turn back. Later that evening, had Long send another dispatch to McLaws, stressing that he must withdraw at once even if doing so meant going over the mountains and abandoning his artillery.

In addition to fears over McLaws’ fate, Lee and his staff also had to deal with the escape of 1,200 Federal cavalry from Harper’s Ferry during the night of September 14-15. The 1,200 Union horsemen, refusing to remain and surrender with the rest of the garrison, had slipped quietly out of the town, evaded McLaws’ infantry pickets, and headed north into Pennsylvania, capturing part of Longstreet’s reserve ordinance train en route. In the wake of the Union escape, rumors abounded of Union cavalry everywhere. Chilton displayed his tendency to quibble over minor details, clashing with Longstreet over how many infantry should be sent to drive the hostile horsemen out of Keedysville. In the end, the debate proved academic, for the enemy had long since left the area. Nevertheless, Lee remained concerned about Federal cavalry and sent Venable ahead to Sharpsburg to see whether any enemy horsemen occupied the town. Venable quickly ascertained that no enemy troops were there. The commanding general then ordered Longstreet’s and D. H. Hill’s divisions to Sharpsburg, where he positioned them behind Antietam Creek with the Potomac at their backs. He used his staff to help direct traffic and curb straggling, which after the South Mountain defeat had reached staggering levels. Here Taylor, having narrowly escaped Union cavalry himself, rejoined Lee.
By the time McClellan’s army had forced the Confederates off of South Mountain, the Union garrison at Harper’s Ferry was about to capitulate. Jackson had already sent a message to Lee announcing the surrender by the time Chilton’s message arrived. Thus, when Jackson received Chilton’s dispatch, he simply wrote “I will join you in Maryland” on the back of the note and sent it back to Lee. Lee sent Jackson another note urging haste and informing him that he was at Sharpsburg; Jackson responded with a message promising to bring two of his three divisions at once, leaving the third behind to process the surrendered men and material.\textsuperscript{56} When Jackson’s message arrived, Lee decided to risk a full-scale battle with McClellan in Maryland, and he had his staff read Jackson’s dispatches aloud to the shaken troops to try to restore morale. On September 16, Jackson joined Lee with two divisions and Walker soon followed.\textsuperscript{57}

Although the Army of Northern Virginia was in a strong defensive position, its situation remained perilous. To face McClellan’s 80,000 men, Lee had at most about 30,000 soldiers, and his artillery was far inferior to his opponent’s. The Potomac River, only crossable at a single ford, lay less than a mile in the army’s rear. To compound Lee’s difficulties, his army was still not reunited after Jackson and Walker rejoined him. Lee sent McLaws another message urging him to hurry, but did not send a staff officer even though Taylor had now rejoined him. He also wrote Major General Ambrose P. Hill, commanding the division Jackson had left at Harper’s Ferry, a note urging him to expedite his operations and leave for Sharpsburg as rapidly as possible.\textsuperscript{58} Finally, he sent Brigadier General William N. Pendleton across the Potomac with his artillery battalions to watch the fords behind the army’s position and make sure that his messages were getting through to Hill. Chilton complimented Lee’s efforts, sending a typically blunt dispatch to Pendleton, ordering him to send up any cannon not immediately needed to defend the fords and any stragglers “at the point of the sword.”\textsuperscript{59} Lee wanted every last man available on
the battle lines, and with good reason. Chilton appreciated this, and he and the rest of Lee’s staff worked all day to position the troops and reconnoiter the field. Although Lee was now able to ride his horse, he still could not hold his reins, and thus remained limited in his ability to observe the battlefield.

Early on the morning of September 17, McClellan attacked Jackson’s forces on Lee’s left flank, thus beginning the Battle of Antietam. Over the course of this, the bloodiest day in United States history, the Federals committed about 60,000 troops into the action, shifting their focus from the Confederate left to the center, and finally the right. By shifting units along his line, Lee barely stemmed the Union attacks. At various points during the day, Lee sent some or all of the members of his personal staff away to bring up units, rally stragglers, or keep him informed of events on the battlefield he could not see.60 Although historians have differed on Lee’s decision to fight in Maryland, they have widely praised his handling of the struggle itself, and the efficiency of his staff in helping him do so. Even Douglas Southall Freeman wrote that “the staff and the division commanders…learned other new lessons of co-operation at Sharpsburg.”61

Repeated Federal attacks splintered Jackson’s line and he sent for reinforcements. Lee ordered Long to summon Walker’s Division from the extreme Confederate right to aid Jackson. Unfortunately, Long did not remain with Walker after delivering his orders, and the division commander wasted precious time wandering behind Jackson’s wavering lines before finally committing his two brigades. Since he had kept his staff so close to him throughout the campaign up to this point, Lee may have wanted Long to return as quickly as possible, but the true reason why Long left Walker may never be known.62

As the Federals began their attack, McLaws arrived at last. At the same time he sent Long to bring Walker to Jackson’s front, Lee ordered Taylor to retrieve McLaws’ two exhausted
divisions. McLaws was as physically spent as his men, and was taking a nap in tall grass when Taylor arrived. Taylor was unable to find McLaws, and no one seemed to know where the division commander had gone, so appreciating the urgency of the moment, Taylor relayed the marching orders to McLaws’ assistant adjutant-general, who promptly put the troops into motion. Taylor eventually found and roused McLaws, and then returned to Lee. Like Walker’s men, McLaws’ brigades went into battle without guidance from any member of Lee’s staff.

Lee positioned himself fairly close to “Stonewall” during the early phases of the battle, sending Chilton and Venable to keep him appraised of conditions on other fronts. He apparently kept Long and the rest of his staff close to him. Soon, the fighting shifted to D. H. Hill’s front immediately on Jackson’s right, where two Union divisions mounted a furious series of attacks on the Confederates positioned in the sunken road soon to become infamous as “Bloody Lane.” Eventually, after taking severe losses, the Federals broke through. A desperate Longstreet tried to scrape together any available troops to slow the enemy. Chilton rode up to assess the situation. He was shocked by the shattered condition of the lines and quickly departed to inform Lee. Whatever report Chilton made to Lee, it made little difference, for Lee did not have any troops to spare to send Longstreet. He had already committed every division in his army present at Sharpsburg besides David R. Jones,’ and that general’s depleted command was then holding the remaining half of his line. The most Lee could do was to send A. P. Hill another message urging him to hurry his march. Meanwhile, Longstreet and D. H. Hill barely held on, helped immensely by McClellan’s refusal to press his attack.

Jones was soon in desperate trouble himself. By the afternoon, the Federals broke through his very thinly-held defenses on Antietam Creek and drove his men south and southwest of Sharpsburg. This advance threatened to cut Lee’s entire army off from the Potomac and
ensure its annihilation. Lee did all he could to stop it, leaving one staffer at his headquarters to forward messages to him and sending all of the others away to round up all the artillery and stragglers they could and send them to reinforce Jones. One of them went to Jackson urging “Stonewall” to attack McClellan’s right with the remnants of his command in the hopes that this might distract the Federals. Having sent away all of his own staff officers, Lee borrowed Adjutant William Owen of the Washington Artillery and Captain Osmun Latrobe of Longstreet’s staff to carry orders for him. A. P. Hill’s Division arrived in the literal nick of time to blunt the Union attack.

Lee’s personal staff continued to serve him well at the Battle of Antietam. They brought Lee accurate intelligence of distant areas of the battlefield, enabling Lee to move his units in the timely and accurate way that he did. They also summoned units from distant sectors. They made mistakes, and contrary to Freeman’s assertion, some of these errors resulted in units facing enemy attacks without support. While Lee apparently ran out of staff officers toward the end of the day, it must be remembered that the battle’s scope was unprecedented in the Civil War. Lee knew that the Army of Northern Virginia faced annihilation, and he sent all of his staff away to do everything possible to save it.

Lee’s army had suffered over 10,000 casualties, over one-fourth of its available numbers. While it had inflicted about 13,000 casualties on the Federals, McClellan had retained two corps in reserve and never committed them to the battle. In addition, heavy Union reinforcements were on their way to Sharpsburg. On the evening of September 18, Lee reluctantly gave the order to withdraw back into Virginia. He used his staff to help direct traffic as the army’s wagon trains, artillery, and infantry splashed across the Shepherdstown Ford. Pendleton’s reserve
artillery remained in position guarding the ford. Lee had Long supervise the placement of additional guns to support him, and directed Longstreet to add two infantry brigades.  

Unfortunately for Pendleton, Longstreet was careless in selecting which units should receive the assignment. He chose Lewis Armistead’s and Alexander Lawton’s brigades, both of which had lost their commanders and were badly depleted. Chilton again exacerbated the situation with a very unclear order to Pendleton, leaving him wide discretion in selecting which units should guard the Potomac ford in the army’s rear. This order left entirely too much to the discretion of the excitable artillery chief, and it seemingly indicated that he should begin withdrawing whatever the situation on his front, since the most that could be required at the ford were “a few guns and a small cavalry force.” Accordingly, Pendleton began removing his cannon, leaving the two battered infantry brigades without support. Meanwhile, Lee began moving the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia upriver, still attempting to recross and keep his invasion alive.

Late that night, the Federals crossed the Potomac, easily routed the infantry defending the ford, and overrun Pendleton’s artillery, almost capturing the general himself. The artillery chief then spent hours wandering from camp to camp trying to locate Lee. In the darkness and confusion, no one seemed able to inform him where the commanding general was. Pendleton finally found Lee and exclaimed that the Federals had overrun and captured his entire artillery reserve. Probably overcome with exhaustion, neither Lee nor his personal staff reacted well to the news; one staff officer angrily stomped off, overcome with emotion, and Lee seemed incapable of decisive action. Lee simply told his chief of artillery to lie down and get some rest, assuring him that the matter would be corrected the next morning. By then, Jackson had already driven the Federals back across the Potomac. Fatigue had taken a heavy toll on Lee and his
staff. In the aftermath, finally grasping that his army had reached its physical limits, Lee ordered a withdrawal back toward Winchester.77

The Maryland Campaign had ended in disappointment for Lee, his staff, and his army. On September 21, Taylor summarized his frustration to his sister:

I suppose it will be generally concluded that our march through- or rather into- Maryland & back was decidedly meteoric. It was however by no means without happy results… The Congress must provide for reinforcing us and then we will be enabled to realize their sanguine expectations. Give us the men & then talk about invading Penn. Our present army is not equal to the task in my opinion. You see the Feds get 3 or 4 thousand new troops a day & though we have done wonders, we can’t perform miracles. My impression is that we are still to fight & that shortly & with God’s help we will again be victorious.78

Taylor was an adamant defender of his commander’s reputation and exhibited great pride in the Army of Northern Virginia itself. He described the Battle of Antietam as “the longest & most severely contested of the war.” Taylor was largely ambivalent about the outcome of the battle, but he steadfastly denied that Lee had been defeated:

We do not boast a victory- it was not sufficiently decisive for that. The Yankees would have claimed it a glorious victory had they been on our side & they no doubt claim it anyhow. But if either had the advantage it certainly was with us. They dared not resume the attack the next day & their left proposed a truce to bury the dead.

With these words, Taylor foreshadowed a theme echoed in subsequent years by other members of Lee’s staff and those who created the Lee Legend. Lee had not lost the Battle of Antietam, and he had fought it for unimpeachable reasons.79

After the war, some Confederates questioned Lee’s decisions during the Maryland Campaign. Longstreet recorded that he had questioned Special Orders No. 191 as being too dangerous because it called for dividing the army in the presence of superior enemy forces. He then claimed that he had questioned Lee’s orders to try to hold the South Mountain passes. Longstreet also heavily criticized his former commander’s decision to fight at Sharpsburg, writing that “all the features of the position” favored the Federals. He concluded by criticizing Lee’s plan to invade Maryland in the first place, stating that “if the Southern army had been
carefully held in hand, refreshed by easy marches and comfortable supplies, the [Emancipation] proclamation could not have found its place in history. On the other hand, the Southern President would have been in Maryland at the head of his army with his manifesto for peace and independence.” By the time he wrote these words, Longstreet was a bitter man, soured by years of literary abuse from Jubal Early and other defenders of the Lost Cause who blamed him for “losing the war” at Gettysburg. Nevertheless, some historians agreed with him.

Longstreet’s former artillery chief, Brigadier General Edward P. Alexander, critiqued Lee’s decisions in Maryland with fewer dramatics, but more precise military criteria. While Alexander did not criticize Lee’s decision to invade Maryland, he pointed out the enormous straggling problem caused by overexerting the men. In particular, he argued that Lee should have been satisfied with the surrender of Harper’s Ferry and aborted his campaign then, claiming that at Sharpsburg, “A drawn battle, such as we did actually fight, was the best possible outcome one could hope for.” He wrote that by the end of September 17 “the Confederate army was worn & fought to a perfect frazzle,” and that Lee had courted disaster by remaining another day.

Lee’s staff leapt to the defense of their commander’s conduct. In fact, hearing criticism of Lee’s Maryland Campaign motivated Marshall to write his first lengthy defense of his former general. Having written Lee’s official reports, Marshall used their contents to justify Lee’s decision to invade Maryland with such an exhausted army. In an 1877 letter, Marshall explained in detail why it was impossible for Lee to have remained in Virginia after the Second Battle of Manassas. Mustering his legal talents, Marshall meticulously presented the evidence for his case, demonstrating why the devastation of northern Virginia made it impossible for Lee to maintain his army there and arguing that if the Confederates had retreated back into Central Virginia, the Federals would simply resume their previous position besieging Richmond, while
Confederate morale would suffer. Marshall thus concluded that “General Lee had nothing left to do after the battle [of Second Manassas] except to enter Maryland.”\textsuperscript{83} Remaining where he was would be impossible, and retreat would forfeit all of the hard-won gains of the previous three months of battles and sacrifices.\textsuperscript{84}

Marshall regarded the entire Battle of Antietam as an unfortunate accident caused by the loss of Special Orders No. 191. He insisted that Lee never intended to fight in Maryland at all unless under very favorable circumstances. According to Marshall, the invasion was an elaborate raid for supplies intended to lure the enemy army into a fatal trap. Unfortunately for Lee, the loss of Special Orders No. 191 ruined his plans, because they allowed the enemy to close on his army more rapidly than expected. Marshall did not blame D. H. Hill for losing the order; he merely ascribed its loss to an “accident,” and then concluded that Lee’s plans were sound, but defeated by chance.\textsuperscript{85}

Lee’s other former staffers focused on the Battle of Antietam itself. Long insisted that the struggle of September 17 was a “drawn battle,” and argued that Lee had been “politically defeated” even before it began by the failure of Marylanders to rally to the Confederate flag, and by the loss of Special Orders No. 191. He cited McClellan’s self-serving report, which exaggerated the damage inflicted and suffered by the Army of the Potomac, to support his claims.\textsuperscript{86} Similarly, in his first book, Taylor used the personnel returns of both armies to calculate Lee’s strength at Sharpsburg at only 35,255 men, and McClellan’s at 87,164 men. He then declared the battle a stalemate, and “as forcible an illustration of Southern valor and determination as was furnished during the whole period of the war, when the great disparity of numbers between the two armies is considered.”\textsuperscript{87}
In his second memoir, Taylor reconsidered the Battle of Antietam in grandiose terms laden with romantic Lost Cause imagery. He claimed that “the thirty-five thousand Confederates in line of battle under General Lee on that memorable day constituted the very flower of the Army of Northern Virginia.” Heaping praise on both Lee and his men, Taylor added that “never did soldiers render more heroic service; never were troops more skillfully handled.” Like Long, Taylor quoted McClellan’s reports to prove that the Confederates had nearly destroyed the Union army. Finally, after summarizing (and exaggerating) the considerable differences in rest and supply between the Union and Confederate Armies at Antietam, Taylor then pronounced the battle a success for Lee, claiming the “neither side could claim a victory,” and likening Lee’s repulse of the Union attacks to the Federal repulse of Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg. In other words, if the North could claim that Gettysburg was really a Union victory, the South had as much justification in regarding Antietam as a Confederate triumph.

While the published memoirs of Lee’s former staffers revealed that they spent considerable energy defending their general’s reputation after the war, wartime reports and letters demonstrated that they expended similar initiative and ability helping him control his army while the fighting raged in Maryland. Thanks to Lee’s injury, his seven personal staff officers had to remain physically close to him, taking his dictation for every single message, no matter how personal or important. Their efforts enabled him to respond swiftly to the crises of the campaign, thus helping preserve the endangered segments of the Army of Northern Virginia. They kept Lee appraised of the fighting at South Mountain and Antietam, and carried crucial orders to bring intact units into battle while rallying stragglers back into line. Although their missions, such as Taylor’s trip to meet President Davis, may not always have been well-devised, they carried out these assignments with professionalism and efficiency. Chilton had again
proven himself a weak link, possibly in distributing Special Orders No. 191 and definitely in many of his subsequent instructions, but on the whole, Lee’s staff had kept the army’s high command functioning during extreme strain and fatigue. During the Maryland Campaign, Lee’s personal staff fully matured into a capable battlefield team that could successfully manage multiple crises. Now that the Confederate Army was entering a period of recovery and reorganization, the staff would face new challenges, and successfully rise to the occasion.
Chapter 5: Fall 1862 and Fredericksburg-Defining Staff Roles

Although General Robert E. Lee’s invasion of Maryland had not produced the decisive defeat of the Union Army that he had planned, the Army of Northern Virginia had escaped back to Virginia, and there it rested, reorganized, and gathered strength. While the army’s organizational structure was streamlined, so was Lee’s personal staff. This was the first lull in activity since Lee assumed command of the army during the Battle of Seven Pines, and the commanding general used the down time to rectify many of the problems that plagued the Confederates in Maryland. Between October and December 1862, Lee’s staff officers assumed the responsibilities that they would carry out during the rest of the war, and they proved quite capable in their new official roles.

After the war, two of Lee’s former staffers, Walter Taylor and Armistead Long, broke from their usual silence regarding their own activities to discuss their lives during this period. In these published primary sources, they provided well-known anecdotes of their relations with their commander that are very useful in helping understand how Lee’s headquarters functioned and how the general interacted with his “military family.” Used in conjunction with wartime archival letters and order books and the published official reports, these memoirs provide a thorough description of the roles and personalities of Lee’s staff officers. This chapter will utilize the available archival and published wartime sources to demonstrate that Lee’s staff members settled into fixed roles and performed them more ably than most historians have realized. It will also analyze the staff officers’ postwar accounts of their headquarters service to demonstrate how they romanticized the drudgery of camp routine and even transformed personal tension with their commander into opportunities to praise him as a superior, yet fallible, leader and man.
With his hands healing, Lee returned his staff members to their traditional roles. His depleted ranks needed replenishing, and he put his staffers to work gathering every available man. Henceforth, Colonel Robert H. Chilton acted as the army’s unofficial disciplinarian. Just after the army returned to Virginia, the chief of staff sent a strongly-worded circular to Longstreet and Jackson. In this message, Chilton lectured both of Lee’s ranking subordinates, enumerating exact procedures for taking company roll-calls, rounding up stragglers, and accounting for supplies. He ordered that each general establish a permanent provost guard to curb straggling, and denounced the “depredations” allegedly committed by absentees as “disgrace and injury to our cause.”1 Two days later, Chilton wrote another order for the army’s movement, adding that arms and equipment lost by the men in the ranks would be deducted from their company commanders’ pay. On October 1, he issued another directive giving detailed instructions for the care of the army’s horses from cavalry mounts to artillery teams to supply trains. Additionally, Lee had Chilton write his former superior officer, Adjutant General Samuel Cooper, to request that all paroled prisoners be returned to the army as soon as possible. Chilton had an eye for minutely-detailed orders, and Lee utilized it thoroughly.2

Lee involved both Chilton and the experienced artillerist on his staff, Armistead Long, in the overdue reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia’s artillery. In many cases, Long assisted the division inspectors as they evaluated the condition and battle records of the batteries and recommended that underperforming units be disbanded. By October 4, Long and his comrades had completed their assignment, and Chilton issued Special Orders No. 209, a sweeping realignment of the army’s artillery that the chief of staff spelled out in his usual exact detail, battery by battery. There was much griping about the consolidation or disbanding of
some units, but on the whole, the reorganization made the Army of Northern Virginia’s “long arm” much more efficient.³

Despite the flurry of activity from Chilton, it had become obvious to Lee that his chief of staff was not up to his official responsibilities. Shortly after the army settled down to rest and recuperate near Winchester, Chilton embroiled himself in a dispute with Major General Lafayette McLaws similar to his earlier feud with John B. Magruder. During the confused retreat from South Mountain, Chilton had relayed Lee’s instructions to withdraw any way he could and reunite with the army commander at Sharpsburg.⁴ McLaws had been slow to arrive at Antietam and had fallen asleep when his two divisions did reach it. The chief of staff accused McLaws of disobeying his orders to march up the Maryland side of the Potomac River to rejoin Lee at Sharpsburg. According to Chilton, if McLaws had followed his instructions, he and his men would have reached the battlefield much sooner and in better condition. In his official report, McLaws defended himself from Chilton’s accusations. Citing his own subordinates’ reports, he thoroughly demonstrated that following the chief of staff’s orders in Maryland had been impractical and might have even jeopardized his entire command. Additionally, McLaws emphasized that Chilton had not bothered to ascertain whether his proposed route was passable by artillery. Finally, McLaws claimed that he was not able to inform army headquarters of his plight or his decision because his couriers could not reach Lee once the Federals were over South Mountain. Instead of directing his report to Lee, McLaws sent it to Chilton.⁵

While this dispute did not degenerate into an ugly controversy like Chilton’s feud with Magruder, it was a sign to Lee that his chief of staff must be reassigned. In the end, Lee quietly censured McLaws for his suspect performance by denying him promotion. Chilton was another matter; he had been Lee’s personal friend before the war, he had personal ties to President Davis,
and he had worked for Adjutant General Cooper. Finally, as chief of staff, Chilton was part of the general staff, and was thus attached not to Lee, but to the Army of Northern Virginia. He therefore did not serve at Lee’s pleasure, and theoretically answered only to the authorities in Richmond. By this time, Chilton was aware that his role had been steadily diminishing since the Seven Days, and deeply resented his unimportant status. On September 25, he wrote a long letter to President Davis complaining that he had remained only a colonel while many of the Confederate army’s generals had been his inferiors in rank in the United States Army. Many officers were thus bypassing him for promotion. Seemingly forgetting that Magruder’s allies in Congress were blocking his advancement, Chilton continued to seek it, noting that his perpetual colonelcy had become a topic of embarrassing conversation.

Chilton sought not only promotion, but increased authority. He claimed that Lee had recommended him for inspector general or brigadier of cavalry after the Seven Days. He now argued that he should continue in the Adjutant General’s Office. As an adjutant, Chilton felt that he could better correct problems such as the army’s recent chronic straggling. He also implied that, as adjutant general, he could improve the army’s supply problems. Chilton complained that Lee was micromanaging his job, reducing him to “performing duties which with General Lee’s habitual attention to the merest detail,” thus making them so simple and mundane that anyone could do them. Overall, Chilton expressed profound unhappiness with his commanding general. Perhaps expressing frustration with his recent efforts, he argued that discipline was lacking in the Army of Northern Virginia and that Lee did not possess sufficient authority to enforce it. He claimed 40,000 Confederate stragglers filled the Shenandoah Valley, and that even 10,000 of them in the ranks would have brought the Confederates a great victory at Sharpsburg. In conclusion, he asked Davis to transfer him back to Richmond, “where rank is not
constantly brought up” and that William W. Mackall replace him as chief of staff. Revealingly, he did not recommend any of his staff comrades for his position, and none of them seems to have been very fond of him.  

Chilton’s request was not granted, for Lee had another post in mind for him, one that would take full advantage of his exacting eye for the minutest details of regulations and his demonstrated ability as a disciplinarian. On September 7, 1862, as the Army of Northern Virginia was in Maryland and shedding hordes of stragglers, Lee dictated a letter to Davis. In it, although more diplomatically than Chilton, the commanding general noted the same problems as his chief of staff, referring to his army’s discipline as “naturally defective,” and insisting that “the material of which it is composed is the best in the world, and, if properly disciplined and instructed, would be able successfully to resist any force that might be brought against it.”

While Lee suggested other measures, such as establishing a permanent provost guard and quicker courts-martial to try offenders, he recommended that a new staff position specifically responsible for maintaining military discipline be established. As he explained to Davis, “If...a proper inspector-general, with sufficient rank and standing, with assistants, could be appointed to see to the execution of orders, and to fix the responsibility of acts, great benefits and saving to the service would be secured.” Although the office of “inspector-general” was not unknown in warfare, no Confederate law provided for such an officer at a field army headquarters. While all members of the commanding general’s personal staff were supposed to see that his orders were being executed, they were not accountable for routine disciplinary matters. Davis and the Congress accepted Lee’s argument and amended army regulations to create the new office. Chilton was the obvious choice for it, and Lee recommended him on October 18. Ten days later, Adjutant General Mason issued the order formally naming “Brig. Gen. R. H. Chilton” as
the army’s inspector general. Despite Lee’s recommendation to War Secretary George W. Randolph that Chilton be made “assistant adjutant and inspector general,” Mason’s order explicitly relieved him of his old duties as assistant adjutant-general. Chilton was now officially off of Lee’s personal staff.11

It seems likely that Lee intended that Chilton retain his old post in name only to soothe his feelings. The contentious staffer’s fears had been realized. While Chilton remained the titular chief of staff, he had virtually no voice in any future operations. From this point until he finally left the Army of Northern Virginia, Chilton issued very few orders to troops on the battlefield and his duties were confined almost entirely to details of camp discipline and supply. While he sent a few orders to generals directing their movements during the next few months, such directives became increasingly rare. By the summer of 1863, Chilton would concern himself almost entirely with carrying out inspections and arresting deserters. He continued to sign telegrams as “A. A. & I. G.,” but it made little difference; despite his wishes, he was now separated from the Adjutant General’s Office and its attendant influence over personnel matters and army policy.12 Lee had handled his troublesome chief of staff in the same way he dealt with subordinate generals who failed him; he obtained an apparent promotion for Chilton that in reality all but relieved him of important responsibility. Chilton was left without any grounds for complaint, as his new role seemed like an increase in his powers, and there is no record of any further correspondence between him and Davis for the rest of the war.

Chilton quickly demonstrated aptitude in his new post. Only two weeks after he became inspector general, he issued a very critical and detailed report on Major General John B. Hood’s Division that helped curb its notoriously poor camp discipline. He was also able to notify Richmond on how many men in James Longstreet’s Corps lacked proper footwear.13 In his
capacity as inspector, he also kept track of food supplies, informing the army’s commissary chief that he was to make sure that all units had three days’ rations on hand.\textsuperscript{14} He also deflected some of the administrative headaches from his chief. In January 1863, an agent of the notoriously incompetent Confederate Commissary General, Lucius B. Northrop, visited the army to protest that Lee’s policies for his supply trains would make it impossible to adequately provision his army. Lee declined to see him; instead, he had Chilton talk with Northrop’s agent, who recited a litany of grievances that must have taken hours. With Chilton’s ear for exact details and his ineptness at actually issuing field orders, such duty as a sounding post on supply matters thoroughly suited him. Once again, Lee had made the most of the talents of his staff officers while avoiding any open dissent at army headquarters.\textsuperscript{15}

With Chilton reassigned, Mason temporarily assumed most of his responsibility to handle the army’s duty assignments.\textsuperscript{16} Meanwhile, Lee’s other staff members were not idle. In addition to his unofficial role as inspector of artillery, Long was responsible for selecting and preparing the headquarters campsite. Lee recognized his most experienced staffer’s eye for terrain, reputedly stating that “Colonel Long has a good eye for locality; let him find a place for the camp.” Despite this, Lee rejected Long’s selection of a comfortable, well-watered farmyard, preferring one crammed with boulders.\textsuperscript{17} While Long had praised both Lee’s headquarters in Georgia and near Richmond as comfortable if not elaborate, this was the first occasion in which he chose a location for army headquarters during a period of comparative inactivity. He had obviously expected better accommodations, and added that when visitors came to Lee’s tent and remarked on the rough terrain, Lee jested that Long had located him there in revenge for not allowing him to occupy the farmhouse yard.\textsuperscript{18} While Long was probably moved to exaggerate Lee’s self-denial by the Lost Cause romantic imagery that he and the other former members of
the general’s staff had helped to create, his account is consistent with Lee’s known preferences and the frustration expressed by the other members of his staff.

Long was not the only member of Lee’s staff with grounds for frustration. During the recent period of intense fighting and continual maneuvering, Lee had used Marshall to take down his official dictated letters to Davis and write his proclamations to his army and the people of Maryland. Marshall’s precise memory, trained in his legal profession, eminently qualified him for such work. Since the military situation was now relatively quiet, Lee now tasked Marshall with compiling material for his official reports. Because Lee’s report could not be composed until all of his generals had turned in theirs, Marshall had to solicit nearly every corps and division commander in the army, badgering them repeatedly to complete their accounts of the previous year’s battles. This process took months, as many officers of considerable battlefield prowess, like “Stonewall” Jackson, proved irritat ingly slow when ordered to produce reports of their exploits. Marshall thus had a truly voluminous amount of sources to read, compare, and compile, and was forced to reconcile the inevitable contradictions and uncertainties arising between different accounts of chaotic, bloody fighting. He also had to negotiate the difficult minefields of the generals’ reputations and egos, and carefully compose Lee’s reports in order to avoid heaping excessive praise on any officer or his unit at the expense of another. Additionally, in a southern army deeply conscious of personal honor, Marshall needed to refrain from criticizing any conduct on or off the battlefield which could not be proven. With his keen eye for details and background in law, Marshall was the ideal staff member to sort out this mess of conflicting data and clashing interests.

Once Marshall had pieced a coherent account together, he submitted his finished report to Lee for his review. As Marshall remembered, the general was a harsh editor; he wrote that Lee
“weighed every sentence I wrote, frequently making minute verbal alterations, and questioned me closely as to the evidence on which I based all statements which he did not know to be correct.”

Marshall had to carry out many interviews with Lee’s subordinates himself, and once Lee had reviewed his draft, he then had to make any of his chief’s changes part of the finished report. In the end, it took Marshall until April 1863 to finish Lee’s report of the Seven Days’ Battles, and until June 1863 to finish the official account of the Second Manassas Campaign. He did not complete the report of the Maryland Campaign until after Gettysburg. Facing such a task, it is no surprise that Marshall sent very few of Lee’s orders for the next six months.

Marshall took time, however, to alert Lee to a possible spy. On October 20, a Mr. Kirby arrived in camp claiming to be an English-Canadian, and Lee reluctantly wrote a pass allowing him to proceed to Richmond. Nine days later, one of Marshall’s friends in Baltimore smuggled him a letter. Remaining outwardly anonymous while identifying himself by referring to one of Marshall’s old law cases, the informant wrote Lee’s staffer that “Kirby, the Canadian or Englishman, who is in your lines, should be arrested at once. He knows and tells too much.” Marshall immediately forwarded this message to Lee and vouched for its authenticity, stating that he recognized both the court case and the man’s handwriting. The next day, at Lee’s order, Marshall wrote a formal note which did not reveal his source’s name for security reasons, but vouched for his Confederate allegiance. He added that “his sources of information are very good, and, from my knowledge of his character, I feel sure that he would not write this letter without strong ground for what he says.” He pointed out the risk his informant had taken given his allegedly high social position in Baltimore, and implored that Lee take action on its contents. Lee followed Marshall’s advice, forwarding his note to Secretary of War Randolph that same day and recommending that Kirby be sent out of Confederate lines.
As both an engineer and a trained scholar, Charles Venable assisted both Long and Marshall. Lee sent him to scout the Virginia countryside looking for defensive positions, often for days at a time. When Venable was not conducting reconnaissance, Lee had him relieve Marshall of the duty of taking his official dictation to President Davis. As the Army of Northern Virginia’s letter book reveals, Venable and Marshall worked in shifts copying their commander’s correspondence with Davis and with his subordinates. Venable copied most of Lee’s messages throughout 1863 while Marshall was compiling reports, and Marshall resumed copying Lee’s letters when Venable was absent.

Since Talcott lacked the mathematician’s formal education, Lee used him only sparingly in the office and more extensively in the field. He assisted Long and Venable in their reconnaissance duties and helped site artillery. He probably did not help compile reports, take dictation, or perform any other office work, as no surviving orders, letters, or reports from army headquarters bear his name as author during the fall of 1862. After the war, Lee would write that Talcott displayed “professional ability, boldness in the field, and systematic industry” as an engineer, thus highlighting Talcott’s battlefield and scouting prowess while devoting scant attention to any office duties he may have had.

While Long was selecting campsites, Marshall was collecting reports, and Talcott and Venable were assisting them, Taylor was enjoying a much-needed period of rest. The three months of campaigning had tired him nearly as much as the men in the ranks. Like them, his clothing had become tattered; as he related to his brother, his disheveled hat was “unanimously conceded…a disgrace to the staff.” Lee’s simple camp standards did not satisfy Taylor, who declared that he had “the largest appetite that ever went unappeased.” He complained about the contents of his meals, but concluded, “poor as our fare is, I manage to fatten on it.”
Taylor was still in high spirits about his work and the Confederate cause, the weariness of war was mounting on him.

Although he was resting from active campaigning, Taylor assisted Mason with the army’s voluminous paperwork. While in the course of these duties, Taylor witnessed his commander in a profound moment of grief; reentering Lee’s tent unannounced, he found his commander stunned, holding a letter in his hands announcing his daughter’s death. Lee habitually did not open himself emotionally to his subordinates, and there is no evidence that he either rebuked Taylor for his breach of protocol or spoke at all with him about the contents of the letter. Nevertheless, Lee’s stoic demeanor deeply impressed Taylor, for he wrote years later that, with his army constantly needing his attention, “Lee the man must give way to Lee the patriot and soldier.”

Taylor needed the rest he received. On November 24, 1862, Mason left Lee’s staff to rejoin Joseph E. Johnston’s staff in Mississippi. Although the post of assistant adjutant-general was theoretically a general staff job and thus attached to units and not to generals, in the Confederacy, such military norms were often disregarded. With Mason gone, Lee officially named Taylor as his new acting assistant adjutant-general. Taylor was now responsible for all of the army’s personnel paperwork in addition to many of his former duties as aide-de-camp.

Taylor immediately assumed Mason’s work. Just four days after becoming Lee’s adjutant, he issued Special Orders No. 253, reassigning thirteen regiments, two battalions, and one legion to different brigades, creating an additional brigade, and naming two new brigade commanders. On December 4, Taylor issued an order announcing a new army chief of ordinance. Later that month, with the army going into winter quarters, Taylor decided after consultation with artillery officers which batteries should remain with the army and which ones
should be temporarily sent south to obtain better forage. Finally, Taylor wrote the order assigning Brigadier General William E. Jones to command the troops in the Shenandoah Valley. In all of these instances, Taylor tried to only disturb Lee with very important cases, handling the bulk of army paperwork himself.32

In addition to handling troop assignments, Taylor also inherited the vast number of military tribunal cases, requests for transfers, and appeals for furloughs that always reappeared when the army was relatively inactive.33 While Marshall handled the official reports, Taylor organized and catalogued the personnel returns, noting the large number of men returning to duty after the hard campaigning of the summer of 1862.34 Although Lee had a standing policy against granting most furloughs and transfers, Taylor still had to answer each petition. Even when he was unexpectedly called to Richmond in early December, he still carried Lee’s personal mail with him when he returned.35

By March 1863, regular telegraph service had been established connecting Lee’s army with Richmond and the railroad depots. Taylor had sent most of Lee’s telegrams when both men were working from offices in Richmond, and now Taylor sent most of the telegrams that came from Lee’s army in the field. These messages dealt with such mundane matters as the courts-martial of company-grade officers, rail transportation for individual officers, and a three-day personal furlough extension for an artillery battalion commander. Taylor had to read and approve all such communication and then personally copy it into the army’s telegraph book.36

It did not take long for Taylor to grow frustrated with his workload. Probably during this time, he expressed his feelings outwardly; as he recalled, “forgetting what was due to my superior, I petulantly threw the paper down at my side and gave evident signs of anger.” Rather than punishing Taylor for his insubordination, Lee calmly said, “Colonel Taylor, when I lose my
temper, don’t met it make you angry.” Later in the war, Taylor’s letters often expressed deeper anger and exasperation with Lee than this incident, and his feelings about it likely softened with time. Additionally, the emerging legends of the saintly behavior of Lee probably influenced Taylor to depict Lee in a more flattering, reasonable light. Nevertheless, this passage was in keeping with Taylor’s temper and what is known of Lee’s usual emotional restraint.

After the war, both Taylor and Long cited this exchange as proof of Lee’s nearly-infallible character. Reflecting on the incident, Taylor expressed extreme devotion to Lee, transforming his confrontation into another proof of his general’s moral superiority:

Was there ever a more gentle and considerate and yet so positive a reproof? How magnanimous is the great soldier, and yet how crushing to the subordinate!...The first man of his day and generation, great and glorious in his humility, condescended to occupy the same plane with his youthful subaltern, and to reason with him as an equal, frankly acknowledging his own imperfections, but kindly reminding the inferior at the same time of his duty and his position. In his memoir, Long quoted Taylor’s entire account, and commented that “most men in his position would have dealt more severely with the petulance of a subordinate, and not have administered this quiet and considerate rebuke by indicating that the loss of temper was not directed toward him and gave him no warrant for a display of anger.”

This account demonstrates that, contrary to some historians’ claims, Lee’s former staffers did not depict their former commander as a flawless saint after the war. Taylor best summarized their views when he described Lee as “the first man of his day and generation.” While Lee may have been the “first man,” he was still a man, not a perfect “marble model” who did not suffer from any vices or faults. Taylor, Long, and their comrades openly admitted in writing about these weeks in camp that their chief had “imperfections.” He could be unreasonable and short-tempered with Taylor, and he could be insufferably stubborn with Long over campsites, but in their minds, he remained a great man. Although Taylor in particular would grow increasingly
irritated with Lee as the next two years of war transpired, he never completely lost his admiration or profound respect for his commanding general. After the war, while he chose to view his dispute with Lee in a romanticized light and absorbed all the blame for the personal friction upon himself, Taylor did not forget that Robert E. Lee was also human.\textsuperscript{40}

Overall, Lee and his staff achieved much in helping to reinforce and reorganize the Army of Northern Virginia under very arduous conditions. A British observer visited Lee’s Winchester headquarters and was astonished at its austerity, commenting that “his staff are crowded together, two or three in a tent; none are allowed to carry more baggage than a small box each; and his own kit is very little larger.”\textsuperscript{41} Thus, as verified by an outside observer, Long’s and Taylor’s complaints about the living and working accommodations at headquarters were accurate. Nevertheless, in spite of acute supply shortages, by mid-November 1862, Lee, his staff, and his generals had completely refitted the Army of Northern Virginia. Numbering barely 30,000 men when it returned to Virginia, it now counted about 80,000 men in two infantry corps. Its cavalry and artillery were also more effectively organized and commanded.\textsuperscript{42}

The Army of the Potomac had not been idle while Lee and his staff toiled. General George McClellan finally crossed his own force over the Potomac in early November and moved slowly toward Fredericksburg, a town on the Rappahannock River roughly halfway between Washington, D. C. and Richmond. McClellan claimed he was planning to make a sudden “dash” on the Confederate capitol, but he never had the chance. Finally exasperated by his continual delays and sluggish movements, President Abraham Lincoln relieved him of command and replaced him with Major General Ambrose E. Burnside. Burnside decided to continue his predecessor’s plan, moving his 120,000-man force to the north bank of the Rappahannock across from Fredericksburg.\textsuperscript{43}
Lee moved the Army of Northern Virginia to meet Burnside. Meanwhile, with Taylor and Marshall still busy with office work, Lee put Long, Venable, and Talcott to work preparing artillery positions. As the most experienced and highest-ranking officer, Lee put Long in charge of the project, and had Venable, Talcott, and Captain Samuel Johnston of the army’s general staff engineers assist him. This was the first time that Lee had sent Long specifically to position massed artillery, and he did his job well, as his emplacements were nearly impregnable.44

In fact, Lee was so impressed with his staffers’ work near Fredericksburg that he sent Talcott away on his first independent assignment. Jackson had proposed crossing the Rappahannock upstream and then attacking the Federal right. To see if “Stonewall’s” plan was practical, Lee sent Talcott to reconnoiter the Rappahannock as far west at its junction with the Rapidan River. On December 2, Talcott returned, reporting that there were no places on the Rappahannock capable of being bridged by pontoons in the winter between the Rapidan and Fredericksburg. This was a relatively simple task for the engineer, but Lee officially noted his prompt, thorough performance of it.45 Talcott’s second assignment was more complicated. Because the Rappahannock was navigable as far upstream as Fredericksburg, Lee feared that Federal gunboats would sail up the river and lob their heavy ordinance at his army’s right flank. He entrusted Talcott with selecting and constructing a suitable site where a Confederate battery could be placed to prevent such an attack. Talcott carried out his assignment extremely well. In his official report, Lee stated that his aide had located his artillery “in an excellent position,” and the Federals made no serious attempt to send gunboats upriver. Talcott’s work made a long-lasting impression on his superiors; decades later, although embittered by repeated attacks on his character and conduct, James Longstreet still took time in his memoirs to commend Talcott’s placement of his artillery on the Rappahannock.46
On December 13, 1862, the Federals attacked. While Longstreet’s corps was stationed behind formidable defenses along Marye’s Heights immediately southwest of Fredericksburg, Jackson’s command held less imposing terrain southeast of the town. Lee positioned himself at an elevation near Longstreet’s right flank near two new thirty-pound cannons recently arrived from Richmond. Here, for the only time in the war, Lee was able to personally observe almost his entire front at once, and he kept most of his staff close to him in order to be able to send them wherever they were needed.\textsuperscript{47} In fact, General Lee’s position was too exposed; Longstreet remembered that the Confederate heavy guns attracted counterbattery fire from Union artillery and that many enemy shots came very close to Lee and his staff. Thanks to faulty Confederate manufacturing, the guns themselves proved dangerous to the general and his staffers, and both burst. As Alexander recalled, “At one of the explosions Genls. Lee and Longstreet & many staff officers were standing very near, & fragments flew all about them, but none was hurt.”\textsuperscript{48}

Lee and his staff had little cause for concern. The Federals did not attack along the whole line, but instead sent a single infantry division against Jackson and then concentrated their efforts on Marye’s Heights. Observing the Union troops heading for Jackson, Lee sent Taylor with a message urging “Stonewall” to exercise caution, as his men lacked the formidable geographical advantages Longstreet’s corps enjoyed. In fact, the lone Federal division hit Jackson’s line at its weakest point. The Union troops broke through even as Taylor watched.\textsuperscript{49} The enemy assault was not supported, however, and Jackson hurried reinforcements to seal the breach. Meanwhile, the movement on Lee’s left at Marye’s Heights developed into a full-fledged series of futile frontal attacks that produced heavy casualties and never reached the Confederates. By the end of the day, the Union Army had suffered 12,653 casualties to only 5,309 Confederate losses.\textsuperscript{50}
Lee put his staff to work to see if it was possible to successfully counterattack the reeling Army of the Potomac. The day after the battle, he sent Marshall to assess the situation on Jackson’s front, and Marshall returned with “Stonewall’s” assurance that he could not attack because of the Federal heavy artillery. Lee also sent Venable to scout the enemy position, and the staff officer had a very close call with an enemy sharpshooter who barely missed his head, as he informed his wife. Venable was feeling the strain of hard campaigning, and while he possessed undeniably ability, he was becoming frustrated with his position and with Lee. He closed his letter appealing for winter clothes, tersely adding, “no chance for a furlough.”

While he was not satisfied with his inability to follow up his victory by destroying the Federal Army, Lee expressed great satisfaction with his personal staff officers. For the first time, he enumerated their services individually in his official report. Despite personal frustrations and an enormous amount of labor both in the office and on the battlefield, Lee’s personal staff members had risen to the challenge. After seven months of hard campaigning, they had evolved as an efficient working team and used their skills more effectively than ever before.

As the primary sources reveal, Lee’s personal staff officers had found definite roles by the end of 1862. They performed the vital tasks of refitting and reorganizing the army. Recognizing their talents, Lee forged them into a highly effective team, placing each man in the position most suited to his temperament, training, and proven aptitude. While their work was not often glamorous, it was essential, and Lee acknowledged their services more specifically and thoroughly than ever before.

After the war, Lee’s former staffers used their published accounts of the relatively quiet camp interlude of fall 1862 to depict headquarters as a difficult yet rewarding place. They admitted that their former commander had been a thoroughly human leader who was often hard
to satisfy, but they dismissed their personal scuffles as trivial when weighed against Lee’s greatness. While they were willing to briefly discuss their own service at headquarters, they presented themselves as mere close spectators whose work was a feeble compliment to Lee’s heroic sacrifice. Crucially, they remembered that Lee was still a fallible, mortal man, but in their minds, he became an even greater example because he resisted his own human frailty and that of his family and staff officers.

By the end of 1862, Lee’s staff had demonstrated its competence. After some teething troubles during the Seven Days’ Battles, its members had rapidly improved in both military efficiency and battlefield service. They had repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to endure hardship and danger to help their general command and control his army. The staff functioned as his eyes, his ears, and even his hands when he was injured. They were now capable of undertaking highly important independent assignments far from Lee’s supervision. Lee trusted them, and they did not betray his confidence. Even Chilton, whose battlefield ability proved wanting and whose tendency to engage in petty feuds caused disruptions, found a position. As 1863 dawned, however, new challenges awaited Lee, his staff, and the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee’s health would begin to falter, new and increasingly-powerful Federal hosts would threaten Richmond, and by the end of the year, Lee’s personal staff would be sharply reduced in size.
Chapter 6: Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863: Failure Brings Controversy

In the Battle of Chancellorsville, fought between May 1-4, 1863, Robert E. Lee and his personal staff helped coordinate a stunning victory over the Union Army of the Potomac.¹ By late May, Lee, his army, and his personal staff officers were very confident that they would win ultimate victory for the Confederacy. Although Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson’s death at Chancellorsville had created a serious high command problem, Lee reorganized his army to help lessen the burdens on his subordinates and expected to continue using his personal staff as before. The staff officers, though tired of their heavy responsibilities and concerned about their families, looked forward to success as the army moved north. By now, although Robert Chilton had proven unfit to carry battlefield orders, the other five members of Lee’s personal staff had served well together through five major campaigns and a harrowing winter, and they had thus added a wealth of experience to their ample innate talents. They had helped to maintain and coordinate the Army of Northern Virginia to victory many times, and they expected to be able to do so again on Union soil.

The Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863 ended in disastrous defeat at Gettysburg in a battle which inflicted more than 28,000 casualties on the Army of Northern Virginia and irreparably damaged its high command. There was plenty of blame to distribute for the catastrophe, but the evidence shows that Lee’s staff continued to perform ably even in defeat. The Union victory at Gettysburg did not result from poor Confederate staff work, but from several mistakes committed by the southern high command and the hard fighting and leadership of the Army of the Potomac. Lee’s personal staff continued to do everything he asked. At several crucial junctures, Lee simply did not use his personal staff to control his army.
as he had previously done at Antietam and Chancellorsville. Using the official reports as well as archival letters, this chapter will show that Lee’s staff did not fail him in his greatest battle.²

In addition to examining Lee’s staff during the battle, this chapter will analyze the memoirs and articles written by former Confederates after the war to explain how Lee’s former staffers helped to shape southern memory of Gettysburg. It will demonstrate that, contrary to much of the historiography written about Confederate recriminations over Gettysburg, Lee’s staff did not speak with a united voice about the battle or who “lost” it. While they generally agreed that James Longstreet was slow to obey Lee’s commands, unlike Jubal Early and some other ex-Confederates, they did not hold Longstreet solely accountable for Lee’s defeat. In particular, Lee’s former staff often faulted cavalry commander J. E. B. Stuart, whose absence, they insisted, had forced the Army of Northern Virginia into a battle with an adversary of unknown strength on unfamiliar terrain. They insisted that, on one level, the question of Longstreet’s responsibility for “losing” the battle was irrelevant; they argued that if Lee had possessed his cavalry, he would never have fought the Federals at Gettysburg at all. Later, in response to Longstreet’s often ill-advised efforts to defend himself from his critics, Lee’s former staffers condemned Longstreet in stronger terms. They were not interested in destroying Longstreet’s reputation or questioning his loyalty to the Confederacy, but they would not tolerate any attack on Lee or his memory.

While the staffers did not blindly follow Early’s lead in condemning Longstreet alone for Gettysburg, they agreed with him that Lee had faced very long odds in Pennsylvania, and denied that he actually lost the battle. Some of them argued that Gettysburg was an inconclusive contest in which the Confederates might really have had a better claim to victory, but they conceded that the Confederacy could not afford such “successes.” In their writings, the staff emphasized this
point, consistently finding reasons to deduct men from Lee’s army and magnify Union numbers. They argued that the Army of Northern Virginia could not have reasonably been expected to prevail against an enemy who outnumbered it two to one. Thus, they concluded that considering the odds, Lee did as well as anyone could, but his army and cause were ultimately doomed by superior enemy numbers and resources. Whether in triumph or defeat, Lee remained an ideal general to his former “military family,” and they protected his image against all critics.

Once the Chancellorsville Campaign was over, Chilton resumed his disciplinary role as the army’s inspector general, and once again proved far more capable in an office than he did relaying commands on the battlefield. On May 8, he issued an order banning all substitutes from the Army of Northern Virginia without the explicit approval of Lee himself. Too many “substitute” men serving in someone else’s place had proven physically, mentally, or morally unfit to be soldiers. Several days later, he ordered that all brigade inspectors should resume their normal duties, as they could not be spared from the ranks. In their place, brigade commanders themselves should conduct trimonthly inspections and promptly report anything that might endanger their men’s health. He also spelled out the procedure for receiving flags of truce in precise detail. Chilton was in his true element, and although he remained unhappy in the role, Lee recognized his aptitude and used his available talents.

Similarly, Taylor returned to his extensive administrative duties, which included tallying the army’s numerical strength after its recent losses. On May 14, as the army’s officers prepared their reports for Marshall’s review, Taylor issued a directive ordering Lee’s subordinates not to include slightly wounded men in these reports, and to refrain from stating how many men were in their units. While many officers saw high casualties in their units as proof of their men’s discipline, courage, and devotion to the cause, they also encouraged the enemy, who were
buoyed by accounts that they put many rebels out of action. Additionally, such reports, when published, provided the Federals with key intelligence about Confederate numerical strength. Several days later, Taylor sent a note to Major General Samuel Jones, Confederate commander in Southwestern Virginia, warning him to be on the lookout for a gang of deserters, and felt the matter urgent enough to telegraph him in addition to his written message. Soon afterward, Taylor wrote to Jones again refusing that general’s request for an infantry regiment and asking for more of his men to be transferred to Lee’s Army. These were the first instances in which Lee entrusted communications with a distant departmental commander to any of his staff, reflecting both his confidence in Taylor’s abilities and his own preoccupation with operations elsewhere.

Taylor continued to be involved with the assignment of higher-ranking officers as well as the men in the ranks, and since this was the season when Civil War armies were active, Taylor had to concern himself far more extensively with officers’ replacements and unit transfers than before. On May 8, he wrote orders assigning permanent commanders to two divisions of the Second Corps. Later, he wrote the order assigning Major General Isaac R. Trimble to command the small Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley. By the end of the month, Taylor had written the assignments for four replacement brigade commanders, and recorded the transfer of one brigade into the Army of Northern Virginia to replace another being reassigned to North Carolina. Additionally, he reviewed General Pendleton’s meticulous counting and recounting of the army’s artillery pieces.

Lee had Taylor prepare Special Orders No. 146 at the end of May. These instructions reorganized the army from two infantry corps of four divisions each to three corps of three divisions each, under Lieutenant Generals James Longstreet, Richard S. Ewell, and Ambrose P. Hill, while expanding Major General J. E. B. Stuart’s cavalry division. In the coming campaign,
Lee’s army would operate in conjunction with Brigadier General John D. Imboden’s independent brigade of mounted infantry and cavalry. Lee’s staff would thus be issuing and carrying orders to three infantry corps commanders, the cavalry chief, and an independent brigade, and probably to many more junior officers as the need arose. Although the army’s realignment put less strain on Lee’s subordinate generals, it increased the burden on his small personal staff.9

By June 1863, Lee had decided to take his army onto Union soil once more. After the war, many former Confederates debated his reasons for doing so. Some claimed that Lee had never desired to fight a battle at all in the summer of 1863; his movement was thus nothing more than a gigantic raid for supplies. Others, notably James Longstreet, insisted that although Lee intended to give battle, he intended to force the Federals to attack him, and then decisively counterattack. Still others argued that Lee planned to draw Federal troops away from besieged Vicksburg, Mississippi, and other points in the Western Theater. In part, former Confederates posited these explanations because they were trying to reconcile the record of Lee’s battlefield prowess with his lack of success in Pennsylvania.

Lee’s former staffers contributed to this discussion and uncharacteristically wrote of their own experiences. Long recalled that Lee invited him into his tent to discuss his plans and claimed that Lee preferred to fight the Federals in Pennsylvania, where victory might demoralize the United States into allowing Confederate independence. With the likely benefit of fifteen years’ hindsight, the former staff officer claimed that Lee had always wanted to fight a battle in the vicinity of Gettysburg. As crucial as the Gettysburg Campaign was to the outcome of the war in the East, it assumed titanic importance in Long’s memory. Long insisted that Lee believed that victory in Pennsylvania could lead to Confederate control of Maryland, West Virginia, and even Washington, D. C., and would thus win the war. His invasion was therefore
fully justified. Long depicted a visionary Lee who promised extraordinary success without realistically considering all of the military and political ramifications of victory. The Army of Northern Virginia was not large enough to begin to hold the territory Long claimed it would win, and the Washington defenses would remain heavily garrisoned even if the Army of the Potomac was destroyed. While Lee certainly wanted to draw the enemy away from threatened points in the West, the rest of Long’s account was very suspect. Even his argument that Lee wanted to fight at Gettysburg was doubtful in light of Lee’s demonstrated aversion to engaging the Federals there on July 1.

In this account, Long displayed all of the aspects of the “Lee Legend.” According to the former staff officer, the Civil War itself hinged on the outcome of General Lee’s operations, which promised to either end the conflict in final Confederate victory or doom the South to defeat. Such depictions served a crucial purpose in white southern memory, for they reassured former Confederates that they came very close to winning the war, and indeed could have won if not for unfortunate circumstances and the mistakes of Lee’s subordinates. Long certainly magnified the stakes of the campaign and the legendary prowess of his former commander.

Although Charles Marshall never finished his planned “military biography” of Lee, he took great care to discuss his former commander’s reasons for invading Pennsylvania. Citing Lee’s report, Marshall demonstrated that the commanding general had entered Union soil to keep the Union army as far from Richmond as possible and force it to give battle under circumstances favorable to the Confederates. Richmond was far more than just the Confederate capital; the city was Lee’s principal supply base and a vital manufacturing center, as well as the most potent symbol of the Confederacy in the popular mind. Accordingly, the Army of Northern Virginia had to protect it at almost any cost. Given Federal superiority in heavy artillery and manpower,
Lee knew that any siege of Richmond would inevitably doom it to capture. Invading Union soil would force the Army of the Potomac northward to protect Washington, D.C., thus relieving both northern Virginia and the Confederate capital. As Marshall summarized Lee’s thinking, “the defence of Richmond controlled all other considerations.”

Without specifying that Lee intended to fight at Gettysburg as Long had done, Marshall claimed that his commander sought a decisive engagement with the Army of the Potomac in which he could finally destroy it. This victory would compel the Lincoln Administration to recall troops then besieging Vicksburg and other points to defend northern cities. Sending troops to relieve Vicksburg was a doubtful prospect and would only embolden the Federals to take the offensive against a weakened Army of Northern Virginia. Unlike Long, Marshall never claimed that Lee thought his army could take any major city; instead, by threatening them, it would force the enemy to react. Similarly, Lee did not feel there was any chance that his army could occupy huge sections of territory. Marshall agreed with his former colleague, however, that Lee thought a major Confederate victory on Union soil would discourage northerners enough that they would sue for peace. Finally, although Lee knew that, due to the Confederacy’s limited manpower, it could not afford more heavy losses without decisive results, and as months passed and the Federals grew stronger, these might soon become unattainable. Overall, Marshall concluded Lee’s plan had been sound, but it had been thwarted by the mistakes of his subordinates.

Eschewing the emotionalism of Long’s account, Marshall thus constructed a thorough, elaborate explanation of his former commander’s decision. As in his other writings, Marshall displayed his legal background, carefully collecting all available evidence and then meticulously, even laboriously, making his arguments. Because he had interviewed Lee at the time, Marshall also claimed that he possessed authority on this issue beyond even the general’s official written
reports. According to Marshall, Lee was a highly intelligent general who considered the overall strategic situation not just in Virginia, but in the entire Confederacy. He then weighed all of the available alternatives and made a risky but calculated decision to take his army northward. As Marshall concluded, “it is an error to compare the possible results of any other plan of operations with the result which actually followed the movement into Pennsylvania. The true standard is to compare the Pennsylvania Campaign as it might have been, and as General Lee had reason to believe it would be, with any other plan that he could have adopted in 1863.” Lee’s was not a perfect decision in Marshall’s eyes, but it was the best possible one.

Thus, while his account differed substantially from Long’s, Marshall agreed that Lee had gone to Pennsylvania to offer battle, and like his former colleague, Marshall included himself prominently in his own writings. In both accounts, however, the staffers served only to reflect Lee’s greatness. Neither former staff officer discussed his own activities at length, only Lee’s. Long magnified Lee to the level of prophetic genius in his alleged prediction that the battle would be waged at Gettysburg. With his legal background, Marshall was far more careful, but still focused his account on Lee’s plans and only mentioned himself as an authority because of his past role as the writer of the general’s reports. Lee’s staff officers thus broke their usual silence about themselves, but only for their commander’s reputation.

Although Walter Taylor wrote two books about Lee, he never discussed his commander’s reasons for entering Pennsylvania at length. Simply put, he had been far too busy in June 1863 to have any idea about Lee’s ultimate plans. As he wrote his sweetheart, “I am so hurried…we are on another tramp, where we are to go is known to but few.” In Pennsylvania, the army would be out of telegraphic contact with Richmond, and anticipating this, Taylor spent a lot of time in the telegraph office, sending messages to Stuart at Culpeper Court House, Adjutant
General Samuel Cooper in Richmond, and Brigadier General James J. Pettigrew at Hanover Court House concerning subjects ranging from the proper procedures for exchanging prisoners to troop and supply movements. He also wrote orders assigning chiefs of artillery for all three army corps and establishing boards to test artillery projectiles. With so many tasks, Taylor had little time for other matters, apologizing to his sister that “my time was constantly occupied.”

Like Taylor, Lee kept Long quite busy. Lee soon demonstrated his deep reliance on Long by giving him a very important mission. As the Confederate Army began its movement toward Pennsylvania, Lee received reports that Union troops were moving up the Virginia Peninsula towards Richmond. Although the commanding general did not credit these reports, he sent Long to the capital to “give [Lee] an exact account” about the enemy on the Peninsula. Long was also to “inform” Secretary of War James A. Seddon of the condition of Lee’s Army. Lee had known and trusted Long as he had no other member of his staff, and as the months had passed, he frequently consulted his experienced staffer’s expertise.

While Taylor and Long were probably the busiest members of Lee’s staff that June, the strain of war had begun to tell on all of the staffers. Chilton continued to issue general orders regarding camp equipage and ably performed his role as inspector general, but his discontent was now widely known. Charles Marshall’s finances were in poor shape, as was his uniform; a “Mr. Douglas” had either misplaced or appropriated a valise the staff officer had sent him, and by the summer of 1863, he had just $166.00 on his credit account. While Talcott did not write anything known to have survived about his role at Gettysburg, his staff comrades mentioned that he was planning to leave for an assignment in the new First Regiment of Confederate Engineers formally authorized by an act of Congress on March 20, 1863. He may have felt he needed a rank and pay increase, for he was probably planning to get married.
Charles Venable was in even worse financial straits. His family had been refugees for months and, although he wrote his wife expressing hope that she could make a “business” out of some monetary matters, he was not optimistic about the family’s finances. Even two visits to Richmond in late May and early June failed to improve his circumstances or his overall mood. In fact, his relationship with Lee was becoming increasingly tense, as he confided to his wife:

I get tired of my aideship sometimes and feel like going back on my Lieutenancy of Artillery. I am too high-tempered to stand a high-tempered man and consequently I become stubborn, sullen, useless and disagreeable. But it makes no difference I suppose after all provided the Yanks are licked and the old man has much to annoy and worry him and is very kind and considerate after all.

In this passage, often quoted by historians like Elizabeth Brown Pryor who have argued that Lee was harsh and aloof in dealing with his staff officers, Venable expressed his frustration with Lee. Few writers, however, have noted that the staff officer admitted that he was “high-tempered” as well as “stubborn, sullen, useless and disagreeable.” Venable knew himself well; his career both before and after the Civil War suggests that he was a troublesome subordinate. Blessed with great intelligence, he was often impatient with his wife, his children, and his superiors, whether civilian or military. He also had a habit of freely expressing his opinion whether solicited or not. Thus, although Lee may not have always been easy to get along with, Venable could be just as if not more intransigent. Besides, as Venable concluded, personal quarrels did not matter as long as the enemy was defeated, and he and the other staffers were confident of victory.

In fact, Lee had utilized Venable’s intelligence and academic background to considerable effect earlier that spring. In April, Major Justus Scheibert of the Prussian Army had arrived at the Army of Northern Virginia as a military observer. Although Lee was too ill to interview Scheibert in person, he assigned Venable to escort the Prussian around his army and answer any questions he might have. Lee chose wisely; of his personal staff officers, Venable was the only one who had traveled to Europe, where he had studied mathematics in Berlin and formed
professional relationships with several Swiss and German intellectuals. Although Venable assisted Lee and his fellow staff officers with routine matters during the day, he took Scheibert along with him whenever possible, pointing out famous figures like “Stonewall” Jackson and reconnoitering the countryside. The staffer then spent every evening conversing with the Prussian, his multilingual ability no doubt proving an invaluable asset.\textsuperscript{27}

Venable performed this assignment flawlessly. He immediately impressed Scheibert, who remembered him as “a genuinely representative Southerner, unselfish and pure of heart, and a sacrificing patriot whose character aroused my genuine respect, and added, “I hope that I may some day be in position to repay his devoted friendship.”\textsuperscript{28} In fact, the friendship between Venable and Scheibert would endure for decades, as Scheibert corresponded with Venable long after the war on matters ranging from family to politics. Scheibert returned to Prussia after a few months as an ardent defender of the Confederacy and its armed forces. In his works, he called for the Prussian Army, reputedly the most efficient and formidable in Europe, to copy certain Confederate methods and procedures. He continued to publish books about the South long after the war, which Venable helped translate and review for the \textit{Southern Historical Society Papers}.\textsuperscript{29}

It was especially well that Venable had decided to stay with Lee for the time being because the general needed him to help run headquarters. The Army of Northern Virginia’s surviving letter book, which dates from this period, reveals that Venable helped to write and send every recorded letter that went out from army headquarters from June to December 1863. As these letters were in Venable’s handwriting, the staffer either took Lee’s original dictation or recopied every word of letters the commanding general had previously written. While Lee trusted Venable with the contents of his official letters to President Davis and his generals, this job demanded scrupulous attention to detail, and would very likely have taxed Venable’s thin
patience. After all, he was a trained mathematician and Lee had previously used him as an engineer. Now he was merely copying Lee’s orders into an official letter book for army records. Ordinarily, Lee might have utilized Marshall for such a task, related as it was to official reports. Marshall was most likely preoccupied in June 1863, however, and Lee, knowing Venable’s high intelligence and thorough education, likely selected him to help write his letters because of this.\textsuperscript{30}

For the time being, Lee was using Marshall to help compose his orders. As the Army of Northern Virginia left Fredericksburg for the Shenandoah Valley, Lee was anxious that his movement remain undetected. Unfortunately for him, Union General Joseph Hooker decided to send his cavalry corps to discover the Confederates’ movement, and the Federal troopers badly surprised Stuart’s horsemen in the Battle of Brandy Station on June 9. Lee and his staff had just attended a grand review of Stuart’s cavalry division the previous day, and they remained close enough to observe the struggle. Although the cavalry battle made a strong impression on Taylor, Lee did not attempt to direct any of the Confederates. Instead, he had Venable send a single message asking Stuart if he was sure that he could repulse the enemy and pointing out that Lee wished to avoid committing his infantry to the battle and so revealing its location to Hooker.\textsuperscript{31}

In the end, Stuart and his Confederate cavalry prevailed, but the battle had been a very close affair. As Taylor noted, “it was nearly an even fight,” and added, “altogether we can claim an advantage, and perhaps a \textit{victory} but not a decided one.”\textsuperscript{32} Stuart had triumphed, but not nearly as easily as in most of his previous encounters with Union cavalry, and the press were quick to point out that he had been completely surprised. Stuart craved popular acclaim, and was deeply stung by such rumors that he had been negligent. As a result, Stuart eagerly looked for a chance to redeem himself, and while his next assignment to screen the army’s movement up the Shenandoah Valley was anything but glamorous, he had far more grandiose plans in mind.\textsuperscript{33}
As the Confederate infantry marched up the Shenandoah Valley into Maryland and Pennsylvania, Stuart’s cavalry covered the movement. Anxious to redeem his reputation, Stuart suggested that he be allowed to ride completely around the Union army and rejoin Lee’s infantry in Maryland or Pennsylvania, and Lee approved. On June 22, Lee summoned Marshall and explained Stuart’s proposal. As Marshall remembered, “He said that he desired to impress upon General Stuart the importance of his rejoining the army with the least possible delay as soon as General Hooker had crossed, and he then directed me to write to General Stuart expressing these views.” In this message, Marshall authorized Stuart to take three of his brigades around the enemy if he could safely do so, leaving two others to screen Lee’s movements, and take position on the army’s right flank in Pennsylvania. When Longstreet expressed concern over Stuart’s proposed route, Lee had Marshall write another order for the cavalry chief.34

Marshall’s second order to Stuart was one of the most controversial letters ever sent from Lee’s headquarters. As Marshall recalled, he did not believe Stuart needed another order, but Lee, feeling “anxious” about the matter, ordered Marshall to write and send a second letter. This second letter did not repeat the first order, but gave Stuart more explicit instructions. As the wording of this order became the subject of heated dispute, it deserves to be quoted at length:

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 mountains 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 hindrance, 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 feel the right of General Ewell’s troops collecting information, provisions, etc. Give instructions to the commander of the brigades left behind you to watch the flank and rear of the army…I think the sooner you cross into Maryland after tomorrow the better….Be watchful and circumspect in your movements.35

Like Marshall’s other writings, the order was very verbose and highly complicated. It authorized Stuart to make his ride if several conditions were met, namely, if he could pass around the Union Army “without hindrance,” without specifying what “hindrance” meant. It allowed Stuart very
considerable discretion; he was to judge whether he could safely pass around the Federals, where
to cross the Potomac, which brigades he would leave behind and which would accompany his
ride, and where to link up with the infantry. Marshall never claimed that he read this letter aloud
to Lee as he did the first, but it still went from headquarters bearing Lee’s signature.

Unfortunately for Lee’s army, Stuart interpreted Marshall’s letter very liberally. Taking
his three best brigades, Stuart attempted to pass around the Union Army, although it was already
moving toward the Potomac and its marching columns obstructed northern Virginia roads for
miles. To circumvent the Federals, Stuart had to make a long detour first to the south and then
east, passing between the Army of the Potomac and Washington, D. C. This route put the
Confederate horsemen far behind Lee’s timetable. Stuart did not succeed in finding any part of
Richard S. Ewell’s Second Corps until July 1. The two cavalry brigades left behind in the
Shenandoah passes were under inept commanders and did virtually nothing for the rest of the
campaign. As a result of Stuart’s actions, the Army of Northern Virginia roamed the southern
Pennsylvania countryside bereft of its cavalry and thus blind to its enemy’s movements.

Unlike the more famous debate over Longstreet’s role at Gettysburg, Marshall’s order to
Stuart stimulated a heated discussion while the conflict still raged. In his report, which was by
far the longest Confederate official account of the campaign, Stuart laboriously attempted to
justify his conduct. The cavalry chief argued that Marshall’s order allowed him sufficient
discretion to do what he did, and even declared that his absence had been beneficial because he
had kept the Federal cavalry preoccupied. According to Stuart, unforeseen circumstances and
unclear orders had created the unfortunate situation. 36 It took the cavalry commander a long
time to prepare this report; he only submitted it when Lee personally demanded it. When he
finally finished it, he brought it to Marshall. As the staffer recalled, “At last General Stuart
brought me his report and asked me to read it carefully, and to tell him what I thought of his
course.”37 Probably, the cavalry commander sought to justify himself with testimony from the
author of his fateful orders.

If Stuart was trying to get vindication from Marshall, he was about to be disappointed.
Possibly sensing that his own actions were being critiqued, Marshall read Stuart’s report and
then accosted the general to his face, claiming that Stuart had no valid reason to disobey his
orders and reminding him of the disastrous consequences Lee had suffered as the result of the
absence of his cavalry. When Stuart claimed that he had discovered the enemy movement and
sent a message to inform Lee, Marshall pointed out that headquarters never received it and
showed the cavalry chief the army’s dispatch book as proof. Although he was emotionally
reserved, Marshall could muster a devastating array of facts to prove his points, and as the
impact of the Pennsylvania operations became increasingly clear, he demonstrated a willingness
to confront officers of much higher rank for the sake of Lee’s reputation and his own.38

After the war, Marshall remained critical of Stuart; rumors stated that he had wanted the
cavalry chief court-martialed or even executed for disobeying orders!39 Contrary to the claims of
many writers who defended Longstreet as the Lost Cause “scapegoat” for Gettysburg and held
Lee’s staff partially responsible for his vilification in southern memory, Marshall never wavered
from his assertion that Stuart was primarily responsible for the defeat. While admitting that his
order gave Stuart wide discretion, Marshall pointed out that his letter explicitly bound Stuart to
“move on and feel the right of Ewell’s troops” and argued that the cavalryman was thus
prohibited from crossing any Potomac ford that would place the Federal army between him and
Ewell. Although, as Lee biographer Douglas Southall Freeman pointed out, Marshall’s work
“contained so much special pleading that one is led inevitably to conclude that Marshall
considered he was subject to censure for the form of Lee’s letters of June 22 and 23 to General Stuart,” the staffer’s overall account still withstands scrutiny.40

The dispute over Stuart’s and Marshall’s culpability was not limited to staff officers who wrote books. Trying to deflect some of the furious criticism he was suffering, James Longstreet pointed out that Stuart had disobeyed his orders as well as Lee’s and thus endangered the Army of Northern Virginia before the start of the battle at Gettysburg. Stuart’s former scout and partisan ranger, John S. Mosby, replied in his Stuart’s Cavalry in the Gettysburg Campaign, in which he accused Marshall and Lee himself of falsifying the army’s official report to minimize Stuart’s achievements. As usual, Lee’s staff replied promptly to an assault on this commander’s reputation, and T. M. R. Talcott broke his usual silence about the war to point out the multiple errors in Mosby’s writing in the Southern Historical Society Papers. Mosby responded in even stronger language, accusing Lee’s staff of committing errors throughout the campaign.41

Although many historians agreed that Marshall’s order was somewhat unclear, they have largely exonerated Lee’s staffer from blame for Stuart’s fateful ride. As Freeman wrote, “It is possible Marshall was less careful than he should have been in drafting this letter because he was confident that Stuart had been fully told what to do; but the meaning is plain enough when the dispatch is read in light of the information Lee and Stuart then possessed.”42 In his study of the Gettysburg Campaign, Edwin Coddington was more critical, stating that Lee’s orders through Marshall “were more in the nature of suggestions than commands,” and claiming that the staffer failed to make Lee’s conditional permission clear to Stuart.43

Overall, although Marshall’s order was not a masterpiece of battlefield command writing, it should still have been adequate for Lee’s purposes. Truly, the message, with its complexity and somewhat laborious detail, reflected Marshall’s legal background and seemed rather difficult
to understand. Lee customarily did not attempt to remotely control distant generals, especially cavalry generals, from miles away, but he usually made their ultimate objectives clear. In this instance, as Marshall and Freeman pointed out, although Marshall’s order was somewhat unclear about Stuart’s role in crossing the Potomac, it definitely required him to contact Ewell promptly once across the river. It should also be remembered that since the order bore Lee’s signature, the commanding general probably approved its phrasing. Finally, after the war, Lee held Stuart responsible for the absence of his cavalry, not Marshall.44

While Lee failed to impose his will on Stuart, he kept his staff busy sending orders to his infantry corps. He sent Ewell a discretionary order to take Harrisburg if possible and massed his other two corps at Chambersburg. By late June, the Army of Northern Virginia was stretched from York to Carlisle to Chambersburg. Unbeknownst to Lee, the Army of the Potomac had a new commander, Major General George G. Meade, and it had not only crossed its namesake river but was moving across Maryland toward his scattered columns. That day, although he was anxious at hearing nothing from Stuart about the Federals’ movements, Lee had Marshall write an order directing Ewell to take the Pennsylvania capitol and Hill to prepare to follow him.45 Meanwhile, he and his staff routinely questioned Confederate convalescents and Pennsylvania civilians for any word about Stuart.46

Despite the lack of news from the cavalry, Taylor remained very optimistic about the campaign. On June 29, he wrote to his sister that “we have progressed swimmingly thus far and find the country a pleasant one.” Noting that his letter had to travel through enemy territory, he quickly added that “prudence forbids my saying anything of army matters.” Like the rest of the army, the staff officer was very confident and believed the invasion of Pennsylvania promised great things, writing that “with God’s help we expect to take a step or two towards an honorable
peace.” Perhaps willfully averting his eyes from unpleasant sights, he concluded by reassuring his sister that “our men are behaving admirably.” In Taylor’s eyes, although the Confederates might be ignorant of their enemies’ location, once they met the Federals, they were destined by Divine Providence to win ultimate victory and perhaps independence.47

Taylor’s faith was ill-placed. The previous evening, a spy brought news that the Union Army had crossed the Potomac River and was moving through Maryland. Marshall was not present during Lee’s interview with the informant; he was giving the commanding general’s orders for Ewell and Hill to couriers for delivery to them. After the spy left, Lee explained the situation in great detail to Marshall and then had his staff officer write an order rescinding the one he had just sent. He then dictated messages through Marshall and Venable to Hill and Ewell, respectively, telling them to rendezvous at either Cashtown or Gettysburg “as circumstances may direct.”48 Upon receiving his copy of this order, Ewell supposedly exclaimed, “Why can’t General Lee have someone on his staff who can write an intelligible order?” While some historians, notably Coddington, agreed with the Second Corps commander’s alleged outburst, others have pointed out that Ewell was not accustomed to receiving discretionary orders. His former superior officer, “Stonewall” Jackson, had customarily issued curt, preemptory directives. While Jackson’s system had ample weaknesses, Ewell had definitely responded better to it. Nevertheless, Lee’s staff was not responsible for the style of Lee’s instructions, and in fact had worked quite capably in getting his orders transmitted and the army prepared to reunite quickly.49

Pursuant to Marshall’s order, Hill moved the Third Corps to Cashtown, between Carlisle and Gettysburg. On June 30, Hill decided to send a lone brigade to Gettysburg to obtain some supplies reported to be there. The Confederate brigade encountered a Union cavalry division and
withdrew. Hill refused to believe the brigade commander’s report, and to obtain the supplies, he ordered two entire divisions to Gettysburg early the next day, informing Lee and Ewell of his decision. Lee replied cautiously, permitting Hill to proceed but warning him against starting a full-scale engagement when the Army of Northern Virginia was divided. Upon receipt of the message, Ewell ordered his own divisions to Gettysburg intending to meet Hill there.50

The Confederates soon discovered that Federal cavalry, not Pennsylvania militia, had taken positions northwest of Gettysburg. Soon, a Federal infantry corps reinforced the cavalry, and the Union troops stymied the two Confederate divisions, inflicting mounting losses.51 Lee and his staff were at Chambersburg, where the artillery could be plainly heard. Lee personally gave Longstreet orders to move his corps to Gettysburg as quickly as possible and then took his staff to Cashtown to confer with Hill. The Third Corps commander was very ill and had not seen the fighting; as a consequence, he could tell Lee very little. Lee then sent for Hill’s third division and ordered it to hasten to Gettysburg. The commanding general and his staff then rode to the town themselves. Despite his anxiety, General Lee did not send any staff officer to see what was transpiring in Gettysburg, and as a result, the battle that he did not want to fight intensified.52

As Lee and his staff left Cashtown, Major Campbell Brown of Ewell’s staff rode up and announced that his commander was nearing Gettysburg from the north. Lee had Brown reiterate his order to Ewell to avoid forcing a major engagement before the Army of Northern Virginia had reunited. Although Lee and his personal staff had been idle spectators for most of July 1, fortuitous circumstances soon produced a Confederate victory without their active coordination of the army. Early’s Division of Ewell’s Corps, marching from York to Gettysburg, came in squarely on the exposed Union right flank. Early attacked without waiting for orders from Lee or Ewell. This time, the Confederate offensive was completely successful, as the Confederates
routed the Federals, driving them south through Gettysburg to Cemetery Hill, where they rallied. The four Confederate divisions had captured about 4,000 prisoners and won an impressive, if costly, victory. Lee and his staff had done very little, however.⁵³

To help determine what to do next, Lee relied on Colonel Long. Long was present when James Longstreet rode up and congratulated the commanding general on his victory, and he heard the corps commander strongly recommend that the Confederates swing southward and force the Union army to attack the Confederates instead of assaulting Cemetery Hill. Lee then sent the veteran artillerist to make a personal reconnaissance of the Union position. Long saw that Cemetery Hill was formidable defensive terrain and reported to Lee that the Federals had already positioned forty cannon on it. With this information, Lee decided that Anderson’s Division of Hill’s Corps, which had just arrived, should not attack that night.⁵⁴

Instead, Lee considered using the Second Corps. Before Long returned, the commanding general entrusted Taylor with the most famous order he ever carried. Unfamiliar with the terrain in Ewell’s front, Lee allowed him to decide whether or not to attack. Lee sent Taylor to Ewell ordering the Second Corps commander to seize the hills south of Gettysburg “if practicable.” As Taylor remembered, “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.”⁵⁵ This order, which assumed such great importance in hindsight, seemed routine to Taylor at the time, and he did not report anything to Lee that would have hindered Ewell. Anticipating Lee’s order, Ewell sent an aide to the commanding general to ask for support in attacking Cemetery Hill. After conversing again with Hill and Long, Lee replied that if Ewell attacked, his Second Corps would have to go in alone, for the Third Corps
could not assist it. In light of this message and repeated false alarms about his left flank, Ewell decided to cancel the offensive.\textsuperscript{56}

Recognizing that something had to be done to remedy the situation, Lee sent Marshall to survey Ewell’s front. Why Lee dispatched the former lawyer instead of an experienced engineer like Venable, Long, or Talcott is a mystery. In any event, the commanding general did not wait for Marshall’s return, but went to personally meet with Ewell and his division commanders. When Lee arrived, he found that Ewell had no recommendations of any kind. Lee proposed moving the Second Corps back to Hill’s left on Seminary Ridge. This would mean abandoning Gettysburg, but it would allow Lee to lengthen the army’s right flank and shorten its lines of communication. Early vigorously protested, suggesting instead that the First Corps should attack the Union left; this would force the Federals to withdraw troops from Cemetery Hill to meet the attack, allowing the Second Corps to take it. Lee reluctantly consented to Early’s proposal.\textsuperscript{57}

After he returned to his own headquarters, Lee decided to reject Early’s plan and sent Marshall to tell the Second Corps commander to move his men to Seminary Ridge. Before he arrived, Ewell had sent his own staff to reconnoiter Culp’s Hill, just southeast of Cemetery Hill. Although his staff reported Culp’s Hill clear of Federals, Ewell did nothing until Marshall delivered Lee’s order. Ewell protested, but Marshall did not possess the authority to override Lee’s directives. The lieutenant general then rode with Marshall back to army headquarters to propose a new plan. He would move his third division, which was only just arriving, to Culp’s Hill and thus flank Cemetery Hill. Lee agreed, but by the time Ewell ordered Johnson forward, Federal troops had taken position on Culp’s Hill, and the Confederates aborted the movement.\textsuperscript{58}

Meanwhile, after conferring with Lee and Long in the late afternoon of July 1, Longstreet returned to his command in a sullen mood because Lee had rejected his advice to flank the
Federals instead of attacking them. Although he moved his two divisions toward the battlefield, he displayed little sense of urgency, and certainly no indication that he knew Lee was planning to use his men to spearhead the next day’s assault. As a result, his men did not reach Gettysburg until 8:30 a.m. on July 2, thus unhinging Lee’s timetable.

Exactly what Longstreet knew of the commanding general’s plans was a subject of intense debate after the war, with many former Confederates all but accusing him of knowingly sabotaging Lee. In these discussions, Lee’s former staff officers played a very prominent role. Soon after Lee’s death, his former artillery chief, William N. Pendleton, publicly alleged that Longstreet had received definite orders from Lee to attack at sunrise, but had disobeyed those orders, thus losing the entire battle for the South. Jubal Early, who gathered many admirers for his rabidly unrepentant attitude toward the war, similarly began publicly stating that Longstreet was responsible for the defeat. Early was the controlling voice behind the *Southern Historical Society Papers*, and in 1877, he and editor J. William Jones gathered evidence to prove that James Longstreet had single-handedly lost the battle and thus the entire war for the Confederacy. In part, this vilification of Lee’s ranking subordinate stemmed from Pendleton’s and Early’s personal dislike of Longstreet and their desire to obscure their own wartime mistakes, but it also reflected Early’s proscription of Longstreet for his postbellum politics. Longstreet had joined the Republican Party, assisted blacks in Louisiana who resisted white violence, and accepted a political appointment from President Ulysses S. Grant. Thus, Pendleton, Early, and Jones concluded, Longstreet was disloyal to the South and always had been.

In contrast, they exalted Lee as an almost saintly commander whose military intellect and impeccable character proved that the Confederate cause itself had been a worthy one despite its defeat. They asked how such a great man and a worthy cause had failed. The only way Lee lost
was because his generals and perhaps his staff were unworthy of him. Gettysburg, the most important battle of the war, represented Lee’s best chance to win final victory. As Longstreet’s “disloyalty” was a matter of record, he must have been the offending commander. Accordingly, in the Papers, Early published a lengthy series of articles by former Confederates to prove that Longstreet “lost” Gettysburg and hence the entire war. Although some of these writings were more factual than others, taken together, they inflicted crippling damage on Longstreet’s public reputation for many decades.  

Under heavy pressure from Early, two of Lee’s former staff officers, Taylor and Long, contributed to the Papers’ Gettysburg series. In these articles, Taylor came the closest he ever would to claiming that Longstreet “lost” Gettysburg. For the only time, he stated that Lee had sent orders to Longstreet on the evening of July 1. He also faulted Longstreet for not attacking on the morning of July 3 and for failing to support George Pickett’s doomed attack later that day. Long, by then focused on his own memoirs of Lee’s life, expressed similar statements.

In his other, more widely-circulated writings outside Early’s editorial influence, Taylor was far more equivocal regarding Longstreet’s failings at Gettysburg. In his Four Years with General Lee, published at the same time as the Papers’ Gettysburg series, Taylor exonerated Longstreet from many of the charges while still criticizing his actions:

It is generally conceded that General Longstreet, on this occasion, was fairly chargeable with tardiness, and I have always thought that his conduct, in this particular, was due to a lack of appreciation on his part of the circumstances which created an urgent and peculiar need for the presence of his troops at the front...General Longstreet was urged to hasten his march, and this, perhaps, should have sufficed to cause him to push his divisions onward toward Gettysburg...but I cannot say that he was notified, on the night of the 1st, of the attack proposed to be made on the morning of the 2d, and the part his corps was to take therein. Neither do I think it just to charge that he was alone responsible for the delay in attacking that ensued after his arrival on the field....At any rate, it would be unreasonable to hold General Longstreet accountable for this. Indeed, great injustice has been done [Longstreet] in the charge that he had orders from the commanding general to attack the enemy at sunrise on the 2d of July, and that he disobeyed these orders.
While Taylor clearly felt that Longstreet had not demonstrated enough initiative in moving his corps as quickly as possible once it became clear that a major battle was being fought, he did not pin the sole responsibility on Longstreet. In fact, he actually denounced Pendleton’s attack on Longstreet in strong language. He did not back down in spite of Early’s bullying; not only did Taylor stand by his statement that Longstreet had not received orders on the evening of July 1, he reprinted both Longstreet’s letter and his own on the subject. Walter Taylor was committed to building up General Lee’s image, but he was not willing to destroy Longstreet’s to do it.

None of Lee’s former staff officers except Taylor wrote at length concerning Longstreet’s conduct. In his writings on Gettysburg, Marshall ignored the entire dispute, maintaining that Stuart, not Longstreet, was to blame for the Confederate defeat. Although he corresponded with Taylor regarding certain aspects of Longstreet’s actions at Gettysburg, Venable was likewise silent on the First Corps commander’s conduct there. Surprisingly, despite his demonstrated dedication to presenting Lee as a near-saintly figure, Long never criticized Longstreet at length in his Memoirs. He merely examined the corps commander’s explanations for his delay in his official report and dubbed them “not satisfactory.” The paucity of comments by most of Lee’s staff regarding Longstreet at Gettysburg certainly did not suggest that they were integral parts of Early’s efforts to discredit Longstreet, and while they were consistently devoted to the memory of their departed commander, they did not engage in political or partisan mudslinging.

Longstreet afforded former Confederates ample grounds to criticize his conduct on the morning of July 2. Lee had dispatched no staff officer to hurry him as he slowly marched his two divisions toward the battlefield, but he did send Long down Seminary Ridge to check and correct the positioning of the Third Corps’ artillery. He also sent Venable to Ewell to consult again with that general and offer his own trained analysis and inspection of the Second Corps’
position. Meanwhile, Lee discussed his plans to attack the Union left with Longstreet, and left him with orders to attack that flank. Once Venable and Long returned, Lee discussed prospects on Ewell’s front again while waiting for the sounds of Longstreet’s attack. Hearing nothing as hours passed, Lee became increasingly irritated.63 In the end, Longstreet’s two divisions did not launch their assault until 4:00 P. M.64

Once Longstreet’s men finally attacked, they made very good progress, driving the Federals back in some of the heaviest fighting of the war. They fought their way onto the main Union position on Cemetery Ridge, but Federal reinforcements finally halted their offensive. While the Confederates had captured all of the ground in front of Cemetery Ridge and inflicted heavy casualties, they suffered dreadfully in return, and did not accomplish their primary objective.65 As July 2 waned, Ewell attacked the Union right. Once again, the Confederates seized some ground but fell short of their ultimate objectives. As Taylor remembered, “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.” Marshall echoed his colleague, writing that “at one time on July 2nd victory was within our certain reach. It was lost by delay and by the failure of co-operation on the part of the troops engaged.”66

Lee and his staff bore much of the responsibility for this “absence of accord.” There is no record of Lee sending any of his personal staff to supervise either Longstreet or Ewell. Most likely, Lee did have most of his staffers observe the offensives, at least on Longstreet’s front, but they apparently gave no orders to any of Lee’s corps commanders.67 The whereabouts of most of Lee’s staff officers on July 2 are unknown, but it was certain that Long remained with Lee.68 Perhaps overconfident that the Army of Northern Virginia was destined to win victory after victory, neither Lee nor his personal staff felt it necessary to correct Lee’s subordinates who
were obviously not carrying out their objectives. As Freeman noted, on July 2 at Gettysburg, the Army of Northern Virginia “slipped back a year,” reverting to its performance of the Seven Days. While Lee’s staff officers must take some of the blame, it must be remembered that they could not assume authority they did not have; if Lee chose not to use them except as observers and advisors, then the ultimate responsibility lay with him, not his staff.69

Late on July 2, Lee sent his only recorded messages to Longstreet and Ewell, telling both generals to renew their attacks early the next day. Longstreet quietly decided to disobey Lee’s order and his battered divisions remained stationary.70 Meanwhile, the Federals attacked Ewell’s lodgment. In six hours of brutal fighting, the Federals drove the Confederates from Culp’s Hill. Seeing that Longstreet had not advanced, Lee sent a message to Ewell not to attack and went to see Longstreet himself, but it was all too late.71

Desperate to achieve the decisive victory that had eluded him for two days, Lee decided to launch a massive assault against the Union center on Cemetery Ridge. At first, he planned for Longstreet’s entire First Corps to lead the attack, but Longstreet persuaded him that John Bell Hood’s and Lafayette McLaw’s Divisions had been too badly mangled to take the offensive. Instead, Lee ordered Longstreet to use George Pickett’s fresh division and two divisions of Hill’s Corps to make his attack. He planned a bombardment of the Federal center by over one hundred cannons. The artillery would pulverize the enemy and thus pave the way for the three divisions to advance over the mile of open ground between the armies and split the Union line. The rest of the Confederate army was to wait to exploit the breakthrough, including Stuart’s recently-returned horsemen, who were to ride behind the Federals to attack from the rear.72

Lee involved his staff in planning this attack, and in doing so, the staffers demonstrated that they shared their commander’s overconfidence in the prowess of his army. Since Long had
made two separate inspections of the Federal center and had proven his value as an advisor, Lee asked for his professional input on the prospects that the massive bombardment could succeed. Long insisted adamantly that the Confederate guns could silence their Federal counterparts and betrayed no concern whatsoever that the cannonade would prove fruitless. In particular, he dismissed the threat of Union artillery posted on Little Round Top, claiming the guns there could easily be silenced by the Confederate batteries. Presumably, Lee sent Taylor and Venable to examine the area for the planned attack as well. After he personally reviewed the ground, Lee invited all three staff officers to participate with Longstreet and Hill as they planned the attack.  

On this rare occasion, Lee’s staff officers failed him, and he did not notice their errors. Lee let his staff select which of Hill’s units should participate in the assault, and the staff selected Henry Heth’s and William Pender’s Divisions without ample consideration of their condition. The officers seem to have chosen these divisions because they had not been engaged on July 2. On the surface, this was reasonable, but the staff did not closely inspect either division. Both had been badly mauled and lost their commanders. Trying to rectify the situation, Lee hastily assigned Major General Isaac R. Trimble to command Pender’s Division literally minutes before the attack. Trimble had ample combat experience, but had never commanded a division.

Despite Long’s assurances, neither Lee nor his staff took any measures to make sure that all three corps’ artillerists cooperated in the great preliminary bombardment. Partially as a result, many Second Corps batteries did not fire a shot on July 3. Colonel Edward P. Alexander, who commanded the guns bombarding the Federals, pointed out multiple flaws in the plan. As he described, if the Confederate artillery was going to have any chance of inflicting the kind of damage Long forecasted, it needed to be coordinated, and it was crucial that the Second Corps guns participate in the bombardment, since they were in position to enfilade the Union line.
Additionally, neither Lee nor his staff kept in touch with Stuart, who was soon checked by Federal cavalry and did not send any messages to Lee the rest of the day. As a matter of fact, after selecting units for the assault, the commanding general and his staff remained as inactive as on July 2; they simply sat on their horses watching the cannonade and issued no instructions.\textsuperscript{76}

Such inadequate preparations were very uncharacteristic of Lee’s staff. Taylor, Marshall, Long, Venable, and even Chilton had shown fastidious attention to details in the office and on the battlefield; this renders their failure all the more puzzling. The staffers likely suffered from the same overconfidence as their commander. The Army of Northern Virginia had prevailed or at least held the field in every battle it had fought under Lee, and they could not imagine that its offensive might not succeed. Heth’s and Pender’s men had shown that they were capable of fighting for days on end before, so Lee’s staff believed they could do so with a full day’s rest. Like their commander, the staff was probably used to the army’s generals exercising initiative, and Ewell’s and Hill’s inactivity may have surprised them. In time, Lee and his staff would adapt to the army’s new corps commanders, but at Gettysburg, their inattention invited disaster.

The assault, popularly known as Pickett’s Charge, was a catastrophe for the Confederacy. At about 1:00 P.M., the Confederate cannon opened. Although they fired fiercely, the southern artillery soon ran short of ammunition and no one bothered to inform Lee or his staff officers.\textsuperscript{77} The attack received no assistance from the other Confederate infantry; two and one-half of the army’s divisions advanced while the other six-and-one-half sat idle. The Federals repulsed the attack in less than an hour, and more than half of the 13,000 men who participated became casualties, including Trimble and all three of Pickett’s brigade commanders. The failure of the assault galvanized Lee and his staff into action; they rode among the survivors as they returned
trying to rally them with mixed results. The overconfidence of Lee, his staff, and his army in their invincibility had led them all to a devastating defeat.\textsuperscript{78}

In their writings about Pickett’s Charge, Taylor and Long attempted to rescue their commander from accusations that he had ordered a hopeless attack with 15,000 isolated men. They agreed that Lee’s subordinates, especially but not exclusively Longstreet, had doomed the attack by refusing to commit their men. As Taylor expressed it, Lee had definitely planned to attack with his entire army, not just two-and-a-half unsupported divisions. \textsuperscript{79} Taylor did not desire to analyze Longstreet’s protests that he feared for the army’s right flank if Hood’s and McLaws’ Divisions moved, but simply to ascertain that Longstreet had disobeyed Lee’s orders, and he solicited a letter from Venable to this effect. In his second book, Taylor listed the army’s infantry divisions and stated that “this whole line was in readiness for fight, but the troops were quiet spectators of the heroic charge made on Cemetery Hill. It was a battle of two divisions against all the Federal army that could bring them within range.”\textsuperscript{80} Thus, although Taylor felt Longstreet had bungled the charge, the other generals had to share some of the blame.

Long usually defended Lee more adamantly than any of his former staff comrades, and unlike Taylor, he fixed sole blame for the failure of Pickett’s Charge on Longstreet:

General Longstreet did not enter into the spirit of it, and consequently did not support it with his wonted vigor.\textsuperscript{81} The author can add his testimony to that of Colonel Taylor. The original intention of General Lee was that Pickett’s attack should be supported by the divisions of McLaws and Hood, and General Longstreet was so ordered. This order was given in the presence of Colonel Long and Major Venable of his staff and other officers of the army.

Long thus argued that Longstreet had willfully disobeyed Lee’s orders because he was convinced of the folly of the charge. Despite his criticisms of Longstreet, however, Long never condemned his entire career; his remark that the First Corps commander did not support Pickett’s Charge “with his wonted vigor” hardly seemed an indictment of Longstreet as traitorous to the South.
Regardless of who was actually at fault, it was obvious that Lee’s army had to withdraw back to Virginia. Such an operation was extremely hazardous, especially since the Confederates were encumbered with a wagon train full of wounded men that stretched for almost twenty miles. In an attempt to procure more transportation, Taylor issued a circular prohibiting private soldiers from stealing horses and ordering all such mounts transferred to the quartermaster department. Even with the extra animals, the retreat was a harrowing experience for injured and unscathed alike, as Union cavalry continually threatened the long trains. On July 7, the army reached the Potomac at Williamsport, Maryland, only to find the river swollen and unfordable. The Army of Northern Virginia fortified its position and prepared to receive an attack. Lee used his staff to help coordinate the defense. Despite Long’s disappointing performance at Gettysburg, Lee still relied on him to inspect the army’s positions, and put Venable and the others to work sending messages to coordinate his generals’ efforts. In the end, the Federals did not attack, and on the night of July 13-14, the Army of Northern Virginia slipped over the Potomac. Lee and his army had escaped, but the Confederates’ evaluation of the campaign had just begun. In many of their works, Jubal Early and his associates did not admit that Lee had lost. They combed the records for any possible deduction they could take from Confederate numbers at Gettysburg, trying to prove that Lee had waged a heroic struggle with a very small army, and thus had achieved all that was possible. Because he did not win a decisive victory, however, someone, namely Longstreet, must be responsible. One of Longstreet’s former subordinates, Alexander, disagreed. In his memoirs, he claimed that the Confederate line at Gettysburg had been too long to allow coordination of the army. He faulted the staff, writing that “our staff organizations were never sufficiently extensive and perfect to enable the Commanding-General to be practically present everywhere and to handle a large force on an extended field.”
private writings, Alexander used Gettysburg to prove that Lee’s staff was inadequate, writing that “an army is like a great machine, and in putting it into battle it is not enough for the commander to issue the necessary orders. He should have a staff ample to supervise the execution of each step, & to promptly report any difficulty or misunderstanding.” Alexander directly stated that Lee did not have enough staff officers. He also implied that those who did serve on the staff were not “competent.” While these writings have influenced many historians, including Freeman, Coddington, and Sears, it is one matter to argue that Lee did not have enough staff officers and another to assert that the staff officers were themselves inept.

Lee’s former staff officers did not reach consensus on Gettysburg. They did not even agree on whether Lee had been defeated there. Because the Federals had not followed up their success by destroying the Army of Northern Virginia, Long claimed that the Union army had been “crippled” at Gettysburg. Although he admitted that the Confederates had suffered “defeat” in Pennsylvania, he grossly underestimated their losses at 16,000. He also related a story that Lee had shown saint-like mercy to a Union soldier during Pickett’s Charge, thus depicting his former commander in a selflessly heroic light even during his greatest defeat.

While he avoided relating such apocryphal incidents concerning Lee, Taylor never conceded that the Union had beaten his commander at Gettysburg. During the retreat through Maryland, he wrote to his sister that “we failed to drive the Yankees from their Gibraltar,” and added that “their last position was impregnable to any such force as ours.” He concluded that the Federals had not beaten Lee, though, stating that “after they find out that we left, they will of course claim a victory.” After the war, Taylor continued to deny that Lee had lost. Reviewing the campaign, he agreed with Long that the Union army had been too mauled to counterattack Pickett’s Charge or smash the Confederates during their retreat. According to Taylor, only
Confederate withdrawal “gave a shadow of right to our adversary’s claim of having gained a victory.” Like Early, Taylor underestimated Lee’s strength; he wrote that the Army of Northern Virginia had carried 68,352 men into battle at Gettysburg.91

This was still a much higher number than Early was willing to admit, and in the Southern Historical Society Papers, Early spent many pages claiming that Taylor’s numbers were far too high and trying to reduce his estimate of Lee’s army. Although Taylor admitted years later that Lee had actually had 74,451 men at Gettysburg, he still insisted that “the results of the battle on the first constituted a far more creditable victory for Confederate arms, when all the conditions are considered, than can be claimed by the Federals, by reason of the failure of the Confederates to carry their works, on the third day.”92 Taylor was willing to apply technicalities to deny the Federals’ claims of victory; they did not actually drive Lee’s men from the battlefield, therefore they could not “really” claim to have defeated Lee. While Taylor’s defense of his commander was dubious, it was somewhat based in real military terminology and the events of the battle and not a vicious fabrication meant to deface another’s reputation.

In his writings, Marshall left no doubt who he thought should be blamed for Gettysburg. Elaborating on his discussion of the order allowing Stuart to ride around the Federals, Marshall meticulously explained how the absence of the cavalry had “embarrassed” Lee. If Stuart had been present, Marshall argued, Lee would have known the whereabouts of the Army of the Potomac and kept his own force concentrated. Instead of stumbling into battle at Gettysburg, Lee would have been waiting for the Federals with his entire army. Ewell’s failure to attack on the evening of July 1 and Longstreet’s delays resulted from the army’s lack of preparation, and by depriving it of its “eyes and ears,” Stuart was responsible for this. Marshall’s statements
showed that not only did Lee’s staff disagree on responsibility for Gettysburg, they also did not parrot Early’s attacks on Longstreet.\textsuperscript{93}

In Pennsylvania, the evidence shows that Lee’s staff officers had performed competently, but demonstrates that they possessed similar flaws as their commander. Taylor did a good job managing headquarters and preparing for the move, and Venable, Marshall, and even Chilton had performed their assigned tasks skillfully. Venable and Long continued to demonstrate that they were usually good judges of artillery and troop placements, and Lee relied on their advice. Talcott would soon leave the staff, but took with him Lee’s warm recommendation of a job well done. Lee remained satisfied with his staffers’ performance, and commended them warmly in his report, writing that “my thanks are due to my personal staff for their constant aid afforded me at all times, on the march and in the field, and their willing discharge of every duty.” \textsuperscript{94}

Additionally, a close inspection of the staff officers’ postwar writings shows that they were committed to preserving Lee’s image from his greatest defeat, but they were unwilling to completely destroy the reputations of others to do so. Many of them agreed that James Longstreet had helped prevent the Confederates from greater success in Pennsylvania, but they never supported Early’s campaign to totally discredit the former lieutenant general. Once Longstreet had assailed Lee in print, the staff officers denounced the corps commander’s actions in stronger language, but they still never accused him of having willfully betrayed Lee or the Confederacy. One, Marshall, insisted that blaming Longstreet was misplaced, for the true fault lay with the cavalry. Overall, although the former staff officers participated in the acrimonious Gettysburg debate, they did so in a measured and fact-based manner.

The staff officers revealed some weaknesses, however, both in their service during the campaign and their writings about it. They lapsed into the same inactivity that afflicted their
commander once the battle started. Although Long and Venable realistically evaluated the Federal position on July 1 and 2, they seemingly forgot their own assessments once they realized that Lee was determined to attack. None of Lee’s staff evaluated the divisions slated to make the attack, and neither the commanding general nor his staffers took measures to correct problems once they emerged. Altogether, Gettysburg was not just Lee’s worst-fought battle, but also his personal staff’s worst performance of the entire war.

Harder times lay ahead for Lee and his staff. Denied victory in Pennsylvania, they soon had to cope with obviously shrinking resources. The Army of Northern Virginia would never again be as strong as it was in June 1863, and neither would its headquarters staff. Soon, Lee’s staff would begin to break up as its officers left for promotions and different assignments. Although Lee had assembled an efficient, professional, and usually effective team, it was about to come apart, and he would never find the time or the men to reconstruct it.
Robert E. Lee and his personal staff began repairing the damage the Army of Northern Virginia had suffered as soon as they were back in Virginia. Almost as soon as the Confederates reached safety, however, Lee’s “military family” began to shrink. The army’s high command had been crippled by heavy losses amongst its officer corps and more field officers were needed to fill these vacancies. Additionally, Lee’s campaigns had shown the value of field fortifications and engineer troops to site and construct them. Confederate leaders recognized that Lee’s staff contained talented soldiers and technical professionals who could replace field officers and lead engineers. In mid-July 1863, two of Lee’s personal staff, Armistead Long and Thomas M. R. Talcott, left the “military family” forever for these new assignments. In late April 1864, Robert Chilton left the staff, further increasing the labor and the tension among those who remained.

Lee did not appoint anyone to fill the positions of those who left. He appreciated the value of trained, capable staff officers, and felt that there were very few available men who were qualified for the demanding jobs that his “military family” customarily performed. In addition, with the Army of Northern Virginia unsuccessfully trying to recover from its Gettysburg losses, Lee was unwilling to pull officers from field commands to join his personal staff. As a result, just as Lee’s army never fully recovered from Gettysburg, neither did his staff. The primary source evidence reveals, however, that the remaining staff officers became proficient at handling even greater workloads and still effectively ran the Army of Northern Virginia.

Lee relied on his personal staff to help him restore his army. Lee turned to Inspector General Chilton to try to restore order and keep the men in the dwindling ranks. On July 14, 1863, the day after the Confederates recrossed into Virginia, Lee had Chilton issue a circular to
prepare the army for further movement. In this, the last marching order Chilton issued, the inspector general spelled out the destination of each of the three infantry corps and promised that the army would soon rest “should circumstances permit.” He also enumerated procedures for collecting men from the hospitals to return to their units and informed the corps commanders of the location of army headquarters. This circular revealed the shaken condition of the Army of Northern Virginia, and Lee probably had Chilton write it because his other staffers were trying to procure supplies and reorganize various units.¹

In the next few days, Chilton continued to display his talents as an organizer. On July 16, he issued an order severely restricting the army’s use of horses to carry supplies. Army, corps, and division headquarters would henceforth be restricted to two four-horse wagons each, with smaller allowances for brigades, regiments, supply departments, and medical equipment.² Ten days later, Lee allowed Chilton to issue another general order whose harsh language was typical of the inspector general, but still reflected Lee’s growing desperation. In it, Chilton ordered all men then on detached service to immediately return to the ranks. Chilton denounced those who failed to respond as cowards, and for the first time in an official message, questioned their masculinity, claiming that “to remain at home in this, the hour of our country’s need, is unworthy [of] the manhood of the Southern soldier. While you proudly boast that you belong to the Army of Northern Virginia, let it not be said that you deserted your comrades in a contest in which everything you hold dear is at stake.” He finished by relaying Lee’s personal appeal to all of the Confederate states to send whatever men they could to his army.³ Chilton’s and Lee’s efforts bore fruit, as the army’s effective strength rose from 37,690 on July 20 to 53,663 by August 10.⁴

Lee resisted efforts by Confederate political authorities to pull men out of his field units and reassign them to other military functions. On July 17, Lee received a letter from Secretary
of War James A. Seddon ordering him to form a regiment of engineers. Lee protested that the creation of such an organization would require him to permanently detail men from infantry service. Although the Confederate Congress had authorized the creation of an engineer regiment on March 20, Lee had procrastinated, admitting to Seddon that he strongly preferred to have his infantrymen serve in “pioneer companies” while performing engineering work. Such “pioneer companies” remained officially part of their respective divisions, and were thus available to fight as infantry. Lee therefore informed Seddon that he was suspending the creation of an engineer regiment, and he had Taylor issue an order returning detached men to their infantry units.5

Lee’s arguments failed to sway the Secretary of War. On July 25, Seddon replied that the Army of Northern Virginia needed to create an engineer regiment because such an organization would be beneficial to the “esprit de corps” of the engineers. He answered Lee’s concerns about removing men from the line by stating that a well-trained and competently-led engineer regiment would go wherever Lee sent it and perform the army’s engineering needs with greater efficiency than “pioneer companies.” Since Lee’s official chief engineer, Lieutenant Colonel W. P. Smith, was then occupied with other duties, Seddon proposed that Major T. M. R. Talcott be promoted to lieutenant colonel and be given command of the new regiment. Talcott was to form the First Regiment, Confederate Engineers half from select veterans of the Army of Northern Virginia and half from recruits and conscripts. Seddon had already decided to form the engineer regiment regardless of Lee’s objections, for he had signed Talcott’s temporary commission on July 15.6

Soon, Colonel Jeremy Gilmer, heading the Confederate Engineer Bureau, wrote Talcott assigning him to the First Regiment of Confederate Engineers. He received his message from Gilmer even as Seddon was replying to Lee.7 Talcott’s commission actually dated from July 8, and once he had finished organizing the regiment, he would assume command as its colonel, thus
advancing two steps in rank in nine months. Talcott had been trying to get this assignment almost since he heard of Congress’ resolution in March, and he devoted himself to the work. By April 1864, he had completed the regiment’s organization and received his colonelcy. The First Regiment, Confederate Engineers would serve with the Army of Northern Virginia throughout its harrowing campaigns of 1864 and 1865, where its expertise in constructing, altering, and maintaining field and heavy fortifications would prove invaluable. After a brief stint guarding prisoners, the regiment was assigned to army headquarters, and Talcott continued to visit his old comrades. Talcott was, however, gone from Robert E. Lee’s personal staff permanently.

Talcott had received this assignment based on his demonstrated abilities as an engineer. No surviving records show that anyone campaigned for Talcott to get his promotion. In fact, since the commanding general was opposed to the establishment of Talcott’s command, it is almost certain that he did not recommend him. Nevertheless, Lee remembered Talcott’s service favorably, and testified to his services on multiple occasions during and after the war. He summarized Talcott’s staff service by stating that “his professional ability, boldness in the field, and systematic industry were conspicuous.” Coming from Lee, a West-Point-trained engineer, such praise removed all doubt that he found Talcott’s services highly commendable.

Armistead Long’s ability had also not gone unnoticed. By September 1863, it became clear that Stephen Crutchfield, the Second Corps chief of artillery, was not going to sufficiently recover from a wound to take the field. Long was an ideal choice to replace him. Recognizing his talents, Lee had enthusiastically recommended Long to lead one of the army’s artillery battalions when they were first organized in the spring of 1863. Whether the commanding general endorsed Long again that autumn is unknown, but on September 21, 1863, Long was
assigned to command of the Second Corps’ artillery and promoted to brigadier general. Long would ably command the artillery of the Second Corps until the end of the war.\textsuperscript{12}

Since joining Lee two years before, Long had benefitted the commanding general with his experience, expertise, and professional advice. Although his official title had been “military secretary,” he had actually done very little office paperwork, instead serving Lee as an artillery expert who could observe and evaluate cannons and positions. Lee allowed Long considerable initiative to position batteries and make recommendations, and there is no record of the two men ever seriously disagreeing on any military subject. He had given poor advice at Gettysburg, but Long had served ably on many previous battlefields. Lee opened himself to Long as he did to very few others, confiding his military plans to him as he did to no other staff officer. If Talcott was difficult to replace, Long’s place was impossible to fill, both personally and professionally.

Although Talcott and Long both left Lee’s staff, there is no evidence to support Elizabeth B. Pryor’s claim that they left because they were frustrated with Lee or felt that promotion was too slow because they were staff officers. Like his father, Talcott embraced engineering, and had demonstrated a willingness to move from assignment to assignment while always maintaining his emphasis on that specialty. Lee never opposed his appointment to lead the First Regiment, Confederate Engineers, because he felt Talcott was incompetent or that his staff should not be promoted. He resisted forming the regiment because he felt that men could not be spared from the infantry no matter how valid the reason. Long enjoyed excellent relations with Lee, but it was obvious that the Second Corps needed an experienced officer to command its artillery.

With Confederate fortunes waning and the staff shrinking, tensions soon arose among those who remained with Lee. Quite possibly, Long’s departure accelerated this process, as the commanding general became increasingly emotionally distant from his staff. Almost all of the
staff officers’ fond memories of Lee dated from the period before Gettysburg. The staff’s wartime letters revealed that their commander became increasingly distant, demanding, and harsh towards his remaining staffers. They reciprocated by blasting him in private letters and sometimes even to his face, using language that at times became insubordinate. Much of this tension undoubtedly stemmed from the increasing hopelessness of the Confederate cause, but the decline in the personal and professional relationships between Lee and his staff suggests that the general no longer wished to associate with his own “military family” much of the time.

In part, Lee’s behavior stemmed from his declining health. On August 8, he wrote a letter to President Davis asking to be relieved from command of the Army of Northern Virginia. Although Lee’s request was largely motivated by public criticisms of his recent failed invasion of Pennsylvania, he felt increasingly unable to perform his duties as he desired, and he hated having to rely on his staff officers to perform tasks for him, writing that “I am so dull in making use of the eyes of others I am frequently misled.” Lee was always somewhat reluctant to delegate authority to anyone, regardless of competence. While Lee may have been referring to Stuart’s absence in Pennsylvania when he wrote of “making use of the eyes of others,” it is more likely he meant using his staff officers to watch over operations out of his sight, something he had never done as often as Winfield Scott had in Mexico or as much as military theory dictated. Lee never claimed his staff officers were inept; he merely said that perhaps he did not know how to rely on them as much as he should. As September opened, Lee was suffering from a severe attack of rheumatism brought on by angina pectoris, and often was confined to a wagon even as his army was advancing. In great physical pain and well aware of the lengthening odds his army faced, Lee grew more irritable and less personable in dealing with his staff.
In fact, declining Confederate fortunes had already begun to strain relations between Lee and his staff before the Army of Northern Virginia left Union soil. As the army anxiously waited to cross the Potomac at Williamsport, Maryland, Lee had sent Venable to survey the situation at the ford. He intended to entrust the experienced mathematician-engineer with the army’s reserve ordinance train. The hot-tempered staffer, exhausted and stressed by the recent defeats, made his survey with his usual ability, and then returned and loudly reported that the river was impassable. The commanding general very harshly rebuked Venable in front of the other staff officers for giving such unfavorable news so conspicuously, and Venable stormed off into his tent. Soon, Lee realized the pressure Venable was under and tried to make amends by inviting him to share a glass of buttermilk. The staffer was only partially appeased. The following day, as Venable remembered, he made another report of conditions at the ford, then collapsed on the ground to sleep. He awoke to find that Lee had spread his own rain-proof poncho over him to protect him from the downpour. While Venable and Long related this incident as further proof of Lee’s benevolent leadership, it revealed that Lee and his staff recognized the mounting tensions in their relationship and that the commanding general tried to ameliorate them.  

After the Army of Northern Virginia had recrossed the Potomac and then the Blue Ridge into northern Virginia, it moved into a defensive position behind the Rapidan. With Talcott and soon Long gone, Lee’s headquarters assumed a new routine. As Taylor remembered, Lee arose early every morning and departed with Venable and Marshall to survey various parts of the army while Chilton left to inspect others, leaving him to “represent the headquarters” by answering dispatches and telegrams.  

Although the passage of years made Taylor’s life seem “uneventful,” late 1863 was one of his most difficult periods in General Lee’s service. Taylor’s already massive workload increased even more, as Lee now took Marshall with him into the field more
frequently as a substitute for Long and Talcott. As Taylor explained to his sister, “I am now much hurried,” and became increasingly frustrated because he did not even have time to write personal letters.¹⁸

Taylor was also concerned over his mother’s plight. Although she resided behind Union lines in occupied Norfolk, she had been granted a pass to move freely between the lines. In July 1863, the Federals revoked her pass and briefly detained her at Annapolis. Although she was soon permitted to return to Norfolk, her humiliation deeply angered Walter Taylor, who blasted the Federals repeatedly in his letters for their “cruel treatment of our household.”¹⁹ Even as Mrs. Taylor returned to Norfolk, the Federals had decided to garrison the city with black soldiers. Like most white southerners, Taylor was appalled by the prospect of armed African-Americans, especially the idea that they might stand guard over whites. He never advocated reprisals against black soldiers in his writings, but his feelings about the enemy were growing increasingly harsh. He deeply felt the loss of many of his friends and, with ultimate success looking ever more distant, steeled himself for an even longer struggle.²⁰

Taylor’s anxieties, combined with his constant labor, took a toll on him. He felt that he had entirely too much to do and received no recognition for his efforts. He also had progressed from pride in General Lee and his army to hatred for the Union. To his sweetheart, he expressed more anger and a deeper bitterness against the North than before. Hearing that the Federals had claimed a great victory at Gettysburg, Taylor exploded, blasting them as “a miserable, cowardly race,” and longing for a chance to “go forth and meet the enemy now and punish him…for his impudence, his vain boasting and his unblushing falsehoods.” Taylor resigned himself, however, to the wisdom both of General Lee and of Providence, concluding that “with the help of Heaven we can and will whip them on any battle field in Virginia, whether of their choosing
Taylor had never, indeed, would never admit that the Federals had beaten the Army of Northern Virginia at Gettysburg. Under the stress of his expanded responsibilities and his concern for his mother’s safety, he utterly refused to believe that the Union could ever win ultimate victory. Surely a cause as manifestly sacred as the Confederacy would receive divine favor, and its ultimate victory was assured as long as the southern people refused to lose heart.

Taylor did not confine his anger to the enemy; he also complained bitterly about his workload. Taylor had toiled very hard before for Lee, but this was the first time he faced an army’s worth of paperwork almost by himself. With Long’s departure and Chilton’s assignment as inspector general, Taylor was then the ranking officer on Lee’s personal staff and as such possessed both great influence and tremendous responsibility. Facing greater administrative duties than he had ever before, Taylor railed at his fellow staff officers and even his commander:

A poor Adjutant General can claim no privileges. If anybody is to be waked at night, to receive the innumerable dispatches, to remain in camp when all else are away, it is the A. A. G….I do have to work pretty hard, but for this I care not. I am only too happy to know and feel that I am of some use. I never worked so hard to please any one, and with so little effect as with General Lee. He is so unappreciative. Everybody else makes me flattering speeches, but I want to satisfy him. They all say he appreciates my efforts, but I don’t believe it….Whereas Joe Johnston and Beauregard have ten, twenty, and thirty Ajt Generals, this army has only one and I assure you at times I can hardly stand up under the pressure of work. Now I don’t care a great deal for rank, but I do want to hear that I please my general. When everybody else on the staff goes on leave of absences and I cannot, I am not satisfied to have others say ‘tis because my presence here is necessary. I want him to tell me, then I’ll be satisfied.

Taylor was thus confined almost entirely to headquarters; even during battle, he often remained in camp as Lee took Marshall and Venable to the front. Taylor was supposed to answer any dispatches that arrived during Lee’s absence, and join his commander whenever he could. Under such circumstances, Taylor obviously could not be spared from the office, whether to attend church services or go on furlough, and this deeply vexed him. Despite his anger, Taylor still wanted to please Lee. He did not express any desire to leave the staff at this time.
Taylor soon received his eagerly-anticipated leave. In September, Lee sent Longstreet with two divisions to reinforce Braxton Bragg’s Army of Tennessee. Now left with only two infantry corps leaders, Richard S. Ewell and Ambrose P. Hill, Lee may have felt he could spare Taylor for a few days. Despite Taylor’s claims that Lee ignored his needs, it is also likely that the commanding general recognized that the strain of his new responsibilities was taxing even Taylor’s abilities. Taylor did not question the reasons for his leave; he eagerly departed for Richmond. Once there, he spent several days courting his sweetheart, who after reluctantly permitting him to write her an occasional letter, finally allowed him to write her regularly and agreed to marry him once the war ended. He also arranged for his mother to safely escape Federal lines. His leave, and his engagement, had been just what he needed.25

Taylor remained absent from the Army of Northern Virginia until early October. By the time he returned, Lee’s army was moving northward again, this time swinging around the Union right to force the Federals to retreat toward Washington, D. C. To reach Lee, Taylor was forced to detrain at Gordonsville in central Virginia, where a standing order prohibited any soldiers from trying to rejoin the army in its exposed position. Taylor disregarded these instructions and, procuring a sickly mount, proceeded to rejoin Lee’s headquarters at 8:00 A. M. on October 13.26 Despite his complaints about the office work, Taylor remained firmly committed to Lee and the Confederate cause. In fact, he remarked to his new fiancée that “I was surprised to see how very naturally I resumed my old position and duties.”27 He had demonstrated his determination and initiative again, and there is no record that Lee ever rebuked him for his ride. In the end, Lee’s army remained near Manassas for a few days before retiring south of the Rappahannock River.28

Lee’s temper revealed itself again during this campaign. As the armies moved, Stuart became isolated from the rest of Lee’s army. He sent Goode, one of his favorite scouts, to Lee to
report the situation. Goode finished his report, and Lee retired to his tent to write orders. In the meantime, Goode conferred with Venable, suggesting where the Confederate artillery should be placed to assist Stuart. Lee came to the door of his tent and very angrily reprimanded Goode for speaking of things that scouts were not permitted to talk about. Venable interceded that Goode was very concerned for Stuart’s safety and was only attempting to help, and Lee tried to make amends by having Goode served a hot meal in his own camp chair. While Long recorded this event as “one of the many examples of [Lee’s] innate nobility of soul,” it was a demonstration of how the atmosphere at army headquarters had degenerated from familial to confrontational in only a few months. As Taylor expressed it, while Mary Lee was a “sweet and attractive” lady he could come to love, “I don’t think I could entertain the same [affection] for the Gen’l.”

Lee reestablished his headquarters in an inhospitable spot fully exposed to the worsening weather. As usual, his staff was not content with his campsite, but as Taylor sarcastically related, “tis one of our commander’s idiosyncracies [sic] to suffer any amount of discomfort and inconvenience sooner than to change a camp once established.” He added that “the minor lights must submit, quietly, grin and endure.” During the next two weeks, although headquarters was moved several times, Lee persistently refused to occupy a private home, much to the frustration of his staff, who finally began building fireplaces for their tents. As winter neared and the war in Virginia settled into stalemate, Lee began displaying impatience toward his staff, mounting and riding away without waiting for them, and caustically remarking to his other staff officers that Taylor, who had collapsed from exhaustion, could sleep regardless of bad circumstances.32

The atmosphere at army headquarters grew worse, not only between Lee and his staff, but amongst the staffers. On November 15, Taylor gave a grim depiction of affairs to his fiancée:

Our Staff is very small now and is growing smaller….I expect to lose my tent mate Venable. He is the only congenial spirit I have here, and I shall miss him very much. He is a great friend of Col Preston’s and the
latter wished him to take a place with increased rank in the Conscription Bureau. I think he will take it. He has a wife and two children & has seen 3 years field service. He consulted me and I advised him to go. The truth is Genl. Lee doesn’t make our time pleasant here & when promotion is offered his staff elsewhere, it is not to be wondered at if they accept the offer. Don’t say anything of this as Venable has told no one else. As for my promotion, please don’t expect it; for I shall feel very badly if you think I should advance and I do not. I only care for it on your account but Genl. Lee will not push us up tho every body else goes. I have given over all expectation of being more than a Major- certainly as long as his say governs the matter. 33

Thus, the “military family” was experiencing severe relationship problems. Taylor felt very distant from Chilton and Marshall, and was only friendly with Venable. The staff officers all felt that Lee demanded too much and did not appreciate their efforts. Now that he was engaged, Taylor felt a new source of pressure to win promotions and pay. He even promised his fiancée that he would personally plead with President Davis when he came to inspect the army to endorse a staff bill that would mandate higher ranks for assistant adjutant generals like himself, promising that “I will advance if the war continues a few months longer.” 34 Pressures of prospective married life had transformed Taylor. While he had pined for promotion as a very young lieutenant, he had been satisfied with his position and rank as Lee’s assistant adjutant general for more than a year. With his general increasingly difficult to work for, and the army’s prospects inauspicious, Taylor threatened to leave Lee for the first time since 1861.

The examples of Long and Talcott also weighed heavily on Lee’s remaining staffers. Both had been promoted, but only by leaving the staff. Taylor remained close to Talcott, even preparing to serve as his best man at his marriage in early 1864. Talcott’s nuptials probably amplified Taylor’s anxiety over being promoted and being able to support a wife. 35 Similarly, the mere fact that Venable was seriously considering a position with the notoriously unpopular Bureau of Conscription revealed how frustrated he was with his status and low rank; when the Bureau formally offered him a colonelcy, he traveled to Richmond in November 1863 on leave to personally inquire about it. As late as December, Taylor remained convinced that he would accept the position. Lee’s staff was disintegrating, personally and professionally. 36
None of Lee’s staff officers realized that, despite his irascible demeanor, their general fully understood their difficulties in attaining promotion and deeply appreciated their services. In late November, trying to remedy what he saw as the evils of the Confederate service, Braxton Bragg sent President Davis a lengthy letter filled with suggestions which the chief executive forwarded to Lee for comment. In his response, mindful of the Confederacy’s shortage of line officers throughout the Confederacy, Lee argued that the number of staff officers each general had should be severely restricted to that provided by the law. He specified, however, that each general should have a staff “adequate to the wants of the officer with whom they serve.” He also conceded that his staffers had a point when they complained of slow promotion and emphasized that they performed vital tasks for the generals who commanded the Confederate armies, writing that “the number and rank of the [personal staff] should correspond with their duties. These officers have no opportunity of promotion, and their importance is not over-estimated by General Bragg.”

While Lee was unable or unwilling to find more officers to fill the vacancies in his own staff, he thus recognized in principle that he should have more staff members. He was also aware that promotion was always slow among staff officers, and while he had campaigned for Taylor’s promotion before, he now used the law to support his claim that his staff should have higher rank. Soon, Lee’s efforts paid off; within three months, Taylor, Marshall, and Venable were all promoted to lieutenant colonel. Meanwhile, the war in Virginia settled into stalemate.

Elsewhere, the war was going poorly for the Confederacy. Bragg suffered a humiliating defeat at Chattanooga. This disaster meant that virtually all of Tennessee was in Federal hands, and the Union forces were poised for a strike at Atlanta the next year. Given this dire state of affairs, Davis summoned Lee to Richmond to personally confer over what the South should do in response. He hinted that Lee and his staff would be sent to assume command of the Army of
Tennessee, a prospect Lee resisted both because he did not know that army’s officers and because he felt the Army of Northern Virginia had no officer capable of taking over from him. He expected to return to the army within two weeks, but in the meantime, since Ewell was in poor health, he effectively left Taylor in charge of the army.

Although Walter Taylor had experienced heavy administrative workloads as assistant adjutant general, nothing prepared him for running the Army of Northern Virginia almost by himself. Exercising real power over tens of thousands of men both excited and terrified the young staffer. General Lee’s absence relaxed the tense atmosphere at headquarters amongst himself and the staff officers; as Taylor confided to his fiancée, he was thinking of “seriously ordering an advance on Meade” and added that “in the General’s absence it is quite ludicrous to see the airs we small fry assume.” The staff officers enjoyed their respite from Lee’s supervision, but as Chilton was on leave, only three of them remained to manage the entire army. On December 14, Venable departed to spend Christmas with his family, leaving Taylor and Marshall alone at headquarters. Since Marshall, as usual, was preoccupied with collecting and collaborating reports, Taylor supervised the Army of Northern Virginia virtually alone.

To complicate matters, Union cavalry raided southwestern Virginia, and Major General Samuel Jones, commanding there, bombarded Lee’s headquarters with pleas for immediate assistance. Writing to his fiancée, Taylor confessed that he felt absolutely overwhelmed:

> Between the many reports from the scouts and the exaggerated & stampeding telegraphic dispatches I receive, I sometimes am in doubt whether I am on my head or heels….All yesterday, last night and this morning, I have been harassed by these miserable telegrams. I don’t believe half of their contents and yet it is a terrible responsibility to assume, to disregard them. I desire to keep Genl Lee fully informed of what really occurs and is important for him to know, and yet he so dislikes to be unnecessarily annoyed by false or exaggerated reports, that I hesitate to be the medium of conveying uncertain statements. Then, I must keep General Ewell and Stuart thoroughly posted & altogether it is such a trial “playing commanding general,” that I have concluded never to accept that position, when the Government awakes to a sense of my merit to tender it beseechingly to me. All jesting aside, I only hope the General will get back before I forget some serious matter or make any unfortunate blunder.
The Union troopers only inflicted minor damage, but even this small-scale action was enough to spark a flurry of telegrams and messages, both real and exaggerated. To help deal with this, Taylor ensconced himself at the recently-established army telegraph office, where he carefully weighted the enormous amounts of incoming intelligence trying to separate fact from fiction. Between December 14-17, he sent Lee six telegrams, and also sent written messages to Ewell, who officially commanded the army, and to Major General Fitzhugh Lee, whose cavalry division was detached in the Shenandoah Valley, to alert them to the actions of the Federal horsemen.44

For the first time, Taylor fully understood the pressures constantly weighing on Lee. Half-apologizing for his complaints about Lee in his earlier letters, the staffer resolved to “make it a habit to be jolly, even under adverse circumstances” as Christmas approached.45 Thus, he learned to handle the stress of his position, distinguishing between the truly important matters and those that did not require his immediate action. Taylor’s relationships with his fellow staff officers also improved, for he now hosted lively conversation sessions with them in his tent every evening and referred to them enthusiastically as his “friends.”46 When Lee returned to the army on December 21, he voiced no disapproval of Taylor’s management.

Relations also improved between Lee and his staff, as the general began to show his officers that he cared about them and respected their abilities. Probably sensing the toll that the last few weeks had taken on Taylor, Lee rewarded him with a furlough in January. It was to take effect as soon as Chilton and Venable returned from Richmond. Lee was rotating his staff in shifts; while Taylor enjoyed his leave, Chilton and Venable would take his place in the office. Meanwhile, with most of his subordinates’ reports submitted, the commanding general had Marshall take his dictation and copy his letters in Venable’s place. Once Taylor returned,
Marshall would enjoy a brief furlough, and Venable would resume taking the general’s dictation and assisting him with his examinations of the army’s positions.  

Just as Taylor had staggered under the burden of Lee’s position, Venable experienced great difficulty assuming Taylor’s role. In a letter to his wife, he explained that he felt trapped, just as Taylor had, because he could not leave headquarters, not even to see her.  

Lee had chosen Venable based mainly on his proven intelligence and engineering skill, not for his administrative aptitude. As an aide-de-camp, Venable’s duties were whatever Lee said they were, but this was the first time he had faced the bureaucratic minutiae Taylor had regularly handled. Such work did not suit a high-tempered man as Venable, and while he handled the position fairly well, he resolved to avoid having to perform such labor again whenever possible.  

Taylor enjoyed his furlough, in which he spent time with his fiancée, served as best man at Talcott’s wedding, and, like Chilton before him, returned with a package of socks that Mary Custis Lee’s circle had knitted for the soldiers. He needed the rest and encouragement, for when he returned to what he dubbed his “horrid desk,” he found more work than ever before. This time, he blamed Venable and Chilton for his plight, stating that “I have been compelled to take upon my shoulders the work usually performed by two in my absence (for Venable feels bound to assist Chilton in my absence, though he allows me to go it alone when I return).”  

While there was much truth in Taylor’s complaint, he did not consider that Venable assisted Chilton because, unlike Taylor, the inspector general actually needed assistance. Venable possessed ample talents, but administration was not among them; as Taylor concluded, “the General appeared to have no need for my services before my return. Modesty forbids me to repeat what others have said relative to my absence and return.”  

The army’s records hinted at
the extent of Taylor’s remedial efforts; in the last week of January, he sent nine telegrams and at least one letter dealing with assorted leaves, courts-martial, and general orders.51

Shaken by his experience with the voluminous amount of army paperwork and resentful over having to leave his family, Venable soon quarreled with Taylor. Although Taylor had received an official appointment as the army’s assistant adjutant general and with it promotion to lieutenant colonel, his duties, especially when compared to that of the other staffers, galled him:

I am alone this evening. Marshall went off to Richmond today. Venable and Chilton have gone to a neighboring camp to play chess. I am afraid I am sometimes envious or selfish when I see those good fellows without care and with not enough to do to hurt or annoy them, but I cannot grumble now, this being one of the bad effects of my promotion, heretofore being a gentlemanly A. D. C. I could quarrel to my heart’s content, as I was required to perform duties not legitimately mine- now I must grin & endure it.52

Venable made sure he could not be shackled again to Taylor’s “miserable desk” by absenting himself from Lee’s headquarters, and Taylor deeply resented his friend’s reluctance to assist him with the paperwork. Although Taylor still regarded Venable as his “chum,” he confessed that they had begun having nightly “altercations.” At the same time, while Lee was more attentive to the needs of his staff officers, he often came across as patronizing rather than sympathetic.53

It had not taken long for tensions to resurface among Lee’s “military family,” but this time, neither Taylor nor Venable considered leaving the staff, and they quickly made amends with each other and their commander. In fact, by February, when Venable complained longingly of wanting to see his family again, Taylor dragged himself out of bed and into the office so that Venable could feel better about asking for another furlough. As for Lee, Taylor wrote his fiancée that “I mustn’t claim too much for our Chief. I fear I am already too proud of him and this army,” and later added that the general had not “been extra cross; indeed for the last six months he has been exceedingly gracious, and most kind in his manner towards me.” Even Taylor’s attitude toward his promotion changed, as he admitted that “this additional star has not
entailed upon me any additional burden.” Taylor had quickly rediscovered his satisfaction in serving under Lee and realized that his commander cared about him.

Lee also began softening his criticisms of his staff. With Long and Talcott gone, he had to send Marshall into the field. In early 1864, he sent Marshall to notify Ewell of a rumored Federal movement and the staff officer discovered that Ewell had already discovered that the reports were false. Marshall returned and did not bother to notify Lee that he had delivered his order or that Ewell had not moved. Instead of publicly rebuking Marshall for this breach of protocol, during supper that night, Lee told him a story from his time in Mexico in which a staff officer’s failure to follow orders nearly led to disaster. As Marshall remembered, “although General Lee was satisfied with what I had done on that occasion, he wished to impress the importance of a literal obedience to orders on my mind, and you may be sure that I never forgot it.” Lee was more tactful than he had been the previous autumn, and his staff absorbed his lessons more readily.

Lee’s staff soon received a second opportunity to run the army. On February 22, Davis again summoned Lee to Richmond. In a message to Ewell, who now technically commanded the Army of Northern Virginia, Venable reassured him that “Chilton will remain here in the office, and is instructed to consult with you on all matters of importance connected with the safety of this army.” He also gave Ewell General Lee’s permission to move the army or formally transfer army headquarters to his own should he deem it necessary. Although Taylor dreaded the idea of “old Mr Ewell…trotting around here and assuming the airs of the General Commanding during the Tycoon’s absence,” Ewell showed no predilection to exercise his authority in any way, and neither did Chilton. Once again, Taylor virtually commanded the Army of Northern Virginia. This time, Taylor had to deal with a far more serious threat from Union cavalry. On
February 28, about 2,000 Federal horsemen left the Army of the Potomac heading for Richmond. They planned to liberate the thousands of Union prisoners held in the city’s prisons, then escape to Federal lines on the Virginia Peninsula. They sent detachments in different directions to confuse the enemy and complicate their pursuit. At least one of them, Colonel Ulric Dahlgren, planned to assassinate Confederate leaders and burn the capital.

With both Ewell and Chilton out of touch, Taylor coordinated the Confederate response to the raid. He had been busy at the telegraph office since February 27, sending Venable to nearby Clark’s Mountain to observe the Federals and keeping Lee informed of developments. At first, the enemy movement appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary, and both Taylor and Stuart advised Lee that his return was not urgently needed. Once the Union troopers crossed the Rapidan, however, Taylor dramatically increased his activity. The raiders were dangerously close to the winter artillery park, and he sent multiple messages to artillery chief Pendleton and to Armistead Long to warn them. He also sent multiple telegrams to Confederate commanders in the Shenandoah advising them to guard their supply lines and notifying them of developments.\(^{59}\)

On February 29, as the raiders neared Richmond, Taylor stopped merely advising and informing commanders and began issuing orders. He directed Major General Wade Hampton to move his cavalry division against the raiders and keep him advised. He also ordered Colonel Reuben L. Walker, commanding the Third Corps artillery, to put his serviceable guns in position to protect the area’s bridges while moving the weapons that were in poorer condition to safety. He received messages from Long and others keeping him apprised of the enemy’s whereabouts and he forwarded these reports to Major General Arnold Elzey, commanding the Richmond defenses, asking him to keep other local commanders informed.\(^{60}\) Taylor was issuing orders to generals who outranked him by two or three grades, and he was doing so in his own name, not
General Lee’s. He demonstrated that he was capable of reacting quickly to a chaotic situation, and displayed commendable energy and considerable composure while doing so. When Lee returned later that day, he found the situation well in hand thanks to Taylor’s efforts. In the end, the Union horsemen inflicted little damage, and the discovery of Dahlgren’s plans publicly embarrassed the Lincoln Administration.

Having returned the reins of command to Lee, Taylor was stunned at what he had just done. His activity and ability had surprised even himself, but as he confessed at length to his fiancé, he had been absolutely terrified of such responsibility. Nevertheless, Taylor related, Lee “had no fault to find” with his actions. Although technically Lee’s assistant adjutant-general, Taylor had revealed that he possessed all of the qualities a chief of staff was supposed to have. He had an excellent grasp of the strategic situation, he coordinated various commanders at widely divergent points, and he took the responsibility to issue orders on his own name using the powers of the commanding general. While the raid had been poorly planned by the Federals, Taylor’s rapid response certainly helped prevent it from inflicting severe damage. He had grown tremendously after three years under General Lee, and like Marshall and Venable, learned how to assume much larger responsibilities than he ever had before.

The official chief of staff, Chilton, had not shared in his staff colleagues’ growth or professional success. In fact, after his initial disciplinary orders in the aftermath of Gettysburg, he began sulking over his rank and became noticeably negligent in his duties. He had made himself unpopular with his comrades, and even threatened to resign from the army in December unless he received a brigadier generalcy. Resentful that Lee no longer allowed him to exercise authority over field commanders, he flatly told Taylor that he had no intention of performing the mundane work of an assistant adjutant general. Chilton also increasingly failed to carry out his
duties as inspector general; the army’s telegraph book recorded that Chilton sent a diminishing number of messages on courts-martial and personnel between August 1863 and March 1864, far fewer than Taylor sent on the same matters in that time.\textsuperscript{66} In fact, Chilton seemed determined to do as little work as possible.\textsuperscript{67} During the recent Union cavalry raid, he had demonstrated no initiative and seemed willfully ignorant of the entire situation, leaving Taylor to take charge.

In late March 1863, Chilton finally asked for a transfer back to the Adjutant General’s Office in Richmond. Lee granted his request, tactfully suggesting that Chilton could be more useful to Adjutant General Cooper than he could in the Army of Northern Virginia. In a letter to his former chief of staff, Lee praised Chilton’s devotion to the Confederate cause while avoiding any discussion of his aptitude, stating that “I shall always feel great interest in your welfare and success, and trust that in your future sphere of action, your zeal, energy, and intelligence will be as conspicuous as in your former.”\textsuperscript{68}

Chilton was an able organizer of camp life and a competent army disciplinarian, but he allowed his personal vindictiveness and pride to interfere with his duties. Chilton always felt that menial office labor was beneath him and aspired for real authority over generals in the field. When Lee had allowed him to issue orders to frontline commanders, he had done so carelessly, displaying an alarming inattention to seemingly minor details that disqualified him from such responsibility.\textsuperscript{69} He had demonstrated aptitude as the army’s inspector general, but that job was precisely what he did not desire; it meant a role even farther removed from high rank, public recognition, and field command. Towards the end of his tenure, he permitted his resentment over his status to undermine his remaining position as inspector general. Thus, he returned to Richmond, the only officer on Lee’s personal staff that the commanding general did not select, and the only one who was demonstrably incapable of performing his tasks. Although he briefly
corresponded with the Lees after the war, he never recovered his relationship with his former commander, and his failure would tarnish historians’ views of Lee’s entire personal staff.

Taylor felt no regrets over Chilton’s departure, but he wondered about his successor. As Taylor wrote his mother, Chilton had done very little, and his replacement might be different:

I do not know whether the General will have any one else or not…If some one does come and some older man of experience ought to come- then I shall expect one of two things. Either he will allow me to continue the performance of my present duties and look on complacently, as did my friend Chilton- or if he has any pride he will himself assume that portion of the labour which should devolve upon the General’s Chief Staff Officer.  

For the next month, Taylor assumed that Lee would recruit another staff officer to supplement the three who remained, assuming that when Major General Martin L. Smith arrived he was to serve as chief of staff. Instead, Smith became the army’s chief engineer, directing Talcott’s regiment and other troops temporarily detailed to assist them. For the rest of the war, Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall, and Charles Venable would constitute Lee’s personal staff. Lee had assembled an efficient team of able professionals to serve as his personal staff precisely because they possessed talents in particular fields that he needed. An analysis of the staff’s private letters and the army’s official order books and reports, however, reveals that once officers left Lee’s staff, it no longer functioned with anything close to the same atmosphere. As Confederate hopes dimmed and separation from loved ones became more painful, interpersonal tensions had arisen between Lee and his staffers and at times threatened to sunder the “military family” completely. Chilton had succumbed to these frustrations, but Taylor, Marshall, and Venable persevered. Although their relationships with Lee would never again be as friendly, they remained loyal to him despite mounting workloads and diminishing prospects of success.

Lee and his remaining staff had grown as a result of their hardships. Even as his health continued to irritate him, Lee treated his staffers better than before and let them know that he
cared about their well-being. He still expected a tremendous amount from them, but they had shown that they could meet his demands. Taylor had fully matured into a chief of staff in all but name, as he had learned to manage the mountainous paperwork and had even ably commanded the army itself for short periods. Marshall learned military protocol even as he was forced more often into the field to carry Lee’s orders and observe his army’s positions. Although Venable resented office work, he demonstrated that he was competent, if not outstanding, at doing it and then assumed Talcott’s former role as the acting chief engineer on Lee’s staff. Lee and his staff would need their newly-developed abilities, for the Army of Northern Virginia would soon face a new Federal commander, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. His relentless mode of warfare would push Lee, his staff, and his army to the breaking point. The fate of the war in Virginia and the Confederacy itself in 1864 would hinge in large part on how well they responded to it.
Chapter 8: Lee’s Staff Meets Its Limits, 1864

With the opening of the 1864 campaign, Robert E. Lee and his army confronted a new Union commander, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. Unlike previous Federal generals in Virginia, Grant displayed dogged determination and was willing to persevere despite severe casualties and repeated setbacks. His reinforced Army of the Potomac would hammer away at Lee’s army as never before, engaging the Confederates in a month of almost continuous battles that put 60,000 Federals out of action and crippled the offensive capabilities of both armies. Even then, Grant was not willing to accept either defeat or stalemate, but maneuvered to trap the Army of Northern Virginia in and around the city of Petersburg. Once there, the armies settled into a nine-month siege that taxed the courage and endurance of Federals and Confederates alike. As Lee’s army sat in its Petersburg trenches, the Confederacy itself was faltering thanks to Union successes in other theaters. By April 1865, the southern cause was lost, and most people knew it.

As its members’ letters reveal, this continual combat placed additional strains on Robert E. Lee’s personal staff. Now reduced to three men occasionally assisted by others, the staff tried to coordinate and control an increasing number of shrinking units. The army’s high command structure was stressed to its limits as many veteran corps and division commanders either became casualties themselves or proved unsuitable for their positions. Like their general and the men in the ranks, Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall, and Charles Venable faced weeks of constant exertion without rest and with dwindling hopes for ultimate victory. During this last year of the war, however, the staffers demonstrated that they had learned to survive personally and professionally even under dire circumstances. The Army of Northern Virginia survived, holding off blow after blow of its far more powerful adversaries for another year, and the staff played a major role in its resistance.¹
Lee’s staff prepared the army thoroughly for the coming operations. On April 3, 1864, Lee summoned Taylor into his tent. With Armistead Long departed, Lee confided in the young staffer who had served him since 1861. He freely discussed Grant’s probable troop movements and expressed his confidence in the army, outnumbered though it was. Two days later, since Chilton was also permanently gone, Taylor issued General Orders No. 27, preparing the Army of Northern Virginia for battle. In this order, which was actually more precise than any issued by Chilton, Taylor assumed Chilton’s former role, specifying the regulations for baggage animals and loads on wagons. Later, to cope with the increasingly severe shortage of animals, Taylor issued another set of detailed instructions further reducing army transportation.

Taylor also assumed much of Chilton’s former responsibility concerning courts-martial. Between March 11 and April 14, he sent seventeen telegrams to various points concerning furloughs, executions, and hospital fatigue duty. In one such telegram, with Lee’s permission Taylor pardoned fifteen privates who had been condemned for desertion or cowardice, spelling out the mitigating circumstances in each of their cases in detail, and ordering that they be restored to the ranks “under guard.” For the rest of the war, Taylor was Lee’s chief of staff in all but name, and he applied the same exacting detail he had on antebellum fiscal matters and wartime personnel returns to his new position.

Taylor was very satisfied with his efforts. While Marshall and Venable took their last leaves before the fighting commenced, he wrote to his fiancée that “there is no one here who could relieve me of my duties.” Despite his immense workload, Taylor chose to reflect on his actions during the last eight months with a sense of accomplishment, writing that “during this winter I have made every exertion so far as I could with my humble capacity in my official position to raise this army to its highest state of efficiency,” and concluding that “if Divine aid is
still vouchsafed us, all will be well, and peace- glorious, welcome peace will visit us before the end of the year.” Not only was Taylor very satisfied with his labors, he remained confident of final Confederate victory. His pride in the Army of Northern Virginia, which had wavered during the autumn, was fully restored and he was convinced that such a force struggling for a righteous cause could never be defeated.

Marshall and Venable had not been inactive while Taylor labored. In February, Lee had returned Venable to duty copying his official messages into the army’s letter book, and kept him at this task until Marshall returned from a very brief leave in early April. Once Marshall came back, Lee realized that without Armistead Long or Thomas M. R. Talcott on his personal staff, he needed a new engineer on his personal staff to accompany him into the field and to inspect the positions of his units. He wisely decided that Venable’s background and talents suited him far better for engineering work than bookkeeping, and as a consequence, relieved the staffer of his role as keeper of the letter book. For the rest of 1864, Marshall copied the vast majority of Lee’s dictated letters, while Venable served as Lee’s field messenger. Marshall also authored most of Lee’s orders that Taylor did not. Field work suited Venable’s impatient temperament better than copying letters. He displayed his talents and energy at once, helping organize a signal station system to help maintain communication with Confederates in the Shenandoah Valley and with Longstreet, whose corps had recently returned to Virginia.

Lee needed all the help his three staffers could provide. Even after eight months, the Army of Northern Virginia had not recovered from its Gettysburg losses. Including Longstreet’s two divisions, Lee still only had about 62,000 men in his three corps to face Grant’s 120,000. Casualties had taken a visible toll on the high command. A. P. Hill’s health was perilous, and as a consequence Lee often felt that he needed to give the Third Corps his personal supervision.
Worse, as Lee had feared, Richard Ewell was proving inadequate as a corps commander. His health was as shaky as Hill’s, and he had repeatedly displayed a notable lack of initiative. As a result, Lee would have to manage two of his three corps very closely, and he would have to do it with only three personal staff officers.

On May 4, the long-awaited Federal offensive began as the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan River and moved east of Lee’s army through the Wilderness toward Spotsylvania Court House. That day, Lee had Taylor send two final telegrams before the army moved away from its wire connection. Taylor ordered Fitzhugh Lee to send regular reports of the Federals’ progress, and told Longstreet simply, “Be prepared to move.” Later that evening, as Lee and his staff traveled with Hill, the commanding general had Taylor write his orders for Ewell. Taylor informed the Second Corps commander that Lee planned to fight the Federals as soon as possible, preferably in the Wilderness, where the tangled undergrowth would neutralize much of the Federal superiority in artillery and numbers, and simply told Ewell to “be ready to move on early in the morning.” Thus, while Lee traveled with Hill, he used his three staffers, especially Taylor, to maintain close communication with his other subordinates. Such control would be impossible, however, once combat commenced, especially in the Wilderness.

As Lee had hoped, his men encountered the Federals, who soon turned from their march southward to attack the Confederates. On May 5, the Confederates engaged the enemy in the very confused, bloody Battle of the Wilderness. Lee stayed near Hill’s lines, relying on Venable to keep him informed. In the poor conditions of the Wilderness, Lee made little attempt to control the Second Corps. At 6:00 p.m., he had Marshall write Ewell to inform him of the situation on Hill’s front. Marshall suggested that the Second Corps attack, ordering Ewell to “be ready to act early in the morning.” An hour later, Lee had Marshall write Ewell again repeating
his instructions. Twice in this short note, Marshall told Ewell to “be ready to act” as early as possible on May 6. Meanwhile, Lee sent Venable to hurry Longstreet to the front; the staffer ordered the First Corps to march all night and cut its way through the tangled Wilderness if it had to, but it had to be in position by daylight. Even after Venable returned to Lee, Longstreet did not start his men toward the Wilderness until 1:00 a.m.

Confederate neglect almost led to the destruction of the Army of Northern Virginia on May 6. The Federals launched a devastating attack at sunrise. Hill’s Corps was overwhelmed, and the defeated soldiers fled past army headquarters where Lee and Marshall desperately tried to rally them with only limited success. Fearing disaster, Lee ordered Taylor to ride back to the army’s supply train to prepare it for hasty retreat. He also sent Venable back to Longstreet with an urgent order for him to rush his men to the battlefield no matter the physical toll on them.

Thus, when the first of Longstreet’s units arrived on the field, Lee was overcome with emotion, and personally tried to lead it into the battle. Venable saw that his commander meant to charge with his men. Instead of trying to dissuade Lee himself, the staffer found someone of much higher rank who could, directing Lee’s attention to Longstreet, who had by then arrived. Thinking quickly, Venable displayed admirable individual initiative. Neither Taylor or Marshall was close enough to have tried to restrain Lee, so Venable took it upon himself to protect his commander. Venable’s ploy worked; as soon as he and Lee rode to see Longstreet, the staffer told the First Corps commander what Lee had been attempting to do. Longstreet managed to persuade Lee to move farther to the rear. The First Corps’ attack blunted the Federal thrust and inflicted heavy casualties, but Longstreet himself was severely wounded by friendly fire.

Although Venable was silent on the most controversial issues of the war like Gettysburg, he derived considerable satisfaction from his actions in the Wilderness. After the war, in the few
instances in which he publicly spoke or published on the Civil War, Venable always focused on General Lee’s bravery in the Wilderness and later at Spotsylvania. He also emphasized that he and the other staff officers had helped prevent their commander from riding to an almost certain death. To Venable and his former staff comrades, any distinction they gained came as a result of Lee’s luster, and when discussing the Wilderness, as with any other battle fought by the Army of Northern Virginia, they strove above all to lift up Lee’s memory. They did not exalt Lee, however, by tearing down his subordinates. After the war, when they had successfully branded Longstreet as a traitor to the South, Jubal Early and his associates questioned why the Army of Northern Virginia had come so close to total defeat on May 6, 1864. They concluded that, just as at Gettysburg, the First Corps was late to a battlefield because James Longstreet was intentionally trying to sabotage Lee and the Confederacy. In making this accusation, Early conveniently forgot that he and his immediate superior, General Ewell, had not obeyed Marshall’s orders of the evening of May 5. The Second Corps was not “ready to act early in the morning;” in fact, it did very little throughout most of May 6.

While Lee’s former staff continued to extol their former commander’s virtues, unlike Early and his cohorts, however, they never accused Longstreet of slowness in the Wilderness or questioned his loyalty. On the contrary, in an address before the Army of Northern Virginia Association in 1873, Venable praised Longstreet’s actions at the Wilderness, stating that during the battle Longstreet displayed “that imperturbable coolness which always characterized him in times of perilous action.” As he concluded, “the story of this and of Longstreet’s unfortunate wounding is familiar to all. His glorious success and splendid action on the field had challenged the admiration of all.” To Venable, far from being a turncoat whose slowness had undermined Lee’s plans, Longstreet was a fearless, composed battlefield leader.
In his writings, Taylor praised Longstreet even more thoroughly than Venable. In his first book, Taylor referred to the First Corps commander’s attack as “brilliant.” Like Venable, Taylor defended Longstreet from charges that he was slow to reach the Wilderness. Once there, Taylor agreed that Longstreet performed admirably, writing that he “was prompt to act.” Taylor referred to the corps commander’s wounding as “an accident truly calamitous in its results,” and even compared Longstreet to “Stonewall” Jackson, who had been fatally wounded by his own men in the Wilderness a year earlier.23

Taylor continued to praise Longstreet’s actions at the Wilderness in spite of the former corps commander’s increasingly bitter and defensive statements concerning his record. In his second book, published a decade after Longstreet’s often-acidic memoirs, Taylor compared the First Corps commander to “Stonewall” even more explicitly, and claimed that his wounding was a “catastrophe” that changed the entire course of the battle.24 In doing so, he invoked classic Lost Cause imagery, declaring that inscrutable Divine Providence had ordained that the Confederacy should not succeed. He considered Longstreet’s wounding further evidence of this, and in so doing rescued the First Corps commander, at least in his own mind, from allegations of disloyalty. Considering that former Confederates regarded Jackson as more capable and more of emulation than anyone but Lee himself, Taylor’s statements should not be dismissed as mere flattery or an attempt to romanticize the Confederate Lost Cause.25 By including Longstreet alongside Jackson, if only briefly, Taylor was inducting him, if not into the highest pantheon of Confederate heroes, certainly into an honorable place.

On the evening of May 6, 1864, however, Taylor and the other staff officers had more immediate concerns than future generations’ memories. After helping care for his younger brother Richard, assistant adjutant-general to Brigadier General William Mahone, who had been
wounded, Taylor returned to Lee’s headquarters while the army commander considered his options. Lee had Marshall and Venable write to Stuart and Ewell to inform them that the crisis on the army’s left had passed, but he had a more complicated task for Taylor. Upon receiving recommendations from Longstreet’s chief of staff, Colonel G. Moxley Sorrel, concerning who should succeed to command his corps, Lee chose Richard Anderson. He then had Taylor write the detailed orders assigning him to the First Corps and Brigadier General William Mahone to his division. Meanwhile, unlike previous Union generals, Grant did not retreat, but moved his forces around the Confederate right toward Spotsylvania.

Because of intelligence from Ewell and Stuart, Lee divined Grant’s intentions. On the afternoon of May 7, he left Taylor in charge at headquarters, riding to inspect Ewell’s lines. He had Taylor order Stuart to “make an examination and thoroughly inform yourself about the roads on our right” in case the Federals continued toward Spotsylvania. That evening, Lee ordered Anderson to march quickly to the Spotsylvania crossroads. He had Taylor inform Ewell that the First Corps was in motion, and order the Second Corps “to be prepared to follow…should it be discovered that the enemy is moving in that direction.” Deeply concerned about Anderson’s total lack of corps command experience, Lee sent both Taylor and Venable with the First Corps, leaving only Marshall at headquarters. Taylor was to personally notify Stuart that the infantry was coming, and that as a consequence his troopers were to hold out as long as possible.

After the war, when the passage of years had dimmed his memory and his desire to exalt General Lee’s reputation had thoroughly colored his writings, Taylor credited his former general with almost prophetic insight on the move to Spotsylvania. As he remembered it, Taylor showed his own lack of thorough strategic military training, and wondered what Lee was doing. While Lee’s movements probably did make a strong impression on the young staffer, he did not make
his plans by superhuman “intuition.” In fact, as historian Gordon C. Rhea revealed, Grant had “stolen a march” on Lee, and if Anderson had not decided to march his men a few extra miles to get them out of the blazing Wilderness, they would not have arrived in time.  

Meanwhile, attrition continued to exact a heavy cost on the Army of Northern Virginia’s high command. A. P. Hill informed Lee that he was too ill to command his corps, forcing Lee to assign Early to temporary command of the Third Corps. On May 12, Major General J. E. B. Stuart was mortally wounded in battle with Federal horsemen at Yellow Tavern, Virginia, thus depriving the army of its cavalry chief. Lee chose not to replace Stuart until late summer; thus, for the remainder of the campaign, army headquarters would not only be issuing orders to three infantry corps commanders, two of whom were inexperienced, but also directly to the three cavalry division leaders. Until Lee chose a new permanent cavalry corps commander, Henry B. McClellan, formerly of J. E. B. Stuart’s personal staff, joined Lee’s staff, and assisted Taylor with the army’s paperwork as an assistant adjutant general. Together, Lee, Taylor, Marshall, Venable, and McClellan succeeded in keeping the army under control, but the high command structure was stretched to the breaking point.

On the evening of May 10, the Federals launched a surprise assault on the Confederate positions near Spotsylvania. Once again, Lee reacted in desperation, sending Venable to Major General Edward Johnson to summon reinforcements while he planned to personally lead the broken troops in a counterattack. This time, Taylor and Marshall tried to dissuade him and eventually succeeded. Instead of Lee, Taylor personally led the counterattack. It was highly unusual for Lee to expose his staff officers to such extreme peril. Just as he felt the situation desperate enough to risk his own life, he was then willing to let his staffers do so. In the end, Taylor, Marshall, and Venable successfully rallied the troops and repulsed the attack.
Writing to his wife the next day, Venable summed up the horrific carnage of the preceding week. While admitting that “I cannot conceal that I have been in great danger,” Venable expressed his admiration for the fighting prowess of Lee’s men, proclaiming that “you never saw men fight like ours do.” He remained confident that the Army of Northern Virginia would prevail regardless of the personal danger he faced, claiming that “I think Grant will soon give it up.” The terrific slaughter sickened Venable, and he expressed no hatred of the Federals, but instead deep sadness at the loss of life on both sides. Having been on the front lines, he faced a very real possibility of his own death, and the thought troubled him, as he admitted that “if God calls me I hope I am willing to go leaving all to Him.” For the time being, he consoled himself that the worst was past, closing his letter by writing that “I hope the heaviest fighting is over.”

In fact, the fiercest fighting of the entire war was about to commence even as Venable penned these words. Encouraged by the partial success of the May 10 attack, Grant ordered a second, massive assault against the Confederates two days later. When the Union offensive commenced, it quickly overwhelmed the Confederates. As he had done twice before in the last week, Lee attempted to personally lead a counterattack. He sent Venable to summon a brigade and placed himself at its head. This time, General John B. Gordon, commanding Ewell’s reserve division, urged Lee not to accompany the men. Like Venable and Taylor before them, Gordon and his troops managed to persuade Lee that they could contain the enemy breakthrough. Lee ordered Venable to accompany the reinforcements to the front. They charged, and in the most prolonged, brutal struggle of the entire war, managed to hold off the enemy until nightfall.

Lee kept his staff busy for the next few days as Grant probed for weaknesses. Taylor and Marshall helped secure the army’s supply train, and both corresponded with Colonel Talcott, whose engineer regiment was assigned to fortify positions and river crossings farther south to
ensure its safety. Marshall then notified Richmond of the secure route and appraised President Davis on the army’s current logistical condition. Meanwhile, Lee relied on Venable to help him maintain contact with his generals. When Grant seemingly disappeared from his front on May 14, Lee had Venable communicate with Major General W. H. F. Lee, commanding the cavalry still with the army, to find out where he had gone, and then inform Ewell.

On May 15, both Taylor and Venable wrote to their loved ones. To his fiancée, Taylor admitted that the Army of Northern Virginia had experienced “severe fighting.” His faith in Lee and his army, however, remained unshaken. He insisted that “With one single exception, our encounters with the enemy have been continuously & eminently successful,” and added that “our men are in good heart & condition- our confidence, certainly mine, unimpaired.” He concluded that “Grant is beating his head against a wall.” Taylor did not dwell on the army’s undeniable setbacks, but focused his thoughts on winning final victory. The young man also did not choose to think much about his own mortality; despite being in more danger than he ever had since the beginning of the war, he thanked God for preserving him and never mentioned the horrific carnage he had just witnessed, although he confessed that it was a “wonder” that he had not been “completely riddled.” Taylor’s optimistic outlook likely stemmed partially from a desire to appear loyal and brave to his prospective wife, and partly from his youth.

Venable was neither as optimistic as Taylor nor as reluctant to discuss his own mortality. In his letter, he briefly summarized the horrors he had witnessed, writing that “our fighting has been terrific,” and adding that “may God send us peace & stop this fearful carnage.” Lacking Taylor’s youthful exuberance, Venable was far more willing to describe the frightful battlefield, and readily admitted that Confederate losses had been heavy. While he hoped for divine intervention like Taylor, he was far less confident of final victory. Unlike Taylor, he openly
admitted his exhaustion. After more than a week of constant fighting and maneuvering, the men of both armies were nearing collapse, and the toll was soon to be felt at headquarters. On May 18, Grant tried one last time to break through Lee’s defenses. While this Federal attack was repulsed, it also caused anxious moments for Lee, as he sent Marshall to observe the fighting. While carrying out this assignment, Marshall was slightly wounded above the eye by a Federal shell that came close to killing him, but instead merely knocked the glass out of his spectacles. It did not matter in the short term if Marshall could not read fine print; the army was so busy that no one made any entries in the headquarters letter book.

The next day, Grant decided to abandon his Spotsylvania line and march around the Confederate right. By then, Lee was convinced that Ewell was unfit to command what remained of the Second Corps. For the time being, however, he had no one to replace Ewell, and so had both Marshall and Venable write him explicit instructions for the next few days. Marshall asked the Second Corps commander for information, while Venable rebuked Ewell twice in a short note for not communicating with army headquarters. Venable closed by writing Ewell that Lee “desires you to have your troops in readiness to move at daybreak tomorrow,” and adding that “he desires you to move at that time without further orders.” Lee had to use his three staff officers to micromanage all three infantry corps now.

Such a burden proved too much even for a commander and staff as capable as Lee and his “military family.” After three more days of marching, the Army of Northern Virginia took a strong defensive position on the south bank of the North Anna River. Lee continued to have his staff closely monitor his subordinates, using the telegraph whenever possible. Nevertheless, the army was beginning to show signs of command breakdown. A. P. Hill felt well enough to resume command of the Third Corps, but he failed to take adequate precautions against the
enemy in his front. As a result, on May 23, simultaneous Union attacks drove both flanks of Lee’s army away from the river, leaving the center still holding its line on the North Anna. As Lee soon realized, Grant had unwittingly supplied him with a golden opportunity. The Army of the Potomac was then astride the North Anna in two places, but the First Corps of Lee’s Army, which still held an imposing position on the river bank, divided the Union forces. By anchoring his flanks on the South Anna River, Lee created an almost impregnable defensive position. Moreover, he could now assault and crush either isolated wing of the Union army. It seemed that Lee and his army were about to win another dramatic victory over the Army of the Potomac, and on May 23, Lee gave the order to attack.

The planned Confederate offensive never really began. Lee had been ill with a violent intestinal disorder since the campaign opened, and three weeks of stress and the lack of sleep forced him to retire to his tent. In his absence, neither Hill nor Ewell took the initiative to launch the attack, and once Grant realized the seriousness of his predicament, he withdrew his men. As Venable summarized years later, the Army of Northern Virginia’s high command structure had completely broken down, writing that “though he still had reports of the operations in the field constantly brought to him, and gave orders to his officers, Lee confined to his tent was not Lee on the battlefield.” Lee did not possess enough staffers to coordinate a complicated offensive. Thus, the Confederates’ last opportunity to destroy a substantial part of Grant’s army passed.

Lee’s staff officers reacted to their exhaustion and the lost opportunity in different ways. For the sensitive Charles S. Venable, disappointment turned to open rage and insubordination. While he had argued with Lee before, this time Venable openly and defiantly confronted him. A witness saw him storming out of Lee’s tent “in a state of flurry and excitement, full to bursting.” Venable announced that “I have just told the old man that he is not fit to command this army, and
that he had better send for [P. G. T.] Beauregard.” After months of frustration and then a campaign more trying than any the war had yet produced, Venable was clearly feeling the strain. He remained a capable, if highly opinionated, officer, and Lee never mentioned his extreme violation of military protocol to anyone else or publicly reprimanded Venable.53

As before, Walter Taylor retained a more optimistic mindset. Writing his fiancée, Taylor described his routine and confessed that he was utterly exhausted. Instead of becoming more frustrated with General Lee, Taylor admired his commander even more. Taylor had discovered that he could manage an army in the immediate presence of the enemy and realized more fully than before how important his duties were. He remained confident of final victory, proclaiming that “I trust our men will conduct themselves in a manner becoming soldiers in the army of Northn Virga [sic].”54

Following the stalemate at the North Anna, the opposing armies sat relatively motionless for two days as Lee had Taylor maintain contact with local railroad officials to keep troops and supplies flowing to his army.55 Perhaps because of the toll the campaign was taking on his health, Lee relied on Taylor more extensively than ever before to manage all aspects of his army that did not require his personal supervision. From this time forward, Taylor often issued orders directly to infantry and cavalry commanders in the field on his own authority. Lee was often absent from headquarters inspecting or directing action at distant points along the trenches, and Taylor functioned as a surrogate commanding general, coordinating troop movements and even limited offensives along other parts of the line. He also received an increasing number of telegrams and written messages addressed directly to him, providing him with intelligence of enemy movements. He thus had to filter the information and decide what was important for Lee
to know; in a sense, he thus became the army’s intelligence officer. As Taylor confessed, while such weighty responsibility still frightened him, he was much more confident than before.\textsuperscript{56} Taylor’s ability surprised even himself. In less than a year, he had grown from a responsible staff officer to one capable of managing the entire Army of Northern Virginia in the face of the enemy. Although he was never officially designated as Lee’s chief of staff, Taylor was then performing all of the traditional military duties of such officers.

By late May, Taylor was receiving a steady stream of telegrams from Confederate forces in the Cold Harbor vicinity, alerting him and Lee to Grant’s movements.\textsuperscript{57} On June 1, Lee realized the enemy’s objective and sent Marshall and Venable with most of his army to block the Federal advance. He left the Second Corps, now under Jubal Early, in position to face the Union right flank.\textsuperscript{58} Because of his health, Lee used his staff to carry his messages and supervise his subordinates, a practice mandated by military theory and forced on him by personal necessity.\textsuperscript{59}

After an unsuccessful Union assault on June 1, Grant spent most of the next day planning a massive attack that was supposed to smash through the Army of Northern Virginia. His June 3 assault resulted in a Confederate victory that was, as Venable remembered years later, “perhaps the easiest ever granted to Confederate arms by the folly of Federal commanders.”\textsuperscript{60} Almost 60,000 Federals hurled themselves at the Confederates. Although they briefly penetrated the lines, the Unionists were soon hurled backward with very heavy losses. The attack was over almost before Lee or his staff knew it had happened; although Taylor received several telegrams giving news of the battle’s progress, no one at army headquarters appeared to have given orders.\textsuperscript{61} The Army of Northern Virginia had fought the reinforced Army of the Potomac to a very bloody stalemate just northeast of Richmond, and had waged a brilliant defensive campaign. It had inflicted about 60,000 casualties and held off a force twice its size on multiple
occasions. Taylor was quite satisfied with the army’s achievements, writing to his fiancée that “old U. S. Grant is pretty tired of us— at least it appears so,” and then adding that “we are in excellent trim— even in fine spirits— and ready for a renewal of the fight whenever the signal is given.”

Grant then decided to cross his forces over the James River to attack the key rail center of Petersburg, Virginia. If Petersburg fell, Richmond would be doomed.

By crossing the James, Grant “stole a march” on Lee, who remained north of that river covering the direct approaches to Richmond. General Pierre G. T. Beauregard, commanding at Petersburg, soon realized that his meager forces faced a considerable enemy host, and he began bombarding the Richmond authorities and Lee with telegrams pleading for immediate assistance. While he sorted through this mass of confusing correspondence, Lee had Taylor continue to act as his chief intelligence officer north of the James, and had Venable help arrange for the army’s supply lines. Taylor received extensive correspondence addressed to him by Confederate infantry and cavalry commanders on the Richmond front carrying the latest reports of Federal activities. These messages were also often contradictory, but within a few days, it became clear both from the Petersburg front and from the Richmond outposts that Grant had crossed the James River much faster than suspected. The Army of Northern Virginia hastily crossed the James itself, reaching Petersburg on June 19, just in time to blunt the Union thrust.

The two armies, exhausted from more than a month of the bloodiest combat ever seen in the Western Hemisphere, now settled into a siege. For the next nine months, the Union forces gradually extended their trenches southwest and west of Petersburg, trying to sever the city’s rail lines and thus force its evacuation. Lee had no choice but to extend his own lines to counter the Federals, although his army’s dwindling manpower assured that this was a forlorn task. During much of the siege, Grant repeatedly tried to break Lee’s lines by attacking simultaneously north
and south of the James River trying to break through and capture either Richmond or Petersburg. At the very least, he would force the Confederates to stretch their lines to the breaking point.  

With the Army of Northern Virginia almost trapped in its trenches, headquarters settled into a routine. As previously, Lee often departed with Marshall and Venable, leaving Taylor to manage the army’s less-threatened sectors and handle incoming correspondence. In particular, Taylor often commanded Confederate forces north of the James River, where a small Federal detachment maintained a bridgehead threatening Richmond. Taylor maintained communications with Ewell, then commanding the capital’s defenses, as well as George Pickett and Charles Field, whose divisions manned the lines at Bermuda Hundred south of the city. He also kept Lee informed of all enemy activity in this area. Although the Confederates suffered reverses here, particularly when Fort Harrison fell to the Federals on September 29, the lines remained mostly stable, and Taylor helped to conduct a competent defense with very limited resources.

As the months passed, the strain of the siege and the obviously-declining fortunes of the Confederacy created tensions at headquarters. The relationship between Taylor and Venable soon deteriorated. By early August, Taylor admitted that “my chum and I have both lost our temper, became very angry & had an explanation.” A week later, he added that “we have here every variety of insect that ever was heard of, & these together with the scorching sun constitute a thorough destroyer of the last lingering spark of amiability that an Adjt General may have once possessed.” Venable, meanwhile, resented what he considered Taylor’s favored position on the staff and refused to share fruit with him on the grounds that he was “already too much petted.”

Taylor was indispensable at headquarters, much to his dismay. To make matters worse, in August, Lee appointed Major General Wade Hampton to head the cavalry corps. As a result, Henry B. McClellan reverted to his old role as assistant adjutant general of the cavalry corps,
leaving Taylor virtually alone. Even when Taylor fell very ill late that month, Lee still insisted that he fulfill his duties and reverted to his old habit of personally shaming him into obedience.\textsuperscript{72} Taylor became extremely frustrated with Lee, perhaps more than ever before:

\begin{quote}
I wish the old chief had some older, wiser, more temperate head near him, for I daily become more and more convinced of my inability to fulfill the position I occupy: and then, I am so distressingly fiery, so lacking in humility. The General and I lost temper with each other yesterday and of course, I was afterwards disgusted at my allowing myself to be placed in a position where I appear to such disadvantage. I couldn’t help however; he is so unreasonable and provoking at times. I might serve under him for ten years to come and couldn’t love him at the end of that period.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

Taylor did not threaten to leave Lee, but he was simply overwhelmed with months of work and the prospect of facing it virtually alone was galling. Marshall continued to take Lee’s dictation for Davis and others, and Venable served as Lee’s “eyes” along the trenches, but Taylor was left to deal with the paperwork and virtually run large portions of the army by himself.\textsuperscript{74}

While some historians have used Taylor’s words to suggest that the commanding general was often confrontational and difficult with his “military family,” it must be remembered that Lee, Taylor, Venable, and Marshall were under tremendous stress by the autumn of 1864. Their army had been under attack or siege for months on end, and each of them worked harder than he ever had in his life. In citing the above letter to “prove” that Lee was an impossible taskmaster, few writers have admitted that in the same letter, Taylor claimed Lee had appeased him, writing that “Suffice it to say that we are on good terms now. When he left me this morning, he presented me with a peach, so I have been somewhat appeased. You know that is my favorite fruit. Ah! but he is a queer old genius. I suppose it is so with all great men.\textsuperscript{75}” While some historians such as Elizabeth Brown Pryor have claimed this as evidence of Lee’s inability to apologize for being so unreasonable, Taylor proclaimed himself satisfied.\textsuperscript{76}

Taylor, Marshall, and Venable all longed for furloughs. Marshall and Venable each received one in September, explaining to a frustrated Taylor that they had “special reasons” for
wanting to be in Richmond. Like Taylor, Venable was feeling physically unwell, and had apparently lost some weight as a result of being ill. He was already taking alcohol and quinine for his malady three times in a day, and was about to begin a mixture containing tincture of iron. Such an ailment and dubious remedy could not have improved his disposition, nor could news of his refugee wife’s impending childbirth in his absence. On September 19, Mary Venable gave birth to Charles Venable’s second daughter, Lilly. In a letter, Venable admitted that he was disappointed that his new child was a girl, but concluded that “such things being very properly beyond human control, I am well contented with a daughter. In this world of temptations and sorrows they oftener prove blessings than sons.” Venable’s attitude toward female children was typical of the gendered norms of the mid-nineteenth-century South, but his distress at his physical condition and the state of his family very likely adversely affected his relationships with both Taylor and General Lee. As for Taylor, he privately resolved to his fiancée to “rebel and have at least a month’s leave in October or Nov.” if Lee did not grant him a furlough also. He confessed, though, that he was “perfectly well & in good condition.”

Despite his improved physical state, Taylor was seething with rage at the Union and the declining fortunes of the Confederacy. When he witnessed black men in Federal blue for the first time, he railed at them, claiming they had once belonged to “masters in happy Virginia homes.” He defended the slaughter of surrendering black troops at the July 30 Battle of the Crater, claiming that “they first cried ‘no quarter’ and our men acted on this principle.” For Taylor, peace with white men who fought beside former slaves was unthinkable. His fury only increased when he received word in October that his cousin Dick had been wounded and captured. To the young staff officer, anyone who questioned whether the South should fight on was potentially a traitor and subject to any accompanying public ostracism.
By November, Lee had decided to move his army headquarters to Petersburg. Taylor was then in the field with Lee, as the commanding general had granted Venable a furlough to see his new daughter and Marshall was still too sick to accompany Lee. The army commander ordered Taylor to find a suitable location for headquarters while he conferred in Richmond with President Davis. After over two years of enduring Lee’s Spartan camp lifestyle and perhaps mindful of his colleagues’ fragile health, Taylor chose a far more elaborate location than his commander ever would. Once Lee returned, he resisted such “luxuries,” but finally submitted.

Taylor was then performing his duties for months on end under a permanent roof for the first time and his spirits lifted accordingly.

As Lee spent an increasing amount of time conferring with Richmond authorities on the declining state of Confederate military fortunes, Taylor’s newfound sense of self-reliance led him almost to insolence. As Taylor related to his fiancée, he ordered army headquarters moved on his own authority for the first time, and selected an even more comfortable location:

I am finely fixed in the parlour with piano, sofas, lounges, pictures, rocking chair, etc etc: everything as fine as possible for a winter campaign. After fixing the general and staff I concluded that I would have to occupy one of the miserable little back rooms of the house; but the gentleman in charge hinted that I might take the parlour and this decided me. I believe the General was pleased with his room and on entering mine remarked “Ah! You are finely fixed; couldn’t you find any other room?—No- said I but this will do. I can make myself tolerably comfortable here.” He was struck dumb with amazement at my impudence & soon vanished.

Long periods of virtually commanding substantial portions of the army and almost a year’s hard-won experience as official assistant adjutant-general had transformed Taylor. He had been a brash young officer who was unsure of himself despite his bluster. Now, he was an effective, even insubordinate staff officer who could anticipate his general’s wishes and oppose him when appropriate. In the end, Lee and his staff remained in the “Edge Hill” home for as long as the Army of Northern Virginia remained at Petersburg. By April 1865, Taylor had even established a telegraph office in the house.
Feeling both his newfound abilities and increasing pressure to marry his sweetheart, Taylor contemplated leaving Lee’s staff again. His considerations did not stem from any resentment of Lee or his enormous workload, but from a desire to make more money so that his fiancée would be persuaded to marry him before the war was over. As early as November 1, he wrote to her urging immediate nuptials and promising to seek a Richmond job since it offered much better pay. By the end of the month, apparently with her encouragement, Taylor was considering actively seeking a position in Richmond. His sense of duty, however, prohibited him from doing so. As he put it, “what cause for congratulations will I have when I contrast my comfortable quarters out of harm’s way with [field soldiers’] slippery abode in the trenches and under fire!” He did, however, entertain the idea of accepting a lieutenant colonelcy or colonelcy of a cavalry regiment. Probably trying to impress his fiancée, Taylor broached the possibility of infantry service, because “it would be more manly to desire to be in a regiment of that branch of the service” due to its dangerousness. In the end, Taylor found no suitable openings for field service, and despite his highly gendered arguments about its superiority, he remained with Lee.

It was more obvious than ever that men like Taylor, Marshall, and Venable were needed. As the year 1864 came to a close, the Confederacy was visibly dying everywhere except in the Army of Northern Virginia. As the holidays approached, Lee’s staff preferred to reflect upon happier topics. In a letter to his son Francis, Charles Venable admonished the boy to become a respectable member of society. Sensing the impending doom of the Confederacy, Charles implored his son never to forget the southerners’ sacrifices, writing that in coming years Francis should ask his mother “what 1864 means.” Even after years at war and months in the trenches, Venable remained a scholar. He was very concerned about his son’s education and piety and wanted him to personally identify with the Confederate cause as his father had.
In a letter to his wife, Venable expressed the deep pain he felt at being separated from his family, and his frustrations with Lee. He even managed a weak attempt at humor:

My dear darling little wife I do love you so much and want to see you so, so much. I dream about you often. I believe too I want to see that new daughter somewhat and Frank and Mamie most tremendously. I can readily imagine the confusion of our dressing room with these young ones to be splashed every morning, all doing something or other mischievous and two in imminent danger of being crushed by heavy trunk-tops and I lying, an elephant half asleep wishing I was in camp again—perhaps. No I never wish to be in camp again.89

Venable would still have much preferred a son, as he wrote of wanting to see his daughter “somewhat” while he wanted to visit with his boy “most tremendously.” Nevertheless, his letter expressed his mounting weariness with his staff work and the war itself. He expressed no thoughts about the Confederacy’s fate; increasingly, all he cared about was his destitute family. In the coming months, as final defeat loomed, such feelings easily turned into morbid fatalism.90

In his comfortable new quarters, Taylor remained optimistic and self-confident. He continued to stand up to Lee himself, and began taking much-needed reprieves from his work without asking the commanding general’s permission.91 While Venable wrestled with the plight of his family and Marshall struggled with his health, Taylor had finally found a way to balance his staff work and his personal life. He enjoyed himself enough to keep his spirits high, but he never let vital work go uncompleted. After a time, Lee realized this, and it is never recorded that he rebuked Taylor again for leaving the office. In fact, on Christmas Day, Lee recommended that Taylor leave the office and spend the holiday with his mother and fiancée.92 Despite Taylor’s occasional resentment of his chief, the two men had developed a very profitable and often personally friendly professional relationship.

The staff officers’ letters and the army’s records reveal that Lee and his staff had come a long way since May 1864. The commanding general had learned to use his staffers as military theory dictated. With so many of his most effective subordinates gone, Lee had no choice but to
use his staff to supervise those who remained. He could not be present along every part of the field works from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor, but he had increasingly used his personal staff to make sure his badly-outnumbered forces were always in position to block Grant’s thrusts. While the command system had experienced some teething troubles, especially along the North Anna River, it had usually functioned smoothly. At Petersburg, with his army locked into a war of attrition, Lee learned to use Taylor’s formidable talents to manage and command parts of his thinly-stretched army out of his personal oversight. While Lee had only had three personal staff officers throughout most of 1864, he had used them to the very limit of their abilities.

The staff officers themselves had demonstrated that their talents were considerable. Walter Taylor had emerged as almost a surrogate army commander in his own right. No longer was he reluctant to receive and evaluate information or issue orders on his own authority. He now routinely did so, and while he continued to express some apprehension at the possibility that he might make a serious mistake, his performance won Lee’s approval. Charles Marshall had battled his own wounding and a debilitating illness to continue to take Lee’s dictation and assist him in controlling his units in the field. Despite his encroaching fatalism and poorly-controlled emotions, Charles Venable had proven his worth as a supervisor of battlefield units who was willing to risk his own life to save the commander with whom he so often quarreled. Although the three remaining staff officers had been pushed to the very limits of their endurance, they had continued to perform well, and they must enjoy some of the credit for the remarkable defense that Lee’s army had conducted throughout the bloody year of 1864.

In the postwar memories of Lee’s personal staff, the campaigns of 1864 assumed even greater significance. In a speech, Venable argued that “to the Federal army [the Overland Campaign] had been a series of bloody repulses, and even when a gleam of success seemed to
dawn upon it for a moment…it was speedily extinguished in blood, and immediate disaster crowded over the face of their rising star of victory,” and proclaimed that Lee’s efforts were “a campaign unexampled in the history of defensive warfare.”⁹³ Venable did not attack Grant’s reputation or that of Lee’s subordinates to build up that of his old commander. Instead, he praised Lee’s achievement in holding out against lengthening odds, and was willing for Lee to share the credit with his men, including James Longstreet, whom Venable referred to warmly.

Although he had been more fully in control of his emotions than Venable in 1864, Walter Taylor vented his feelings in his postwar writings. While he stated the basic numerical statistics of the Overland Campaign, Taylor boasted of Confederate arms, writing that Lee’s army had inflicted over 60,000 Union casualties, and even after such terrific slaughter, “still presented an impregnable front to its opponent, and constituted an insuperable barrier to General Grant’s ‘On to Richmond!’”⁹⁴ According to Taylor, Grant’s subsequent move to Petersburg only proved that he could never defeat Lee in the open field. Instead, the Union commander resorted to a siege and policy of attrition, “to exhaust and wear out the people who could not be beaten in a trial of arms.”⁹⁵ Unlike Venable, Taylor was willing to attack Grant’s reputation partially in order to vindicate Lee, since after all, Grant had forced Lee’s final surrender.

Although the passage of thirty years dimmed Taylor’s brashness, he remained firmly convinced that Grant was no superior soldier. In his second book, he reviewed Grant’s Overland Campaign and subsequent Siege of Petersburg without giving him much credit, writing that “Grant earned the title of a great commander; but his is not the brightest name that emerges from the smoke of battle at that eventful period.”⁹⁶ For Taylor, Grant may have won final victory, but Lee always remained the far better general. He did not fully embrace the idea that Grant and the Union had triumphed purely because of “overwhelming numbers and resources,” as he admitted
that Grant did plan to take advantage of the North’s material superiority. Nevertheless, Taylor firmly agreed with many of his former Confederate colleagues that Union triumph did not vindicate the Federal cause or condemn the Confederate one. In fact, for Taylor, the bloodshed of 1864 proved Confederate virtue: “in taking a retrospective view of the events and conditions of that period, one is impressed by the apparent hopelessness in the cause of the South, and marvels at the persistently courageous spirit exhibited by the leaders and people in their struggle against such overwhelming odds.”

Although Venable and Taylor could look back on the Army of Northern Virginia’s exploits years later, the Confederacy itself was in dire straits by 1865. In one final campaign, Lee’s staff would prove its worth yet again. It remained to be seen how Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall, and Charles Venable would handle the unthinkable. In their written responses to it, they represented the range of emotions felt by most former Confederates as the nation they had fought so long and hard to help establish collapsed in final defeat. They would also begin the process of forging the white South’s collective memory of its struggle for independence.
By January 1865, it was obvious that the Confederacy was dying. Federal triumphs in Georgia and Tennessee had almost destroyed the Army of Tennessee and carved a swath of destruction from Atlanta to Savannah. Only one seaport, Wilmington, North Carolina, remained open to blockade runners, and even that was about to be closed by Union forces. Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia had been trapped in the Petersburg trenches for six months, suffering from a lack of supplies and low morale. Its numbers were dwindling rapidly, as Confederate soldiers deserted in droves, convinced that the cause was lost. Lee himself realized that the end was near, but continued to press Richmond for more supplies and reinforcements.

Lee’s three remaining personal staff officers continued to faithfully discharge their duties. Whether or not they chose to admit it, their letters revealed that they shared their commander’s gloomy perspective. The Army of Northern Virginia then occupied more than twenty miles of trenches stretching from Richmond to the southwest of Petersburg. The question was not whether Richmond and the Army of Northern Virginia would fall, but when. Facing the bleak reality, like many of those in the ranks, Lee’s personal staff officers began coming to terms with the plights of their families and the Confederacy’s dismal prospects.¹

Lee’s staff dealt with impending doom in different ways. Probably because of his youth, Walter Taylor remained optimistic. Having returned from a much-needed three-week leave of absence in January, he wrote to his fiancée Bettie Saunders in ebullient terms, even as the Union Army launched another of its seemingly endless offensives to turn the Confederate right flank, concluding that “we are in very good condition and by the help of God will render a good account of ourselves.” Continuing his letter, Taylor grew increasingly confident, even flippant, about the army’s prospects, dismissing the Federals and his job as minor annoyances and
declaring that General Lee had once again allowed him to issue orders to distant commanders. In part, Taylor believed what he wrote, but inwardly, he knew that the Confederacy was in dire straits. In the latter part of his letter, Taylor spelled out the Confederate situation as he saw it, admitting that “Sherman may trouble us a great deal,” and that he expected Richmond to eventually fall. Thus, despite what R. Lockwood Tower argued, Taylor was willing to “face reality,” insofar as he admitted the capitol was probably doomed. He was still of the Army of Northern Virginia, insisting that “we could hold our own,” and blamed any incoming disaster on the western Confederate armies, whose remnants faced the hopeless task of stopping Sherman.

Taylor considered his fiancée’s desires and trusted her judgement. Considering the plight of the capitol, he frankly asked her, “What would you wish to do?” He suggested she abandon the city and travel with Lee’s army, but admitted that such a course would mean abandoning her family. Admitting his relative hopelessness and mixed feelings, he insisted that he “could never be satisfied” for Saunders to “be in the Yankee lines,” before resignedly asking her “seriously” what her “wishes” were. He veered sharply between almost ordering his fiancée to accompany the army and allowing her to dictate events. In part, Taylor’s words probably reflected his own distressed emotional state over the decline of the Confederacy. They also revealed his painful realization that the enemy, and his fiancée, possessed greater influence than he did over her movements. Indeed, he was not pleased when Saunders replied that she wanted to remain in Richmond and consoled her somewhat patronizingly that “how thankful I should be, how grateful I am, to know that my brave little girl has a courageous heart, a will and a spirit which fits her for any emergency.” He continued to insist that she follow him, but finally relented.

In these circumstances, Taylor grew more defensive about his own position than before. For the first time, he defended himself against potential accusations that being a staff officer was
somehow “cowardly” because staff officers like him were not on the firing line, writing that, “Should not I also go where there is danger? A soldier, dear Bettie, must obey orders- though mine keep me here now, they have often heretofore carried & will frequently hereafter carry me into positions most uncomfortably hot.” It is uncertain why Taylor felt compelled to defend his own record this late in the war. While general staff personnel in Richmond were frequent targets of accusations of being shirkers, no one seriously questioned the bravery of most personal staff officers. Probably, although he did not choose to admit it, Taylor realized that the cause was lost, and wished to reassure his fiancée and anyone else that he had done his part to defend it, thus foreshadowing the self-justifications of many former Confederates after the war. Neither Taylor nor his fellow staffers succumbed to the temptation to overstate their roles after the war. While the fighting still raged, however, Taylor could not resist justifying his record.

Probably for this reason, Taylor considered leaving Lee’s staff for the final time. In early March 1865, a cavalry brigadier offered him an appointment as colonel of a mounted regiment. Taylor wrote to his fiancée that he had already replied that he would accept such an appointment. Cavalry command at least offered excitement and action, not incessantly dreary reports of ever-worsening news and dwindling personnel rosters. In the end, nothing came of this proposal, but Taylor was reaching the end of his patience with his commander, and although he remained very loyal to Lee, he was growing more loyal to his bride-to-be.

Although he remained a staff officer, Taylor considered his future in the Confederate army. Given the military situation, this would have already been highly uncertain, and word that Lee would soon be promoted to general-in-chief only heightened Taylor’s anxieties, as he wondered “what becomes of the staff?” Taylor felt uncertain Lee would take him in his new role as general-in-chief, and the young staffer worried that he might not get along as well with Lee’s
successor in army command.\textsuperscript{12} For the past year, Taylor had been paying increasing attention to what his “friends” said about him probably because he was now engaged and thus considering his future in southern society. He need not have worried about his position with his commander or his army; although Lee was appointed general-in-chief of all Confederate armies on February 6, 1865, he did not relinquish command of the Army of Northern Virginia, and thus his staff officers’ positions remained stable.

Lee did, however, belatedly realize the administrative burdens on his three staff officers. As Taylor noted, the commanding general not only relied on him to manage headquarters, he also trusted him to divide up the headquarters work; at last, Taylor found some time to himself.\textsuperscript{13} After almost a year, Lee had realized that although Taylor was capable, he was very overworked, and resolved to get him some assistance. In addition to having Charles Marshall and Charles S. Venable shoulder more of the army’s administrative burden, Lee unofficially allowed a fourth officer, Giles B. Cooke, formerly of J. E. B. Stuart’s “military family,” to remain on his personal staff as the campaign season approached. Cooke assisted Lee’s official staffers in copying and relaying orders in these final months of the war.\textsuperscript{14}

With a refugee family to support and lacking Taylor’s youthful exuberance, Venable had ample reason to be “considerably disgruntled.” While Taylor was away, he had again assumed his duties, and liked them no better in 1865 than he had in 1864. He complained to his wife that “Our troubles are many, my precious one and they mortify me because people seem to think they occur from my mismanagement and incapacity.” Although he languished at Taylor’s desk, Venable was probably referring to his family’s abject poverty. Like Taylor, he felt compelled to defend his wartime actions, but instead of justifying why he was not serving on the line, Venable explained why he had joined the Confederate army in the first place, stating that “you know we
could have been as snug as the snuggest throughout this whole war except that ‘noblesse oblige’ and I could not see how with any self-respect I could hold back from the war.” The plight of his wife and children caused Venable to regret ever volunteering for the military. About the war itself, Venable wrote very little, resignedly stating that “There is such a chaos of opinion about the country and our affairs that I dont [sic] let it concern me. I look to God alone and am satisfied with the conviction that I am in the line of duty though with many shortcomings so far as my feeble vision can guide me.”¹⁵ He fatalistically accepted that the end was near.

Once Taylor returned, Venable continued to help him with the work he despised, and because Marshall fell ill in late February, the workload on both of the other staffers remained heavy.¹⁶ Once Marshall recovered, he often went with Lee to Richmond, leaving Taylor and Venable to tend to the office. Even Venable occasionally accompanied Lee to Richmond or the front. By contrast, Lee depended heavily on Taylor, having decided that the young staffer was the only one who could be trusted to manage headquarters during his absence. In February and March 1865, Lee took several trips to Richmond to plead for supplies for his starving troops, and although Taylor deeply wanted to accompany him to see his fiancée, Lee refused. Because the commanding general was so often either in the capitol or inspecting a distant sector of his lines, Taylor was essentially confined to headquarters. As Taylor confessed, “I wd [sic] much prefer…that he would manifest his appreciation for my humble services in some other way.”¹⁷

Taylor had much to say about the South’s waning prospects. He saw the failure of the Hampton Roads Peace Conference of February 1865 as confirmation of the wickedness of the Union and called upon all southerners to rally to defeat such a foe, writing that “our people now know what they have to expect & unless we are a craven hearted spiritless people, the result will surely prove beneficial & cause every man & woman to be doubly determined to fight to the
In another letter later that month, he elaborated on this theme, suggesting that white southerners should be ready to abandon all of their cities if doing so would bring final victory:

They are trying to corner this old army like a brave old lion brought to bay at last. It is determined to resist to the death and if die it must, to die game. But we have not quite made up our minds to die, and if God will help us, we will yet prove equal to the emergency.…. Our old Chief is too law abiding, too slow, too retiring for these times, that is to dare and deem necessary, but nevertheless he is the best we have, certainly the greatest captain and in his own safe & sure way will yet, I trust, carry us through this greatest trial yet.

Thus, Taylor’s frustration even caused him to question whether Lee could become a dictator. He continued to trust Lee, though, and was willing to accept extreme measures to win the war.

Within the month, Taylor faced such a radical plan. Facing the reality that slavery was irrevocably compromised and desiring to retain as much white supremacy as possible after its demise, General Robert E. Lee had given his public support to a plan to enlist blacks in the Confederate army. Such men would be promised freedom after the war if they served faithfully to the end. Although Lee proposed that the families of such freedmen should also be freed, the Confederate Congress proved highly hostile to any emancipation, even in the name of continued white domination. In the end, Congress passed a very limited bill allowing blacks to enlist, but only with their masters’ approval, and the soldiers’ families would not share their freedom.

Although the very idea of black men with guns in their hands was an anathema to southern society, Marshall approved of it, writing that “what benefit [slaveholders] expect their negroes to be to them, if the enemy occupy the country, it is impossible to say.” By contrast, Taylor was aghast at the idea at first. As late as September 1864, he had written that “we also propose to make the Negroes serviceable, and some advocate placing them in the ranks, making soldiers of them, but for this I am not quite ready.” By February 1865, Taylor was “ready” for black soldiers mainly because Lee had supported the idea, not because he felt them desirable or even necessary. In a letter to his fiancée, Taylor cautiously accepted Lee’s proposal, admitting
that “It makes me sad…to reflect that the time honoured institution will be no more, that the whole social organization of the South is to be revolutionized.” Although Taylor acquiesced in Lee’s wishes regarding black soldiers, he never fully reconciled himself to the idea. Forty years later, he would claim that “public sentiment” demanded that blacks be freed and armed, and thus distanced both himself and General Lee’s memory from any association with the proposal.

Taylor and Venable remained confident that the Confederacy would still somehow succeed. Although Taylor wrote that “I will not pretend that our condition at this hour is not a critical one,” he insisted that “at the proper time I feel sure our Chief will exhibit himself in his full strength & prove equal to the emergency.” He claimed that Lee could somehow escape Petersburg, defeat Sherman, and then turn on Grant and save Richmond. He tried to reassure his fiancée, falsely asserting that desertion had not reached endemic proportions and that “most of our brave fellows are in good heart, though grieved to hear of the despondency at home.”

Even Venable, whose letters had often been filled with despair, was more optimistic about Confederate prospects, writing his wife that “I am rejoiced to believe that God has answered the prayers of his peoples in reviving the spirits of the army and nation and giving a sterner determination and higher courage to all. The spirit in the Southern States has improved very much and the army here is again bright and buoyant.” On March 23, as Lee was preparing a last-ditch offensive at Fort Stedman trying to break Grant’s stranglehold, Venable was even more sanguine, claiming that “Everything looks much better for our cause than some weeks ago. Though I do not look to this or that encouraging circumstance but try to stay my faith and hope in God as the Governor of all things who will do all things as seemeth best to him….Everything is assuming the activity of preparation to meet the enemy. Our troops drill eight hours a day and I hope will be ready for the onslaught.”
By March, as the campaign season began, Taylor and Venable seriously contemplated their future. After soberly considering his fiancée’s probable fate if she traveled with the army, Taylor conceded that she would be safer in Richmond, but he could not bear to be apart from her any longer while they were still engaged. He thus wrote to her proposing immediate marriage, and lamented being separated from her any longer. He concluded, however, “better this, better anything than submission to Northern rule!” To his great delight, Bettie Saunders accepted. They were to be married as soon as he could get time to visit the capital. Taylor admitted that he was not likely to be able to leave headquarters for some time, but proclaimed to Saunders that she should not “be startled to see me any day, relentlessly claiming that dearest little hand” in marriage. He quietly resolved to get away as soon as he could possibly obtain Lee’s permission for even a short time.

While Taylor planned his wedding, the Federals began their final movements to turn Lee’s right. While entertaining hopes for a life with his fiancée, Taylor remained committed to the Confederacy, declaring that “nothing shall abate my determination to resist Yankee tyranny to the last extremity,” adding that “with every principle of honor to support me, with pride & patriotism as my incentives I shall endeavor to live and if need be to die a good soldier and citizen.” He reassured his fiancée that “you shall never blush on my account.” Four days later, Taylor wrote again, reminding Bettie that she and her family must keep their faith in God, and again declaring his willingness to give his life for the cause. Taylor had long ago lost his idealistic notions that war was a grand, bloodless affair, and he was reconciling himself to the idea that this bloody conflict was for a defeated cause.

Like Taylor, Venable wrote to his loved ones on the eve of the campaign. While he continued to express hope for the Confederacy, Venable apparently had very little for himself.
He enclosed a letter to his son inside a missive to his wife, and in it Charles Venable explained his situation in blunt terms, stating that “We are about to enter on a succession of bloody battles and it may be possible that you will never see your father again in this world.” Like Taylor, Venable anticipated a final, desperate struggle in which the Army of Northern Virginia was unlikely to survive, and thus one that he would probably not live through. He accepted his fate stoically, admonishing his son to “cherish, love, and cheer” his mother, who would hear all of his future plans and provide support to help him through his problems.

Venable desired that his son would follow his example. Francis was to “cultivate body and mind,” and carefully avoid “irreverent or blasphemous words.” Accepting the gender norms of his time, Charles reminded the boy that it was his duty to “protect” his mother and sisters if his father did not survive the war. Remembering his earlier words to his wife, Charles instructed Francis to “do God and your country great service.” According to Charles S. Venable, a man’s true station in life was in performing his duty to God, his nation, and his family; he declared that “Above all things my dear son recollect that God never made a man or boy to think of his own comfort and welfare and promotion in wealth and honour but to serve him and his fellow man.”

In closing, Charles Venable reminded Francis that he had sent him a compass from General Lee and one of the general’s orders. Sending orders in such a manner was a blatant violation of military protocol of which Venable had been guilty in the past thanks to overwork and oversight. As the army faced imminent destruction, Venable deliberately enclosed another of Lee’s orders to help his son remember him and the cause for which he assumed he would soon die. Mary Venable was so upset by this letter that she cried bitterly. 32

Although Taylor and Venable were wrong to assume that they would soon perish, their assessment of Confederate fortunes proved correct. Lee’s desperate offensive, launched on
March 25, temporarily captured Fort Stedman east of Petersburg, but was repulsed with heavy casualties.\textsuperscript{33} At the end of that month, Grant, sensing that Lee had fatally thinned his lines, launched a massive assault on Lee’s right near the intersection known as Five Forks. On April 2, the Federals attacked all along the Petersburg front, shattering Lee’s lines.\textsuperscript{34}

Lee and his staff tried to salvage the situation. Through Taylor, Lee sent a telegram urging Richmond’s immediate evacuation. Then, leaving Taylor at army headquarters to send telegraphs, Lee departed with Venable, Marshall, and Cooke to investigate the breakthrough.\textsuperscript{35} With headquarters virtually exposed to the enemy, Taylor’s situation soon became highly perilous. Soon, he could no longer coordinate the army’s units because the telegraph was out of commission. With the enemy approaching rapidly, he made a dramatic escape even as shells began crashing through the house.\textsuperscript{36} While his telegraph operator fled for his life, Taylor returned to General Lee, whom he found with Lieutenant General A. P. Hill, trying to stabilize the front.

While Taylor was still sending telegrams, Lee had kept his other staffers busy hurrying units to try to plug the breach in his lines. Lee sent Marshall to keep him informed of the condition of the Second Corps. Once Taylor rode up, Lee sent Venable with Lieutenant General A. P. Hill as he rode out to ascertain the identity of the troops approaching Lee’s position. Hill soon discovered that the men were Federal skirmishers, and trying to personally capture them, was shot and killed instantly while Venable watched. Venable quickly returned to Lee, who moved farther to the rear and sent him for reinforcements to bolster Hill’s remaining troops; they barely managed to stall the Federal advance while Venable and Cooke assisted the commanding general in forwarding troops.\textsuperscript{37} Lee and his staff were now ordering units out of instead of into Petersburg, for it had become obvious that the city was doomed.\textsuperscript{38}
Since the telegraph was no longer operating, Lee dictated detailed evacuation orders detailing the exact route each corps and division was to take as they crossed the Appomattox and James Rivers. Only a few bridges were available, so such coordination was especially critical. The army’s scattered components were to meet at Amelia Court House, where rations were supposed to be available. Although Lee’s orders were necessarily highly complex, Taylor copied them flawlessly, and each commander received his instructions in a timely fashion.

Having dispatched Lee’s orders, Taylor could restrain himself no longer. Knowing that he might be separated from his fiancée indefinitely, he had telegraphed her earlier that day promising to join her in Richmond to be married.³⁹ On the evening of April 2, he accordingly requested permission to go into the capital before he rejoined Lee at Amelia Court House. As Taylor recalled, Lee was taken aback by this apparently shocking request, but soon agreed because Bettie was a government employee who would soon be behind enemy lines.⁴⁰ After four years of effective service, Lee recognized that Taylor had earned his trust. Lee also understood Taylor’s youth and the anxiety he felt at his impending separation. Although he certainly could have used his assistant adjutant general’s services on the night of April 2-3, he allowed Taylor to proceed to Richmond. He likely knew that the southern cause was lost in any event, and felt that his hardworking staffer deserved brief marital happiness before final defeat.

Nonetheless, the incident reveals that Taylor’s loyalty to Lee and his army was reaching its limits. He was willing to die for the Confederacy, but perhaps not to endure separation from his loved ones before doing so. There is no indication that Taylor would have deserted the army as thousands of his comrades would in the next week, but clearly, his unconditional obedience to army protocol was slipping in the wake of obvious defeat. In the ensuing retreat, Taylor would serve faithfully as always, but his loyalty would continue to be severely tested.⁴¹ As might have
been expected, Taylor experienced great difficulty in reaching the capital. As most of the trains were no longer running, especially into the city, he boarded a train carrying severely wounded Confederates, and later switched to the last locomotive entering Richmond. He did not reach his destination until after midnight. Early on April 3, he married Bettie Saunders in a memorable and unique ceremony. Most Confederate troops and authorities had departed, and the fires that would consume a large portion of the city had been started. As Taylor recalled years later, “the occasion was not one of great hilarity, though I was very happy; my eyes were the only dry ones in the company.” As his new wife added, “tears and sobs were the only music.” Nevertheless, once the ceremony was concluded, a lighthearted Taylor briefly visited his mother and siblings before returning to Lee as he had promised. He escaped the capital on the last intact bridge over the James River before the Confederate rear guard torched it, and rejoined Lee early after daylight on April 3 at Amelia Court House.42

Crucially, the Army of Northern Virginia found no rations at Amelia Court House. The trains at the depot were filled with munitions, not rations, and as a result the Confederates were starving. In addition, Ewell’s forces had not been able to cross the James at their anticipated spot and were delayed several hours before rejoining the rest of Lee’s army. It was unclear exactly who was responsible for these logistical errors, but they proved fatal. Desperate for foodstuffs, Lee sent detachments to scour nearby farms and might even have hastily printed a circular begging the locals to send food; he also sent Cooke, who was beginning to fall seriously ill, back toward Richmond to retrieve Ewell’s men.43 In the end, the Confederates had to remain at Amelia Court House for an entire day, thus sacrificing its critical head start on their pursuers. While historians have differed on why Lee did not find his provisions and why Ewell was unable
to rejoin the army promptly, they have agreed that the delay at Amelia doomed Lee to final defeat.\textsuperscript{44}

While most former Confederates blamed the War Department for failing to forward the necessary supplies to Amelia Court House, historian William Marvel blamed Walter Taylor for the army’s predicament. In Marvel’s view, Taylor was guilty of gross dereliction of duty because he had abandoned his post on April 2. In his discussion of the Confederate retreat, Marvel wrote that “Lee…had assigned a couple of staff officers like Major Cooke to direct each of the corps on their escape from the city, dispatching others to deliver vital orders. So precipitous an evacuation would have taxed the general staff in any case, but their burdens fell especially heavy this night, and Lee was forced to act as his own chief of staff” because of Taylor’s absence.\textsuperscript{45} Later, Marvel indicted Taylor in even more explicit terms, accusing him and his fellow front-line soldiers of shifting blame to the much-despised Richmond staff bureaus in order to cover their own failings. Although Douglas Southall Freeman had largely exonerated Taylor from culpability for the supply and communications failures of April 2-3, Marvel was unconvinced. In fact, in Marvel’s opinion, Freeman’s narrative only confirmed Taylor’s guilt.\textsuperscript{46} Not only did Marvel accuse Taylor of gross neglect, but also of twisting the truth, if not outright lying, to preserve his image. As he summarized it, Marvel strongly implied that Lee’s personal staff, and especially Taylor himself, had doomed the Army of Northern Virginia.\textsuperscript{47} Marvel concluded that Taylor was indirectly responsible for Lee’s final defeat because he had failed all day to focus on his duties and then deserted his post. While Marvel convincingly argued that former Confederates exaggerated the importance of the missing supplies at Amelia Court House, his case against Taylor was not compelling. Firstly, his description of Lee’s personal staff was inconsistent. Although he claimed that Lee assigned “a couple of staff officers” to accompany
each corps, he later admitted that Lee only had four personal staff officers. Thus, Lee did not have enough staffers to send even one to each corps, let alone two. For most of his book’s accounts of Lee’s staff, Marvel relied on Cooke’s diary, although he confessed that Cooke fell seriously ill during the campaign and his memory was thus suspect.

Additionally, the fact that Taylor did not mention his midnight marriage in his first book did not indicate that he was trying to obscure his errors. Less than two pages after he discussed the evacuation of Richmond and Petersburg, Taylor confessed that he publicly and personally let Lee down at the surrender at Appomattox. Taylor devoted little coverage to the last year of the war in his first book, covering the entire nine-month Petersburg siege in only eleven pages, many of which were filled with copied official correspondence. Like many other former Confederates, Taylor simply chose not to focus or devote much space to discussing the army’s twilight, preferring to remember better times.

In fact, the most conclusive evidence that Taylor continued to perform his duties well came from Lee himself. The commanding general never rebuked Taylor in any of his wartime or postwar comments on the Amelia fiasco. There is no indication that any of the corps or division commanders failed to receive appropriate instructions on April 2. While Taylor might have been more thorough in making sure that Lee’s supply orders were received, that was ultimately the job of the army’s commissary, Lieutenant Colonel Robert G. Cole. In the end, Lee allowed Taylor to go. He recognized that the young staffer had performed capably and professionally for four years, and it was unlikely that he would have permitted him to leave if he did not trust him to return. Ultimate accountability for Taylor’s absence, like the army’s supply and command situations, rested with Lee alone.48
The Army of Northern Virginia did not resume its retreat until April 5. From the beginning, the Confederates displayed obvious signs of haste and disintegrating organization; Longstreet’s men started on the wrong road and while Lee and his staff corrected the error, Taylor wrote to Richard Anderson, commanding the Fourth Corps, to warn him against repeating it. Once he found the correct route, Longstreet did not proceed far before discovering that Federal cavalry blocked the main road to the southwest. As it was soon evident that the Union horsemen had infantry support, Lee decided to turn his army further west, toward Farmville, another small town where he expected to find food. By nightfall, the rearguard was still at Amelia Court House, and there were three Union infantry corps at Jetersville. In desperation, Lee ordered his army to march through the night to escape the trap.

Although the Army of Northern Virginia had narrowly survived thus far, on April 6 it received a shattering blow, as the Federals trapped and destroyed about one-fourth of his army’s rapidly-dwindling strength at the Battle of Sailor’s Creek. Lee had been traveling with Longstreet at the head of the column. To prevent the confusion that had retarded the army’s march the previous day, Lee had sent Venable and Cooke to supervise Anderson’s and John B. Gordon’s commands as they followed Longstreet. Seeing Anderson’s predicament at Sailor’s Creek, Venable left the Fourth Corps and galloped to Lee to inform him that Union cavalry had pierced the Confederate column, threatening the wagons and Anderson’s corps. Venable could not have anticipated how quickly the Confederates would be defeated. By the time Lee hurried to the scene, the battle was over.

By April 7, the Army of Northern Virginia had been reduced to about 25,000 men, many of whom were no longer armed. What remained of the army reached Farmville that day to discover the long-awaited rations, but Union pursuit was so relentless that only a fraction of
Lee’s soldiers were able to receive them before the trains had to be moved further west to evade capture. Once again, exhaustion made the situation worse for Lee, as Colonel Talcott, whose engineers were supposed to burn the High Bridge over the Appomattox near Farmville, did not receive orders in time to torch the span before the Federals could save it. As a result, Lee’s Army spent most of April 7 shuffling its remaining units to block Union attacks while inching toward Appomattox Station. Lee still intended to march westward, possibly even to Lynchburg, before swinging south to join Joseph E. Johnston in North Carolina. Thus, when he received a note from Grant that evening offering him terms of surrender, Lee simply replied, “not yet,” and had Marshall write a reply which conveyed his refusal while cautiously asking for terms.  

After another exhausting night march that drained most of the remaining Confederates, the army neared Appomattox Court House on the evening of April 8. Meanwhile, Grant replied to Lee’s message offering very generous terms, and the Confederate commander parlayed for time, ambiguously offering to discuss a general truce. Grant refused on the grounds that he had no authority to meet with Lee on such grounds. While the Confederates marched and Lee stalled, Union cavalry captured the supply trains at Appomattox Station and blocked the main Confederate line of retreat at the court house. Lee’s men quickly detected the horsemen, and the commanding general ordered Gordon, whose battered corps had assumed the vanguard during this last march, to attempt to break through. If Union infantry supported the cavalry, the Second Corps’ attack, and the Army of Northern Virginia, would be doomed. 

As he made preparations for a last-ditch assault, Lee kept his staff busy. Cooke had been wounded during the retreat, so Lee’s staff was again reduced to Taylor, Marshall, and Venable. Taylor continued to manage headquarters during the retreat. In this capacity, he was unwittingly responsible for the loss of most of the army’s paperwork; as he confessed years later, fearing the
papers and books would fall into the hands of Federal cavalry, the headquarters guard burned them. Despite his failure to prevent a great calamity for future historians, Taylor had helped manage the disintegrating army as well as anyone could, and Lee ordered him on the evening of April 8 to arrange for the safety of the remaining wagons. Taylor was not encouraged by the condition of the wagon train. As he remembered, when he beheld the wretched conveyances, for the first time, he doubted the army would escape; he remembered that “my experience in the performance of this duty caused me to realize that if we persisted in the effort to save the wagons, the end was very near.” For the time being, Taylor dismissed such thoughts, and returned to Lee the next morning hopeful that his chief had found a way to save the army from certain annihilation. Given his bitter thoughts toward the Federals and their black troops in particular, the young staff officer was simply unable to process the idea of surrender.

Back at Lee’s camp, affairs were no less grim. Writing years later, Charles Marshall remembered what he dubbed his “last night under the Confederacy;” he and his fellow staffers shared a can of cornmeal gruel from a tin can used for shaving, and then bedded down on the ground using their overcoats as blankets. Lee kept Marshall and Venable close to him during the overnight hours. Lee, Longstreet, and their staffs posted Longstreet’s remaining men in a defensive line northeast of the court house. While they were still positioning these troops, Gordon’s Second Corps, reinforced by the remnants of various commands, moved to attack the Federals occupying Appomattox Court House.

Gordon’s attack was doomed from the beginning. His small divisions pushed aside the Federal cavalry troopers only to encounter the entire Union Army of the James massing behind them. Having finished aligning Longstreet’s troops, Lee sent Venable to check on Gordon’s progress. By the time the staffer arrived, the Second Corps was already retreating through
Appomattox Court House, and Federal infantry were plainly visible far beyond both of Gordon’s flanks. When Venable asked for an update, Gordon replied, “Tell General Lee I have fought my corps to a frazzle, and can do nothing unless heavily supported by Longstreet’s corps.” As a trained officer, Lee had to have known that his last chance to escape had vanished with the arrival of Union infantry in his front.

Indeed, when Taylor returned from his mission, he found that Lee had already made up his mind to surrender. Perhaps rhetorically, Lee asked Taylor’s advice as he had done on previous occasions, and indicated that the other staffers and generals had advised capitulation. The young staff colonel was adamant that the army should not surrender:

“Well, sir,” I said, “I can only speak for myself; to me any other fate is preferable.” “Such is my individual way of thinking,” interrupted the general. “But,” I immediately added, “of course, general, it is different with you. You have to think of these brave men and decide not only for yourself, but for them.” “Yes,” he replied; “it would be useless and therefore cruel to provoke the further effusion of blood, and I have arranged to meet General Grant with a view to surrender, and wish you to accompany me.”

While Taylor accurately represented his reluctance to surrender the army, he probably credited himself with too much rational reaction in his memoirs. Although his recent experience with the wagons had definitely sobered him, it seems highly unlikely that Taylor remained calm enough to engage Lee in a philosophical conversation as he claimed. On the other hand, Taylor’s four years of war service, and especially his last year as the army’s unofficial chief of staff, had demonstrably matured him. After looking over battle reports and issuing orders on his own authority, Taylor undeniably had gained a much deeper appreciation of the human responsibility that constantly rested on Lee’s shoulders. In the end, it is possible that Taylor did remind Lee of the human cost of continuing the struggle, but he probably did so in a much less reasoned way. As a matter of fact, the young staffer was seething with rage.

Leaving Venable to manage headquarters, Lee took Taylor and Marshall with him as he rode toward Longstreet’s lines. Exactly why Lee did not leave Taylor at headquarters as usual is
unknown. Possibly, Lee wanted Taylor with him because he had known him the longest and trusted him the most of his three remaining personal staff officers. Additionally, he may have sensed Taylor’s anger, and decided that the young man should be supervised. By the time Lee and his two staffers reached Longstreet’s front, that general was confronting two corps of the Army of the Potomac preparing to attack. Lee quickly sent Marshall to arrange a cease-fire.

The former lawyer played a key role in the tense negotiations that followed. As Marshall recalled, he removed his sword and sidearm and walked in front of Confederate lines waving a handkerchief. Shortly, he met Lieutenant Colonel Charles Whittier. Whittier gave Marshall Grant’s reply to Lee’s latest message. In it, the Federal commander refused to negotiate a general “peace” with Lee, but reiterated his earlier offer to accept the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. When Marshall carried this message back to General Lee, the Confederate commander realized his army faced immediate annihilation. He accordingly ordered Marshall to prepare three copies of a letter to Grant in which he offered to discuss surrender.

Marshall sent two copies through the lines near the court house, but he took the third himself to the Federal troops facing Longstreet. As he recalled, the situation remained extremely tense, and called for delicate negotiation; the ranking Union officer in the area did not feel he had the authority to suspend his attack or even to read Lee’s letter. Marshall begged him to open themissive and reconsider his assault, or at least forward the letter to Meade, who could suspend the attack. He finally succeeded, as Meade read Lee’s message and postponed the attack.63

Given the choice of relying on Taylor or Marshall, Lee had chosen correctly. As always, he astutely judged the abilities and personalities of the members of his personal staff. In this situation, which called for extreme care and delicate diplomacy, Lee chose the former lawyer to write his replies to Grant and to negotiate with the Federal generals. Taylor was far too short-
tempered to have been safely entrusted with such a mission, and would have probably only exacerbated matters. Thus, in one of the last decisions Lee made involving his staff, his wise choice had helped prevent further useless bloodshed.

After hearing Meade’s reply, Marshall returned to Lee, and the Confederate commander and his staff rode out to stop Fitzhugh Lee from continuing his assault on the Union flank at Appomattox. Afterward, Lee’s staff established army headquarters in an apple tree, piling up fence rails for their exhausted commander to lie on. Soon, although Meade and later Philip Sheridan both expressed their lack of authority to order a full cessation of hostilities, the latter asked permission to send his chief of staff, General James Forsythe, through Confederate lines to confer with Meade on the subject. Lee immediately agreed and assigned Taylor to escort Forsythe. Recognizing Taylor’s feelings, Lee probably sent Taylor both to keep him occupied and to enable him to retain Marshall to communicate with Grant if necessary. In the end, Taylor accompanied Forsythe twice through the lines as he rode to and from Meade’s army. Notably, unlike Forsythe, Taylor did not enter enemy lines, but rode “as far as the Federal outposts.” Meanwhile, Meade had forwarded Lee’s offer of surrender to Grant, who immediately ordered his armies to halt their advance. He sent his aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Colonel Orville Babcock, to Lee with another letter promising to meet him in Appomattox Court House.

When Taylor returned to Lee’s makeshift headquarters, Lee asked Taylor to accompany him as he surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia. Here, Taylor failed his general. He had invested so much mental and emotional energy on the army over the past three years that he could not bring himself to witness its surrender. Instead of remaining at Lee’s side in this, the general’s most trying day, Taylor feigned illness and refused to go with him. Twelve years later, Taylor remained ashamed by his actions on April 9, admitting that “I shrank from this interview,
and while I could not then, and cannot now, justify my conduct, I availed myself of the excuse of having taken the two rides through the extent of our lines and to those of the enemy…and did not accompany my chief in this trying ordeal.” Curiously, in his second memoir, published twenty-five years after the first, Taylor did not mention his failure of April 9, 1865. Perhaps he felt that, having confessed his actions, he did not need to do so again. At Appomattox, though, Taylor allowed the repressed emotions of the last few months to get the better of him, and he deserted his commander precisely when he needed legal, professional, and emotional support the most. Lee likely understood Taylor’s actions, for there is no record that he ever rebuked him.

With Taylor obviously in no fit emotional state to manage headquarters, Lee chose Marshall to accompany him while Venable remained there. Like Taylor, Marshall was not ready to go with Lee, but he had more mundane reasons; as he recalled years later, “I was in a very dilapidated state,” and had to borrow a dress sword, a clean shirt collar, and gauntlets. Meanwhile, Lee donned a dazzling, pristine dress uniform complete with presentation sword. Accompanied by Babcock and two orderlies, Lee and Marshall rode off toward Appomattox.

According to historian Elizabeth R. Varon, Lee had ulterior motives for having Marshall accompany him. She pointed out that Marshall knew Lee better than almost anyone else thanks to his three years of office work and preparation of the general’s official reports. As a result, she argued, “Marshall was therefore the perfect witness to the surrender. Lee knew he would be able to count on his help in recording the event, contextualizing it, and assigning it meaning.” She claimed that Lee wanted the former lawyer along because he was trying to control the memory and meaning of the surrender from the start. While Varon was probably correct in asserting that Lee chose Marshall because of his legal talent and proficiency with legal phraseology, she may have credited Lee with too much far-reaching intent. Given his volatile temperament, Venable
was not a suitable choice. Taylor had just demonstrated that, in Varon’s words, “he simply could not bear the thought of seeing Lee humiliated.” While Lee was certainly mindful of the South’s future and the posterity of his army, he literally had no choice but to include Marshall.69

Once they arrived at the small town, Lee ordered Marshall to find a suitable location in which to meet Grant. The staffer stopped the first citizen he met, Wilmer McLean, who had once owned a farm near Manassas Junction and had moved to the sleepy hamlet to escape the war. McLean first showed Marshall what he remembered as a “house that was all dilapidated and that had no furniture in it,” and Marshall dutifully rejected it, insisting that Lee capitulate in an appropriate setting. McLean then offered his own home, which Marshall recalled as “very comfortable” and accepted. He sent an orderly back to summon Lee and Babcock, and the three men sat down in McLean’s parlor for half an hour of conversation while they waited for Grant.70

Soon, Grant arrived with a small cavalcade of officers, who exchanged pleasantries with Lee before the commanding generals sat down to discuss the surrender. Lee and Grant sat at small tables on opposite ends of the parlor, while Marshall leaned against a sofa on which Union Major General Philip H. Sheridan was sitting. The two commanding generals soon agreed on the basic terms of surrender, and Grant ordered Eli Parker of his staff to write a formal letter stating the surrender terms. As Parker had nothing to write with except a pencil, Marshall supplied him with both ink and pen. Meanwhile, Marshall awkwardly talked with Sheridan, who found the former lawyer’s dour, strictly literal perspective of the countryside highly amusing.71

While Parker copied and Marshall and Sheridan bantered, Lee and Grant agreed that the Federals would send 25,000 rations to the starving Confederates and their Union prisoners. Soon, Parker had finished, and Lee ordered Marshall to write his formal reply. Marshall had some trouble with the assignment; he began to write an overly-elaborate reply, but Lee reminded
him that as Grant was present in the same room, such language was unnecessary. Marshall’s legal training usually served him well, but in this instance, his legal training and penchant for excessive verbosity were inappropriate. He soon corrected his error, writing a much simpler note accepting Grant’s terms, and took it to Lee for his signature. Marshall and Parker exchanged the letters, and the surrender was concluded. Lee and Marshall chatted a little longer with Grant and his officers, then exited and rode back to Confederate lines.

Looking back on the surrender years later, Marshall was struck by its simplicity, writing that “There was no theatrical display about it. It was in itself perhaps the greatest tragedy in the history of the world, but it was the simplest, plainest, and most thoroughly devoid of any attempt at effect, that you can imagine.” In his postwar writings, he remembered Appomattox as a place of reconciliation. He adamantly denied that Lee had ever offered his sword to Grant, as some early writers claimed, pointing out that Grant’s initial offer had allowed all Confederates to keep their sidearms. At the same time, Marshall praised the Union army in emotional terms, writing that “I cannot give you any idea of the kindness, and generosity, and magnanimity of those men. When I think of it, it brings tears to my eyes.” While many veterans of North and South had bitter feelings towards each other for years, Marshall usually resisted such sentiments.

Lee summoned his staff to give them their final assignments. As assistant adjutant-general, Taylor had the unpleasant task of arranging for complete personnel rosters of all surviving units so that their men could be properly catalogued and paroled. As Cooke was still too unwell to assist him, Lee probably assigned Venable to help one last time with the paperwork he so despised. For this last campaign, Lee had Taylor, not Marshall, solicit reports from the generals to allow Lee to write his own for President Davis. Having relayed orders to Longstreet
and Gordon, Taylor prepared the paroles for his fellow staffers and signed all of them except his own. At Taylor’s request, Lee signed Taylor’s parole; it was the only one Lee signed.77

For Marshall, Lee had another task. As Marshall remembered, “On the night of April 9th after our return from McLean’s house General Lee sat with several of us at a fire in front of his tent, and after some conversation about the army and the events of the day in which his feelings towards his men were strongly expressed, he told me to prepare an order to the troops.”78 Marshall had written sweeping proclamations for Lee before, and possessed marked ability to manipulate extravagant language. Now Lee ordered him to prepare his formal farewell order.

While his staffers worked, Lee received a message from Grant asking to meet again. He agreed, and talked with the Federal commander again, this time without any of his staff. Other Federal officers began invading the Confederate camps to visit old friends or simply look around, impeding Lee’s staff as they tried to carry out their final assignments. As a result, when Lee returned, he found that Marshall had hardly started on writing the order. He took drastic action, ordering Marshall into his ambulance and posting an orderly to keep visitors away.79

Marshall’s farewell order assumed legendary proportions among postwar advocates of the Lost Cause. The staffer admitted, however, that his initial work was highly inflammatory, recalling that “I made a draft in pencil and took it to General Lee who struck out a paragraph, which he said would tend to keep alive the feeling existing between the North and the South, and made one or two other changes.”80 Although older than Taylor, Marshall was apparently not above succumbing to the bitterness of final defeat that had consumed his young comrade.81

Marshall’s writing, General Order No. 9, became the basis of extensive writing by former Confederates in future years. Even without Marshall’s original bellicose wording, it still lauded the martial performance of the Army of Northern Virginia in heroic terms:
After four years of arduous service marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources. I need not tell the survivors of so many hard-fought battles who have remained steadfast to the last that I have consented to this result from no distrust of them; but feeling that valor and devotion could accomplish nothing that would compensate for the loss that must have attended the continuance of the contest, I determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past service have endeared them to their countrymen... You may take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed.

While many former Confederates appreciated Marshall’s praise of their “valor and devotion,” they often focused on his statements regarding the allegedly impossible odds they had faced. In the coming years, many of them would spill oceans of ink trying to prove that Lee had never been truly defeated, but had been exhausted by “overwhelming numbers and resources.” Given his mood on April 10, 1865, it is very possible that Marshall was deliberately attempting to leave such an impression, but his original intent became somewhat irrelevant in light of what his words were implied to mean. Heroic Confederates and their gallant leader should never have been beaten by irreligious, racially-impure “Yankees,” but they could not overcome the infinite hordes of inferior troops the North had sent against them.

Having obtained signed paroles, there was little left for Lee and his personal staff to do. None of them stayed to witness the formal surrender ceremonies on April 12. Instead, Lee, Taylor, Marshall, and Venable all rode eastward toward Richmond, with Cooke accompanying them in Lee’s ambulance. Venable soon left the party to rejoin his family in Prince Edward County. He was soon accosted by Federal cavalry, who assumed that because he was riding south, he was trying to join Johnston’s army, but was soon released when he showed the Union troopers his parole. He would never see Lee in person again.

Years later, Taylor remembered the journey as a pleasant, but somewhat awkward one. Each man needed time to collect his thoughts on the momentous events that had just concluded, and there seemed no point in discussing what might have been any further; as he remembered,
“It was not a time for useless repining.” Lee and his staff reached Richmond without incident on April 16. Lee went to his family’s rented house in the occupied city, while Taylor and Marshall departed to rejoin their loved ones. Before he left, Taylor agreed to pose with Robert E. Lee and his just-paroled eldest son, George W. C. Lee, for photographer Matthew Brady. The resulting photo session produced the best-known picture of Taylor, and one of the most well-known images of Robert E. Lee.

Although reduced in numbers, Lee’s personal staff served him well until the very end of the war. Despite diminishing numbers of soldiers and fading hopes for ultimate Confederate victory, Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall, and Charles Venable did not give up until the army surrendered. Each demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice for the Confederate cause and was emotionally devastated when the South had lost. As the strain of impending defeat increased, they made some rash decisions and may have thought of their loved ones before Lee or the army, but that made them no different than the thousands of ordinary soldiers in the ranks. Unlike many line soldiers, Lee’s personal staff remained at their posts until April 9, 1865. That day, they continued to maintain Lee’s contact with and control over his dwindling army. They assisted Lee as he negotiated his surrender. They handled the paperwork necessary to dismiss the army, and left its soldiers feeling at least a little satisfied with their hard service.87

Such performance was typical of Robert E. Lee’s personal staff. Contrary to the writings of many historians, careful examination of the official published and unpublished primary sources produced by the Army of Northern Virginia reveals that Robert E. Lee’s personal staff had performed with considerable ability. Lee had carefully chosen five of the six men who comprised his “military family,” selecting them based on their demonstrated qualifications for their demanding roles. Given that many documents from the war have doubtless been lost, the
enormous number of entries the staff made in the army’s order and telegraph books and the *Official Records* surely only hint at the Herculean labors they performed. Lee’s army could never have sustained itself or fought as capably as it did without effective administration. Despite their ideological differences over matters of race and Confederate military prowess, white southerners and later revisionist historians have magnified Lee out of all proportion, making him almost the Confederacy personified while forgetting those officers without whom he could never have commanded his army. While Lee’s personal staff had labored largely in obscurity, they could also look upon their wartime service with the satisfaction of “duty faithfully performed.”

While the army’s official sources show that Lee’s staff performed a lot of work, the staff’s private correspondence demonstrates that they understood their tasks well and remained very dedicated to the Confederate cause. Charles Marshall, Armistead Long, Charles Venable, and Walter Taylor all left contemporary or postbellum accounts of the amount and importance of the work they performed. Although they experienced personal tensions with Lee that increased as the Confederacy’s fortunes declined, they never wavered from their commitment to the South. In the end, they remained loyal to Lee himself as well.

In the coming years, however, Lee’s staff almost never chose to write or speak of their own exploits. Instead, they emphasized the heroic and intellectual qualities of their former chief. They rarely subscribed to the notion that Lee was somehow superhuman, but they insisted that he was undeniably the greatest figure on either side in the war. They did not engage in the vicious accusations soon to circulate amongst their former comrades regarding who was to blame for the defeat of their cause, but they consistently upheld Lee as an ideal figure whose example should unite all former Confederates, and insisted that their cause, Lee’s cause, had been just. In his
first book, published in 1877, Walter Taylor succinctly captured the memory that Lee’s staff possessed and would soon perpetuate about him, writing that Lee “returned to Richmond a paroled prisoner of war, but a monarch still in the hearts of his countrymen, and an object of admiration in the eyes of the civilized world.”

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Chapter 10: Helping to Create a Legend, 1865-1877

After four years of war, the Army of Northern Virginia had been destroyed and the Confederacy had been vanquished. Like most of their comrades, the former members of Robert E. Lee’s personal staff had to reconcile themselves to their defeat while simultaneously finding new positions for themselves in a radically-altered postbellum world. As their correspondence revealed, for the first few years after the war, the ex-staffers were primarily concerned about their personal economic survival, and although they endured hardships, they all managed to create relatively comfortable lives for themselves and their families. Having stabilized their finances, most of them then found time to publically reflect on the war and the accomplishments of their former general. When Lee died in 1870, such ideas led them to memorialize him as an almost superhuman figure. While it did not take long for former Confederates to squabble over who was to blame for their defeat, Lee’s staff agreed that their commander was not responsible.

The former staffers occupied a peculiar place in the body of Lost Cause writings. Historians of Confederate memory such as Thomas Connelly and William Garrett Piston have implied that the Lost Cause was almost monolithic. They claimed that Virginians, including Jubal Early and Lee’s former staff, magnified Lee’s virtues until the former commander of the Army of Northern Virginia resembled a flawless “Marble Man” or a saint. They then projected this “Lee Cult” onto the entire former Confederacy. If Lee was a saintly man, they insisted, the cause he fought for must have been a just one. Since God blessed righteous nations, He should have favored the Confederacy with final victory. Thus, the South’s defeat could not have been Lee’s fault; he must have been betrayed by less-virtuous officers.¹

While this image of Lee’s staff possessed considerable merit, it did not fully consider the war careers of the officers themselves or their motives for extolling the virtues of their former
commander. Connelly claimed that the Virginians who built Lee’s image did so largely to cover up their own abundant wartime failings; in reality, as this project has demonstrated, most of Lee’s staff officers had ample reason to be satisfied with their records. Connelly and Piston also argued that the Virginians built Lee’s memory on the ruins of other former Confederates’ reputations. To Lee’s former staff officers, other southern generals were unimportant. When they felt that Lee’s subordinate generals had failed him, the former staffers did not hesitate to say so repeatedly, but they never accused any former Confederate, including James Longstreet, of being traitorous to the South, and in fact emphasized the heroism and valor of all Confederates.

Although Connelly’s and Piston’s writings captured only a part of the thought processes of Lee’s former staffers, more recent scholarship has illuminated other aspects of the Lost Cause. In particular, Caroline E. Janney’s works on Confederate memory have considered the impact of women and the limits of the popular rhetoric of “reconciliation.” In Burying the Dead but Not the Past, she showed that women dominated early Confederate memorialization and mentioned that these women often clashed with Confederate veterans over control of public memory of the war. In Remembering the Civil War, Janney demonstrated that despite widespread depictions of easy reconciliation between the North and South, hard feelings persisted for decades after the war. Crucially, she revealed that over time, multiple “Lost Causes” emerged, with some former Confederates openly defending slavery and refusing to associate with northerners, while others avoided the race issue altogether in favor of reunion based on the soldiers’ common valor.2

Janney’s works offered valuable insights on Lee’s former staffers and helped to illustrate the ways in which they contributed to the shaping of southern memory. Rather than challenge the female prerogative of public mourning and sentimental remembrance, Lee’s former staffers avoided the issue entirely. In most of their writings and speeches, Lee’s former staffers did not
mention southern women at all, but focused entirely on military matters. In such a male-
dominated world, they could and did offer perspectives on Confederate memory unavailable to
women. In particular, their unique relationship with Lee himself gave them considerable ability
to mold their former commander’s reputation and speak with authority on all disputes concerning
the leadership of the Army of Northern Virginia. Stressing their close connections with the
South’s most famous figure gave their views considerable weight among former Confederates.

Largely because of this, Lee’s former staffers played a considerable and independent role
in shaping Confederate memory. Although Thomas Connelly depicted them as servile followers
of Jubal Early throughout his verbal campaigns against Longstreet and others he considered
disloyal, the letters and memoirs of Lee’s former staffers reveal that they created their own
Confederate memory. The staff was less concerned with recriminations than with molding Lee’s
reputation as a great man and military genius. Similarly, they did not follow Early’s example of
“unreconstructed” rebellion. On the contrary, at least three of them wrote that such attitudes
were unworthy of Robert E. Lee’s memory. Thus, Lee’s former staff demonstrated the
distinction Janney noted between former Confederate “die-hards” and “reconciliationists.” Jubal
Early was a bitter lifelong “Rebel,” while most of Lee’s staffers eschewed such sentiments. 3

In the immediate aftermath of the war, however, all six men who had served on Lee’s
personal staff had to focus on the pressing business of survival. Since leaving Lee’s staff,
Armistead Long and Thomas M. R. Talcott had both enjoyed successful careers in Lee’s army.
As commander of the Second Corps Artillery, Long had suffered serious defeats at Spotsylvania
Court House and Cedar Creek, but retained the confidence of both Jubal Early and General Lee.
Indeed, he had been put in charge of the remaining Confederate artillery facing the Army of the
James at Appomattox Court House, and claimed that his guns fired the Army of Northern
Virginia’s final shot there.\textsuperscript{4} Having received his parole with the Second Corps, Long moved to the Charlottesville, Virginia, area to begin farming. He continued to enjoy a close personal relationship with the Lees and was the last of the general’s personal staff officers to see him alive, while visiting him at Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, only a month before his death.\textsuperscript{5} By the mid-1870s, Long’s eyesight was failing, and after writing a few articles on Lee’s early Civil War career, he did not often contribute to discussions on the meaning of the conflict.\textsuperscript{6}

Thomas M. R. Talcott’s tenure as colonel of the First Regiment of Confederate Engineers was both successful and stressful. In the constant entrenching and fighting of the opposing forces from the Wilderness to Petersburg, Talcott’s engineers found ample work. The Engineer Regiment fortified and demolished railroads, forts, bridges, and trenches for eleven grueling months. Talcott reported directly to Lee, or, more often, to Walter Taylor, who was by then managing all lower-level headquarters communications. His regiment proved so successful that by April 1865, a second engineering regiment had been organized and added to his command.

After being paroled, Talcott returned to Richmond armed with a recommendation letter from Lee himself. In this missive, the now-former general praised Talcott in glowing terms, writing that he had served “always with distinction,” and concluding that “He is a brave & skilful [sic] officer & as a gentleman unexceptionable in character & deportment.”\textsuperscript{7} Talcott needed money immediately; during the Appomattox Campaign, he had lost a horse valued at $3,000.\textsuperscript{8} In the depressed southern economy of 1865, however, even this letter from Lee could not by itself secure him a position. Lee accordingly wrote a second recommendation letter for Talcott in November highlighting his “valuable service” as an engineer in Norfolk and later as colonel of an engineering regiment; he concluded by stating that Talcott’s “whole career in the Army of N. Va. Was marked by ability, zeal, devotion, & integrity.”\textsuperscript{9} Reinforced by Lee’s second letter,
Talcott became an engineer with the Richmond & Danville Railroad. He served ably, but was kept busy by the railroad’s many construction projects. By the 1870s, he was disbursing thousands of dollars every month and being paid handsomely for his efforts.\textsuperscript{10} Probably because of his loaded schedule, he did not find time to participate in the initial discussions among his former comrades over how to memorialize their commander. He did see Lee again one final time before the general’s death in October 1870, and later emphasized Lee’s acquiescence in the face of black suffrage and Radical Reconstruction.

Unlike Talcott, Lee probably never saw Robert H. Chilton again after the war. Although the two men had been very close during Lee’s tour of duty in Texas in the 1850s, the strain of Chilton’s failure as chief of staff had all but ruined their relationship. Although he had gained the brigadier generalcy he had so long sought, the former chief of staff enjoyed even less success in Richmond than he had with the Army of Northern Virginia. There is no evidence that he ever contributed meaningfully to Confederate policymaking or even to the internal affairs of Adjutant General Samuel Cooper’s office. He seems to have continued to behave much as he had in the field; regarding office paperwork as beneath his dignity, he required very little of himself or his immediate subordinates.\textsuperscript{11} By May 1865, a greatly humbled Chilton was back in Richmond. On May 13, he wrote a desperate letter begging for help in securing work. In it, Chilton stressed his organizational skills and tried to capitalize on his relationship with his former commander, arguing that he could have enriched himself in his staff position. In Chilton’s mind, his abject poverty was itself proof of his selfless service to the Confederacy and thus suited him for Lee’s recommendation to any position. Quite possibly, Chilton was still suffering the political fallout from his ill-advised quarrels with John B. Magruder, Lafayette McLaws, and other officers. Whatever the reason, as his letter continued, he admitted that his prospects were grim, claiming
that “I am not particular about the nature of my employment, so it is honest and sufficiently remunerative to afford my family comfort & education,” and he pointedly added that he had “sacrificed everything to considerations arising out of my sense of duty to my native state.” Chilton thus appealed for patriotic sympathy simply because he had been a Confederate soldier. While it is not certain to whom the former staffer addressed this letter, the Lee family almost certainly saw it, for it is now within its postwar papers. Regardless, although Lee maintained a limited correspondence with Chilton, there is no record that the former army commander ever used his considerable influence on Chilton’s behalf. In fact, when Chilton wrote directly to Lee asking for a position at Washington College, the general-turned-college president replied that no positions were available and recommended that his former chief of staff take up farming.

In the end, Chilton took Lee’s advice, moving to a small farm near Columbus, Georgia. There, he eked out an unhappy existence, suffering periodically from neuralgia. His relations with his children were little better than with his fellow staff officers, and his children’s lives were no happier than his. His son, named Robert after General Lee, was a drifter who lost a lot of money on an unwise business deal and remained poor for years. By his sister’s admission, the younger Robert Chilton was too lazy to become a farmer, and in fact refused to work at all. By the 1870s, General Chilton was dying and Robert Lee Chilton had to be sent money so he could afford to travel to see him. For months afterward, he remained with his mother, refusing to work. Meanwhile, Chilton’s daughter Laura married a wealthy man, William Harvey Maverick of Texas, who took her on trips all over Europe, but eventually divorced her and forbade her from ever seeing or writing to her children again. Throughout all these ordeals, General Chilton communicated very little with either of his children, and his daughter only wrote him once every six months. In the end, Chilton died in 1879 without having seen any of his grandchildren.
never reconciled with Lee, either; when the dying Lee visited Georgia during his “farewell tour” in 1870, he declined Chilton’s offer to visit him.15

Although Chilton lived through the first decade after his former commander’s death, he had little contact with his erstwhile comrades. The only former Confederate who occasionally corresponded with him was Jefferson Davis. Very likely, Davis remembered that Chilton had saved his life in Mexico, and despite the unpleasantness of the staffer’s wartime record, desired to maintain contact with him. Throughout the 1870s, Chilton and Davis exchanged letters in which they mostly discussed the latter’s efforts to vindicate the Confederate cause in his massive memoir, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*.16 Eventually, this correspondence led Davis to write to Chilton proposing that the former staff officer should write his own recollections of the war as a “duty” to his family and to the late Confederacy. In reply, Chilton admitted that he was still very bitter over the war years and stated that he preferred to forget them because “they were years of hard & fruitless work” for him. He still smarted over his rank, complaining that he had been betrayed by “a rabble Senate, striking Gen’l Lee…by failure to confirm his recommendation to a petty grade.”17 After more than a decade, Chilton was still blaming others for his shortcomings. Because of his bitterness, Chilton became the only member of Lee’s personal staff not to publish anything. If any of Lee’s staff had a war record that needed expunging as Connelly suggested, it was Chilton, yet the former chief of staff never took advantage of the pen to vindicate himself.18

Charles Marshall enjoyed a happier fate after the war. After leaving Lee, Marshall comfortably resumed his law practice in Baltimore as though he had never put on a Confederate uniform. Like Long, he remained connected to his former chief, corresponding regularly and even ordering furniture for the Lee family, writing Lee that “it will always give me pleasure to
serve you in any way I can.”19 Desiring to vindicate his army’s combat record in the face of defeat, Lee wrote Marshall asking him for his recollections of the army’s strengths during the last year of the war, and the former staffer promptly answered. While he never personally saw Lee again, Marshall’s letters clearly indicated that he felt close to the general.20

Charles Venable remained in closer physical proximity to Lee, but their correspondence reflected the personal distance that had grown between Lee and his temperamental staff officer. Having rejoined his family, Venable first went to see his dying mother, and then concerned himself with earning a livelihood. While he had saved his family’s horses from confiscation by showing his parole, he was still reduced to a handful of silver coins and fifty-nine dollars in cash by the summer of 1865, and had been forced to sell his watch and remaining furniture.21 He considered starting his own academy, and was soon offered his old position back at the now-University of South Carolina. Considering his family and the ordeal they had endured, however, he was determined to remain in Virginia if possible and applied for a position at the University of Virginia. He solicited letters of recommendation from General Lee, former Confederate congressman Benjamin Ewell, Walter Taylor, and his old professors.22 Lee wrote of Venable in glowing terms, stating that “I take pleasure in stating my opinion as to his eminent fitness, both by nature and education, for an instructor of youth.” He added that “I can speak with confidence as to his general and scientific attainments, his high moral character and his energy and zeal in the discharge of all his duties,” concluding that “I know of no one to whom I would more readily intrust [sic] the education of youth, than to himself.” Although Venable’s personality had caused clashes with Lee during the war, the former army commander still thought very highly of his old staff officer and recognized his considerable talents.23
Another former Confederate who recommended Venable was “Stonewall” Jackson’s chief of staff and noted Presbyterian clergyman Robert L. Dabney. In his letter, he argued that Venable’s wartime service with Lee made him ideally suited for an academic position, claiming that his staff position “is perfect proof of Mr. Venable’s dignity of character, perfect principles, courage, diligence, and capacity for without these, no man could as long have occupied so honorable a place near the person of Gen. R. E. Lee.”24 Thus, southerners in 1865 viewed Venable’s service as “honorable,” and thus beneficial to the cause. Notably, Venable did not mention his service with Lee in his own letter to the Board of Visitors, and in so doing demonstrated an emerging trend amongst Lee’s former staff officers. Although they could have claimed high positions in southern society and historiography through their association with Lee, they almost never did so. In part, this was likely due to Lee’s then-emerging legend, but it also revealed that most of the men who had served on Lee’s personal staff were content to rise on their own merits and publicly exalt their general’s reputation.25

In the end, after deliberating for a month, the trustees selected Venable as professor of mathematics largely to spite the university’s Federal occupiers, whose preferred candidate had not served in the Confederate army.26 For the next five years, Venable was fully occupied with professional and family matters. His wife soon began experiencing severe dental problems that caused her death within ten years. Although the Venables soon welcomed a second son, Charles Jr., and another daughter, Natalie, tragedy struck when Charles, Jr. died in infancy. Additionally, the war had left the former staff officer estranged from his surviving son, Francis.27 At the same time, it took Venable years to settle with his “list of creditors” in South Carolina, and his house was in desperate need of repair.28
In the midst of such privation, Venable threw himself into his academic work with the same determination as his wartime staff and engineering duties. By 1866, he was already in contact with publishers to print his first textbook on mathematics. The next year, he proposed a curriculum change to make the mathematics program more flexible, and staunchly opposed any attempt to open the university to black students.29 In his capacity as an educator, he frequently exchanged letters with President Lee of Washington College. This correspondence mostly concerned higher education, but also contained deeply personal matters including invitations for the Venables to visit Lee’s family in Lexington. Desiring to vindicate his record through historical writing, Lee asked Venable to send him any material he had on the Army of Northern Virginia’s numerical strength toward the end of the war. Although Venable furnished his former commander with the limited recollections and papers at his disposal, he was far too occupied with academic matters to write his own memoir; in 1870, he became chair of the faculty.30

Upon his arrival in Richmond, Walter Taylor borrowed General Lee’s ambulance and set out with his new wife on their wedding tour, eventually arriving at the Taylor family home in Norfolk.31 Once there, he opened a hardware store, Taylor & Martin, which would eventually become Walter H. Taylor & Co. He and Bettie also raised eight children, all of whom lived to adulthood. Remembering Taylor’s ability from his war record and his brief academic career, Virginia Military Institute Superintendent Francis H. Smith wrote him in August 1865 offering him the “treasuryship” of the Institute. By then, Taylor had already been elected registrar of Norfolk, and he declined the V. M. I. offer. He did, however, send his eldest son, Walter H. Taylor, Jr. to the Institute, and remained a keen advocate for its advancement until the end of his life, eventually serving on its Board of Visitors. By 1870, he had won election to the Virginia State Senate, where he campaigned strongly for railroad expansion and modernization.32
As Lee’s official assistant adjutant general, Taylor should have had the most reliable recollections and papers concerning the Army of Northern Virginia’s numerical strength during the last year of the conflict. Recognizing this, Lee wrote to him only months after hostilities ended asking him for any insights he could provide on his former army’s personnel, claiming that public knowledge of the Army of Northern Virginia’s strength “is the only tribute that can be paid to the worth of its noble officers & soldiers.” Lee added that I am particularly anxious that its actual strength in the different battles it has fought, be correctly stated.”33 When he received this letter, Taylor immediately wrote to one of his former staff clerks asking him to forward the army’s strength returns from throughout Lee’s tenure to Lee. Even as he received letters from Taylor, Venable, and Marshall all testifying to the Army of Northern Virginia’s numbers, Lee still confessed that he did not have the requisite time or records to be able to write an account of his campaigns. For the time being, neither did any of his former staff officers.34

Thus, Lee definitely kept in contact with at all six of the men who had served on his personal staff. This demonstrated Lee’s determination to record his army’s history, even though he never did so. It also revealed the deep personal attachment the former general shared with the members of his “military family.” While their relationships had been strained severely by the trials of a losing war, they never severed relations. Although Lee was unquestionably a difficult superior, he did not provoke his staff officers to deep resentment of him, as some historians have implied.35 Until 1870, though, Lee and his staff, along with the rest of the former Confederates, had to deal with the psychological, political, and socioeconomic ramifications of defeat.36

Lee’s death led to a concentrated effort by his former staff officers to create a memory of a virtuous yet doomed Confederacy.37 Although flooding of the Shenandoah River prevented all of them except Taylor and Venable from being present at Lee’s funeral in October 1870, most of
his former staff officers soon assumed leading roles in shaping their general’s legacy. Soon after
the services, Jubal A. Early established the Lee Monument Association, dedicated to preserving
Lee’s memory by enshrining the general beneath an elaborate monument in Richmond. In his
efforts, Early faced stiff competition from the female-dominated Lee Memorial Association and
from Washington College. The school, which soon dubbed itself Washington & Lee University,
campaigned to keep the general’s body in Lexington, while the women’s group resented the
veterans’ intrusion into the traditionally feminine sphere of public mourning. While Lee’s
former staff remained mostly aloof from this struggle, they gave limited support to Early.
Marshall gave a speech at the founding of the Lee Memorial Association, but did not publicly
support Early’s efforts afterward. Venable also spoke at the Association’s founding, but he had
his own motives. In particular, he resented Washington & Lee’s efforts, fearing that they
would divert state funding away from the University of Virginia. Instead of participating in the
feuds over public monuments, Lee’s staffers confined themselves to memorializing the army
itself through their commander. Such a stance avoided the public controversy surrounding
Early’s efforts and did not threaten any women’s groups or their attempts to control Confederate
memory. They were not continual participants in the debates over the war’s meaning, but
when they contributed, they quickly gained the veterans’ notice.

Charles Marshall offered a perfect example of the staff officers’ reluctance to take sides
between Early and his opponents. Although he arrived in Lexington too late to witness Lee’s
funeral, the general’s family and Washington College quickly agreed that he should be the one to
write a “military biography” of Lee for sale to raise money for the school. They probably chose
Marshall mainly because he had written Lee’s official reports and thus knew his military mind
better than any person alive. In J. William Jones’ Personal Reminiscences of Robert E. Lee,
published very soon after Lee’s passing, he referred repeatedly and anxiously to Marshall’s “forthcoming work” about the late hero, and included Marshall’s preliminary sketch of him.

In fact, the Lee family and the college faculty should have considered Marshall’s writing habits more closely before giving him the assignment. The soldier-lawyer had spent his entire professional life both in and out of the army meticulously gathering all possible sources of data before writing any legal brief or military report, and the prospect of writing a biography of Lee overwhelmed him. As late as July 1871, he had to confess to the Lee family that he had barely begun his task. In a long letter, Marshall explained his difficulties in detail, claiming that the Lees and the university to write a “memoir or sketch of his Father’s life as a contribution to the Memorial Volume,” and claimed that he had understood that “nothing but a memoir would be expected” of him. He resisted even beginning to write a full-length biography, explaining that such a work “requires that the author should have access to the most authentic proofs of all he may state, that he should have ample time to collect all facts, and that he should omit nothing that bears upon the subject.” Marshall had not changed from the officer who had collected all of the generals’ reports before composing his own; he still insisted on having every source before he began writing. He promised, however, that he was preparing to start “at some future time.”

After explaining why he had not produced a full-length work, Marshall lamented that Jones had stirred up popular expectations that his full-length biography would come out soon. Marshall begged the Lees to try to quell the demands being placed upon him, but pledged that “when I do write the Life of Genl Lee, my object will be first, to write something that will have the weight of authority to establish the truth concerning him, and secondly, to write something from which his family will derive some pecuniary advantage, as it is my intention to try to make some small return for the uniform kindness & indulgence that I received from him.” In the
end, Marshall’s excessive meticulousness proved fatal to his project; he never came close to completing the biography, and aside from his brief “memoir” of Lee in Jones’ book, he never published anything at all on the general for the rest of his life. His efforts to write a book for the university at all, though, revealed that he was no blind follower of Early.44

Although none of Lee’s former staffers was prominent in the Lee Monument Association, Walter Taylor, Charles Venable, and Charles Marshall all became officers in the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia (AANVA), which was formed in November 1870. The AANVA was a Confederate veterans’ group that focused on “the preservation of the friendships that were formed in that army, the perpetuation of its fame, and the vindication of its achievements.” While Jubal Early held the presidency of this organization also, Lee’s former staff officers filled all of the other offices; Taylor served as the corresponding secretary, Venable as the recording secretary, and Marshall as the treasurer.45 The AANVA was mainly responsible for holding state and national reunions of veterans of the Army of Northern Virginia, although in fact few such meetings ever took place outside Virginia. At these reunions, speeches and toasts honored the valor of Confederate soldiers and the memory of General Lee.46 Significantly, they also touted the martial prowess of James Longstreet.47 Like Lee’s former staff officers, the AANVA was dedicated to upholding the memory of General Lee and his army, and paid very little overt attention to politics or faultfinding. The Association was not successful; it never claimed more than a few hundred members, and by 1876, even among Lee’s former staffers, only Venable and Long apparently attended its annual reunion.48

Lee’s staff officers did not limit their efforts to memorial societies. Although his career as a civic and railroad engineer kept him busy, Talcott found time to report his last conversation with his former commander in the Richmond Dispatch in 1875. In contrast to the emerging
depiction of Lee as a chivalrous leader who had resisted valiantly to the end and then honorably acquiesced in defeat, Talcott’s Lee remained quite bitter over the war’s outcome:

When he commenced speaking he seemed brittle…but as he progressed the fire kindled in his eyes, and carried himself to a sitting posture and said almost excitedly ‘If the people of the South had foreseen the fate that was in store for them, they would have fought desperately from the first, and would never have yielded. Even now I think sometimes that submissiveness has ceased to be a virtue.’ Then after a pause he said sadly ‘but no, we must submit, resistance would do no good,’ and added bitterly ‘a more diabolical punishment could not have been devised than the subjection of the masters to the rule of their slaves, and yet they expect the world to applaud their magnanimity.’ 49

Talcott thus depicted Lee as an “unreconstructed Rebel” who stopped just short of advocating a resumption of open warfare against the United States. According to him, Lee was so angry over black suffrage and Radical Reconstruction that he considered both “oppressions” of the South.

Whether Lee actually said such things to Talcott, the general made a deep impression on him. Of all Lee’s former staff officers, Talcott was possibly the least “reconstructed.” Whether from the pressures of his work or a desire to avoid becoming entangled in the disputes over the war, Talcott participated very little in the postwar debates over Confederate memory. Excluding Robert Chilton, Talcott published fewer comments on the Civil War than any other member of Lee’s staff despite surviving the war longer than any of them. In his only notable article about the war, Talcott insisted from memory that Lee and not “Stonewall” Jackson had originated the idea for the famous flanking maneuver at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Privately, however, Talcott remained firmly committed to the Confederate cause; his scrapbook contained such newspaper clippings as “John Brown, the Assassin- Pictured in True Light,’’ copies of “Dixie” and Bonnie Blue Flag,’’ and multiple Confederate veterans’ reunion invitations and obituaries. Perhaps most revealingly, it included explicitly racist articles like “Rich Girls With Negroes,” and “The Faithful Slave, Old Mose, at Gettysburg.” Compared to Taylor, Marshall, Venable, and Long, each of whose speeches and writings portrayed Lee as gracious and slavery as mostly paternalistic, Talcott’s papers suggest that he retained deeply anti-reconciliationist sentiments.50
The next year, in a graduation speech for his alma mater, Hampden-Sidney College, Venable shared Talcott’s bitterness, but held out hope for a brighter southern future. He began with rhetoric similar to other southern speakers who bemoaned their region’s devastation, saying that “our ruined homes, our battle-scarred vales, our halls of learning, our temples of worship, all around which our memories linger with love and affection; the graves of those we love, the tombs of our mighty dead, and the simple sod beneath which rest our unknown comrades—these, these are our country.” As an educator, however, Venable placed particular emphasis on the damage Union forces had wrought on southern higher education, stating that the south “is in danger in this great and vital interest of its higher culture.” He described Radical Reconstruction as “Punic,” and accused the North of actively trying to destroy southern intellectual life by “adverse federal legislation.” He derided the idea of giving freedmen the vote, expressing thanks that Virginia had escaped the “black dominion” of military Reconstruction, and derided the idea of blacks attending the University of South Carolina as “the Fetish of abolitionists.” Finally, he summarized Reconstruction itself as “the cruel crotchets of a sentimental philanthropy.”

Venable proposed several remedies to preserve southern intellectual culture and intellect from what he dubbed “a Russian unity of thought.” First, he called for strong-willed, highly-educated leaders to advance southern interests. They were to show that “the bonds of union after a war between great States are cemented by wise and liberal measures of conciliation, rather than by compendious modes of punishment for imaginary political offences,” and protect the southern states from what he labelled “unscrupulous majorities” and “oligarchies of the stronger States.” Secondly, southern churchmen must also be educated in order to “meet and beat back the sword of Satan, now wielded with titanic force in the cause of error.” Thirdly, he insisted that Virginia was being called upon to “rescue” her sister states from northern cultural domination, and called
on his listeners to emulate Lee, whom Venable called simply “our great leader.” To that end, Virginia’s collegians should spread across the region founding new institutions of learning. As Venable summarized his views, “The hope of the South is in the educated sons of the South.”

Thus, Venable proposed a plan to simultaneously modernize southern education and remain as firmly rooted as possible in antebellum ideals. On one hand, he called for what historian Dan R. Frost has dubbed “modernization” of college curriculums, such as colleges of law, medicine, agriculture, and other vocational pursuits. On the other, he likened the federal centralization of the war years to the ancient, despotic Persian Empire. Venable tried to enact his own program, helping the University of Virginia establish departments of astronomy and agriculture, and thanks to his own impatient personality, offending many of his fellow faculty in the process. He succeeded in expanding his own institution, but while his remarks were well-received, they directed them at fellow intellectuals and they had little discernable impact on popular southern culture. Venable’s speech hinted at more widespread efforts to preserve Confederate memory, however, concluding that “There is no ‘dead past’ to a living people.” He admonished his listeners to “Talk not, then, of a ‘dead past burying its dead;’ but from the great examples of the immortal past catch the spirit and the power, the will and energy and wisdom to redeem the dead present, and by the great victories of peace to achieve a glorious future.”

Along with Venable, Taylor agreed that Confederate memory should be created and kept alive in southern consciousness. To that end, both former staffers joined the Southern Historical Society (SHS). The SHS had been founded in New Orleans in 1869 and dedicated itself to the preservation of “southern” views of the recent conflict. It had quickly proven unsuccessful, and faced bankruptcy until 1873, when it came under Jubal Early’s control. Early moved the SHS headquarters to Virginia and filled its executive board with fellow Virginians, including Venable.
and briefly Taylor. Within three years, the SHS began publishing its own periodical, the *Southern Historical Society Papers*, which contained articles on the war all from a supposedly Confederate perspective. In reality, the *Papers* quickly became sharply skewed in favor of Virginia, and the SHS itself, although more financially stable than before, was almost entirely centered in the Old Dominion.\(^{57}\) Like Early himself, most of its leaders were, in historian Gaines M. Foster’s words, men of “undistinguished or at least disputed military record,” who sought to “defend southern martial valor” and “justify their own conduct by ardently defending the actions of the South, or, as they would have put it, by establishing the truth of history.”\(^{58}\)

While the *Papers* were, as Gaines Foster argued, a means for former Confederates to “refight the war,” they virtually became Early’s mouthpiece to blast northerners and former Confederates who opposed him or his version of Confederate history. In 1872, in a speech at Washington & Lee University, Early utilized Marshall’s statement that the Confederacy had succumbed to “overwhelming numbers and resources,” but he added a more specific reason for Lee’s defeat. Early stressed that Lee was a flawless, saintly man and brilliant commander who could have won the entire war at Gettysburg. Lee’s Pennsylvania Campaign was unsuccessful because his subordinates, namely James Longstreet, had failed him.\(^{59}\) The same year, Lee’s former chief of artillery, William N. Pendleton, toured the South to raise funds for Early’s memorialization efforts, insisting in multiple speeches that James Longstreet had willfully disobeyed Lee’s orders at Gettysburg, and that his actions directly resulted in Confederate defeat.

Longstreet was an easy target for such attacks; he was not a Virginian, but an adopted Georgian who had publicly questioned Lee during and after the conflict.\(^{60}\) After the war, he had committed the ultimate political and racial heresies of joining the Republicans and commanding black militia in Louisiana during Reconstruction. By 1876, thanks to Early’s and Pendleton’s
efforts, he was increasingly being vilified in the southern popular mind, and he responded in print. He even wrote Marshall, Venable, and Taylor asking them if he had received the orders from Lee that Early and Pendleton claimed he had sent, and they conceded that they could not remember any such orders. In an article in the Philadelphia Weekly Times, Longstreet quoted both Long and Venable to prove that Lee had not sent him any order to attack at dawn on July 2. Later, as Longstreet continued to insist that he had not disobeyed Lee’s orders, he cited letters from Taylor, Marshall, Long, and Venable to prove his point. 61

The staff officers’ testimonies failed to sway Jubal Early or his supporters. Far from controlling the testimony of Lee’s staff, Early simply dismissed it, claiming that the staffers’ views “amount[ed] to nothing.” 62 In the first three years of the Papers, the periodical devoted several issues to the “Causes of Lee’s Defeat at Gettysburg.” Written by former Confederates including Fitzhugh Lee, Henry Heth, and Early himself, its articles all agreed on two overarching points; if Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia had been victorious at Gettysburg, then the South would have won the Civil War, and since Lee himself could not have been responsible for his defeat there, then Longstreet must be to blame. Lee thus remained a saintly, virtually perfect leader of a noble yet doomed cause, and Longstreet became the scapegoat of the Confederacy. 63

Additionally, Early not only appropriated Marshall’s statement that Lee had yielded to “overwhelming numbers and resources;” he spilled vast quantities of ink to prove that the Army of Northern Virginia had faced even longer numerical odds than was commonly believed. By counting every conceivable Confederate deduction for behind-the-lines details and sickness and exaggerating Union numbers, Early insisted that while Lee and his cause were just, they were simply doomed by overwhelming odds. Defeated Confederates thus needed to feel no shame, since they could not have prevailed against the sheer weight of numbers. As Early summarized,
“is anything farther necessary to show the tremendous odds against which we fought?” Early railed against black suffrage, which he dubbed “the instrumentality of the ballot in the hands of an ignorant and inferior race,” and, echoing Marshall’s farewell address, sadly concluded that “our only earthly consolation being that derived from a sense of duty performed and the conviction that the world will yet learn to do justice to our acts and motives.”

Many of Lee’s former personal staff officers certainly sympathized with Early’s attempts to vindicate the South and contributed to the Southern Historical Society Papers. Most of them, however, did not participate in Early’s “Gettysburg series,” and none of them wrote any article-length works expressly for it. Thoroughly consumed with his law practice and his unfinished biography of Lee, Marshall did not write anything at all for the Papers; he only forwarded battle reports and other primary sources from the war period to the SHS when he and his wife had finished copying them for his own use. Talcott was preoccupied with his railroad work, and contributed nothing at all to the Papers until the 1890s.

Long was a frequent contributor in the first few issues of the Papers, and he eventually participated in its Gettysburg series. Long wrote an article for the Papers in the publication’s first six months, but it was a defense of Lee’s record as commander of the South Carolina and Georgia coastal defenses in 1861-1862, not a discussion of Longstreet or Gettysburg. A year later, probably at Early’s behest, he authored a lengthy piece entitled “General Early’s Valley Campaign.” In it, Long tried to revive Early’s reputation that had suffered so severely after his failure in the Shenandoah, asserting that “this campaign is remarkable for having accomplished more in proportion to the force employed, and for having given less public satisfaction, than any other campaign of the war.” In this article, Long praised his old commander and displayed the talent for hyperbole and romanticism of the Confederate cause that would make his forthcoming
book a great popular success. He never mentioned Longstreet, however, and like his fellow former staff officers, only seldom mentioned himself.67

Long soon discussed Longstreet frequently and critically. Quite possibly because of his service as Early’s chief of artillery, Long participated more fully in the Virginian’s attack on Longstreet than any other former member of Lee’s staff. He absolved Ewell of any blame for his failure to assault Cemetery Hill on the evening of July 1, claiming that any such attack “would have been very hazardous and doubtful of success.” Even though he had written Longstreet that he could not recall Lee ordering the First Corps to attack at dawn on July 2, Long now seemingly reversed himself.68 It no longer mattered that Lee had sent no message to Longstreet, because now Long remembered that Lee had given Longstreet his orders in person in the early evening of July 1. With romantic flourish, Long wrote that “when I sought my bivouac for the night [of July 1-2], it was with the firm belief that the battle would be renewed early the next morning.” He added that he had “momentarily expected” to hear Longstreet’s guns, and claimed that “as the morning [of July 2] advanced, I became anxious lest the delay might lose us the opportunity of defeating the enemy in detail.” He concluded that by midday on July 2 “it was now apparent that the advantage of position had been lost by delay, and that the enemy had been permitted to concentrate a greater part of his forces.”69 Although Long had not technically contradicted his letter to Longstreet, he clearly accused him of forfeiting a priceless advantage at Gettysburg because he was slow getting his men to the battlefield, perhaps costing the South the war.

Soon afterward, in a letter published in the Papers, Long carried his admiration of Lee and his army even farther, claiming the Army of Northern Virginia in 1863 had a “spirit and efficiency unsurpassed in modern times.” He seemingly denied that he or any other staff or line officer could claim any credit at all for the army’s fine condition, writing that “this result was
chiefly due to the unaided exertions of General Lee.” He then emphasised the errors of both Stuart and Longstreet and blamed both men for ruining Lee’s campaign, stating that “while preparing for his campaign in Pennsylvania General Lee carefully considered every contingency that could mar success, except the possibility of tactical blunders of those who had always maintained his confidence by a prompt and intelligent execution of instructions.” As Long continued, “the absence of his cavalry, caused by the fatal blunder of Stuart, which separated it from his army at the most critical time, obliged [Lee] to grope his way in the dark.” Although Long admitted that Longstreet had served Lee well before Gettysburg, he still held the First Corps commander accountable for the Confederate defeat there, writing that “the blunder of a lieutenant who had never before failed [Lee], being unexpected, could not be averted in time to prevent the evil consequences that followed.” For Long, “enough has been said to explain the causes of the failure of the Confederates on the second at Gettysburg.” Long was not willing to attribute Lee’s defeat solely to Longstreet, but he clearly faulted his alleged failure to obey Lee’s commands. Even now, he never questioned the corps leader’s devotion to the Confederacy.70

Remembering that Longstreet had earlier produced testimony from Lee’s former staffers that seemed to vindicate his conduct, Early took great pains to control what the staff officers published. He was especially successful with Long. While Long had been the only member of Lee’s staff to have ever served under Early’s command, his impending blindness left him easier to manipulate. Early, well-known for his acerbic pen and personality, openly bullied Long, writing Venable condescendingly that he had made “corrections” in Long’s writings “so as to prevent him from publishing what might bring him shameful criticisms and comments.” He exploited Long’s condition to browbeat him, claiming to Venable that since Long was blind, he could never write accurately about anything he had not actually seen, because he could not read
any other sources to correct his errors. Similarly, Early tried to pressure Venable to join his campaign against Longstreet, and admitted that he had been “unable to get any information from you staff officers” to help him build his case that the First Corps leader had betrayed Lee.  

Venable resisted Early’s overtures. Although he served on the Southern Historical Society’s chief planning committee, Charles Venable contributed very little to the Papers. He provided the SHS with a copy of Justus Scheibert’s book on the Confederacy that praised the military aptitude of Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia, and in his only writing in the Papers, he reviewed the book very favorably.  

At this time, Venable’s stressful professional and personal life prevented him from taking any active role in the creation of Confederate memory. Although his financial situation had stabilized due to the publication of Venable’s Practical Arithmetic, his wife had succumbed to multiple abscesses and died in agony. Venable found that he could not handle the stresses of being chair of the faculty while his wife was so ill, and he had resigned from the position.

Unlike Venable, Taylor wrote at length about Lee’s Pennsylvania Campaign, but while he was somewhat malleable to Early’s “suggestions,” he was far more focused on recorded data and less open to romantic depictions of a noble-but-forlorn cause. Taylor had never been fond of Early, having previously labeled him a “godless man,” and regarding him as “a man who utterly sets at defiance all moral laws & such a one Heaven will not favor.” At the same time, while he strongly opposed Longstreet’s postwar politics, he refused to attack him on those grounds. By this time, inspired by Lee’s futile efforts to prove that his army had faced great numerical odds, Taylor had gained access to the captured official documents of the Army of Northern Virginia. He was the first Confederate to be granted access to these materials, which included the army’s strength returns. Displaying the energy and attention to detail that had made him a capable staff
officer and businessman, Taylor carefully built his arguments. During 1877, he produced a short “Memorandum” for the Papers and an article for the Philadelphia Weekly Times on Gettysburg.

In his “Memorandum,” Taylor avoided attacking Longstreet, but strongly defended Lee. Citing his recently-obtained records, he showed the numerical odds the Confederacy had faced from the beginning of the war, remarking that “under such circumstances it is remarkable that the South held out as long as it did.” He insisted that Lee’s decision to invade Pennsylvania in 1863 had been correct, although he claimed that Lee had only had 62,000 men with him at the start of the invasion and Meade had commanded 112,000. Unlike Early and Long, Taylor refused to place sole responsibility for the defeat on Longstreet. He summarized Stuart’s failure to keep Lee informed of the location of the Federal army and pointed out that his failure meant that Lee stumbled into an unexpected battle at Gettysburg. Regarding Ewell’s behavior on July 1, Taylor was blunt, stating simply that “General Lee directed close pursuit,” and adding that “we should have occupied the heights that evening.” He criticized Longstreet’s tardiness, but he chose his words carefully and avoided making sweeping claims about what might have happened had the First Corps been more prompt. At the same time, Taylor spread blame throughout the army’s high command, writing that “it seemed impossible to get the co-operation of the commanders along the line.” He explicitly defended some of the First Corps’ actions on July 2, recalling that “when Longstreet did attack, he did so in handsome style- drove enemy and captured prisoners, artillery and other trophies.” He critiqued Longstreet’s refusal to attack on the morning of July 3, but admitted that the enemy did outflank him. Taylor faulted Longstreet mostly for failing to commit Hood’s and McLaws’ Divisions to “Pickett’s Charge” on July 3, claiming that “I believe success would have crowned [Lee’s] plan had it been faithfully carried out.”
In this short piece, Taylor revealed the basic tenets that would characterize his future writing on General Lee and his army. He concurred with Early’s basic views, but differed with him on particulars. Taylor agreed that the Confederate cause had been a noble one that had faced very long numerical and material odds, but unlike many fellow ex-Confederates, he did not feel that the cause was doomed from the beginning. His analytical mind had little use for dramatic, emotional stories of heroic warriors struggling against overwhelming hordes; he preferred to rely on obtainable numerical data. Although he creatively interpreted certain aspects of the Union and Confederate duty rosters to magnify the Federals’ advantage, he still placed Confederate strength higher and Union strength lower than Early would. He persistently refused to place sole blame for Gettysburg on Longstreet, but fiercely defended Lee from all potential criticism. Finally, like all of his fellow staffers, Taylor barely mentioned his own actions during the battle.

In his article for the *Philadelphia Weekly Times*, Taylor expounded upon his arguments. He continued to fault Stuart for leaving Lee without cavalry, stating that as a result of Stuart’s actions, “General Lee was consequently without accurate information of the movements or position of the main Federal army. As Taylor explicated, “an army without cavalry in a strange and hostile country is as a man deprived of his eyesight and beset by enemies; he may be ever so brave and strong, but he cannot intelligently administer a single effective blow.” Probably due to pressure from Early, Taylor softened his criticism of Ewell somewhat, explaining the Second Corps’ failure to take Cemetery Hill on July 1 as the result of an “undue regard” for Lee’s earlier orders against precipitating a general engagement with the Union army. While not excusing his fellow Virginians, Taylor continued to blame Lee’s failure on his subordinates.77

Taylor built his most elaborate case against Longstreet. Unlike Long, however, he did not rely entirely on his own recollections, but used the First Corps commander’s own official
report of the campaign as evidence. He admitted that most of Longstreet’s men were on the Gettysburg battlefield by dawn of July 2, and quoted Longstreet’s own report to demonstrate that, as Taylor wrote, “General Longstreet clearly admits that he assumed the responsibility of postponing the execution of the orders of the Commanding General.” Taylor thus carefully but explicitly faulted the First Corps commander for his behavior on July 2.78 Taylor was attempting to exonerate Lee and avoid condemning Longstreet. He never charged Longstreet with treason, but emphasized that he had failed Lee “on this occasion” with “tardiness.” Taylor explicitly repeated his admission that Lee had sent Longstreet no orders on the evening of July 1, and expressly contradicted Early’s claim that Longstreet had received them, admitting that “great injustice” had been done to the First Corps commander’s reputation. To Taylor, although Lee’s generalship was above reproach, he was far less willing than Long to blame Longstreet alone for Lee’s defeat or adopt Early’s version of events at Gettysburg.

Taylor praised the “men of brave hearts and nerves of steel” who had participated in “Pickett’s Charge,” and repeated his claim that Longstreet had disobeyed Lee by withholding Hood’s and McLaws’ Divisions from the charge. Reading Longstreet’s official report, Taylor disagreed strongly with his rationale for holding these units in defensive positions. The former staff officer claimed that he was neither trying to examine the merits of Lee’s battle plan nor attempting to discuss the “necessities of [Longstreet’s] position.” Instead, Taylor remembered his “surprise and disappointment” that these divisions had not participated in the attack. As he summarized, “I deem it proper to record [his impressions] for confirmation or refutation as the undisputed facts of the case, and the testimony of others may determine.” Taylor clearly felt a personal desire to condemn Longstreet, but he was unwilling to blindly follow Early’s dictums
and blast the First Corps commander without proof. In the end, Taylor reserved his strongest criticism for the Federals, denying that they had really won a victory.79

Early was not pleased that Taylor had not echoed all of his sentiments, and publicly critiqued the former staffer’s article in the Papers’ next issue. Marshalling a bewildering array of units, detachments, and battlefield losses, Early argued that Taylor had wildly overstated Lee’s numerical strength at Gettysburg.80 He insisted that Lee had about 54,000 men there instead of the 62,000 Taylor had claimed. Early also fiercely defended Ewell from Taylor’s criticism, claiming that the former staff officer was “under a misapprehension as to the real facts of the case,” citing Long’s statement and Ewell’s report as proof that Cemetery Hill was too strongly held to have been successfully stormed. In any case, according to Early, the events on Ewell’s front had no bearing on the battle’s outcome. He also defended Stuart, implying that the cavalry’s absence had not caused any real problems for Lee.81

Having defended all the Virginians Taylor criticized, Early blasted the former staffer for having critiqued them in the first place, writing in no uncertain terms that Taylor should not have attempted to write about Gettysburg unless he confined himself strictly to his own observations.82 Just as Early tried to influence Long and Venable, here he attempted to browbeat Taylor. Early insisted that Lee’s former assistant adjutant general needed to avoid any discussion of any subject Early found to be “disputed” and only write a very basic narrative. In other words, Early strongly disapproved of Taylor’s using the official reports and numerical strength returns to make a balanced, rational argument that might not exaggerate the odds Lee faced nor incriminate Longstreet as much as Early wanted. In Early’s mind, Longstreet alone was to be vilified as the traitor who had cost Lee Gettysburg and the Confederacy the war.83
The published dispute between Early and Taylor is demonstrative of the relationship of Lee’s former staff to Confederate memory in the first twelve years after the Civil War. To this point, the staff officers had hardly spoken with a united voice, and in fact three of them had never expressed many public sentiments about Lee or the meaning of the war. As their private papers reveal, Robert Chilton, Charles Marshall, and Thomas Talcott had all been too consumed with personal matters to be very active participants in the emerging “Lost Cause.” They had all maintained relationships with Lee after the war, and all of them viewed Lee as an icon of the Confederacy, but as yet, they had committed few of their sentiments to paper or the public lectern. Chilton died without leaving any substantial material on the war; he had preferred to forget his forfeited opportunities to shape southern history and memory. While Marshall and Talcott would eventually participate in some of the efforts to preserve Confederate traditions, through the end of Reconstruction, they contributed little to the creation of southern memory.

Those who had published their recollections or given speeches remembered the conflict differently. Charles Venable continually mourned what he regarded as the destruction of southern intellectual life and dedicated himself to rebuilding the South’s culture. He referred to Lee as a “great leader,” but to him, all Confederate soldiers should be celebrated, even political traitors like Longstreet. Armistead Long, conscious of his failing eyesight, became increasingly vulnerable to Jubal Early’s efforts to control the meaning of Confederate memory. After initially resisting pressure to join the campaign against Longstreet, he had eventually yielded. Walter Taylor had painstakingly examined official records and produced some of the first researched work on the Battle of Gettysburg. For his troubles, he had been thoroughly rebuffed by Early, whose determination to vilify Longstreet meant that any other former Confederate, including Lee’s staff officers, was expendable.
While Lee’s staff had not spoken with a united voice, certain trends were already apparent in their publications and public addresses. Whether romantically inclined like Long or factually-oriented like Marshall and Taylor, they all agreed that the Confederate cause had been a worthy one. They also concurred that General Lee, while mortal and thus fallible, was an almost unsurpassed military leader. Finally, they proved willing to ignore their own wartime achievements, writing about Lee and almost never about themselves. Walter Taylor, for example, might have avoided Early’s criticism if he had confined himself to a narrow account of his own experiences. He and his fellow surviving former staffers, however, would all write and speak in the coming years not of their exploits, but Lee’s.

Until 1877, although Taylor, Long, Marshall, Venable, and Talcott had all written or spoken short passages about Lee and the “Lost Cause,” their works had attracted little notice. The Southern Historical Society never had many members, and always struggled with its Papers’ circulation and its own finances. In time, it would greatly influence popular southern memory of the war, but that period was years in the future. Similarly, Venable’s efforts, while successful in reviving the University of Virginia, had limited influence outside academia. Later that year, though, Armistead Long and Walter Taylor would profoundly shape popular views on Robert E. Lee and the cause he fought for. Soon, Lee’s former staff officers would publish their views on their commander, his army, and the Confederate cause in detail, and this time, they would have a widespread impact on southern memory and subsequent historiography.
Chapter 11: From Memory to Legend

By the middle of 1877, Robert E. Lee’s former staff officers had become fully conscious of the impact of public memory on popular perceptions of the war, and they strove to influence it. For the first twelve years after the Civil War, they had been focused on dealing with the trauma of defeat and finding places for themselves in a postbellum society. Once Lee died, they had joined associations and produced relatively short works on Confederate history, but these works had not reached mass audiences. Some of them had participated in the bitter wrangling amongst former Confederates over who was to blame for the South’s ultimate defeat, while others were too preoccupied with their personal lives to participate in such debates.

As Jubal A. Early’s Southern Historical Society Papers published the last of its series on Gettysburg, Lee’s former staff became more active in propagating Confederate memory. Many of them were likely influenced by Early’s and Longstreet’s war of words to record their own perspectives of Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. By this time, Reconstruction had officially ended, and the absence of United States soldiers in the former Confederacy greatly emboldened many southern whites to defend Confederate legitimacy. Additionally, with the South languishing in poverty even as northerners flourished through the fantastic wealth of the Gilded Age, white southerners of all socioeconomic classes began demonstrating far more interest in the memory of the Confederacy. Lee’s former staffers were more inclined to write longer works and speeches than before. As an analysis of their published works reveals, they were focused much more explicitly on preserving the Confederate past than before. In so doing, the staffers helped to shape, and were themselves influenced by, the emerging “Lost Cause.”

Even now, as historian Caroline Janney has observed, the “Lost Cause” did not mean the same thing to all white southerners. For southern women, it meant increased public influence;
since women were not traditionally “political,” they were free to voice their views and proclaim
their continued defiance of northern domination through the traditionally female the rituals of
mourning and memorialization.¹ To “unreconstructed” southern men, the “Lost Cause” was a
noble yet doomed effort to resist the “overwhelming numbers and resources” of Yankee tyranny.
They never apologized for any facet of the Confederacy or the war, and defended the antebellum
way of life as a utopian racial and socioeconomic order. Other white southern men steadfastly
defended the Confederate soldier, insisting that he had waged war for constitutional principles.
They avoided discussing slavery and focused on the common valor of all Civil War soldiers.

Whatever their feelings toward northerners, the defenders of the “Lost Cause” embraced
Robert E. Lee as one of the most potent symbols of a heroic, doomed Confederacy. Lee was an
already exalted figure, but increasingly, white southerners almost deified him. They claimed that
not only was Lee a great commander, but he also became a saintly, chivalric warrior whom they
even likened to Christ. Because Lee was so noble, the cause he served must have been approved
by God. The only way for such a good man and his people to lose must have been either through
overwhelming enemy numbers or treachery in his ranks. In the Southern Historical Society
Papers, Jubal Early had tried to argue both points. While the Papers had reached only a small
audience, after about 1880, such sentiments became widespread across the white South.²

Through their published works, Robert E. Lee’s former staffers played key roles in the
development and propagation of this memory. While they privately derided the results of the
Civil War, especially black suffrage, in public, they focused on less controversial aspects of the
war. They almost never discussed slavery; in their speeches and writings, they emphasized the
martial prowess of all Confederate soldiers. While they were firmly committed to preserving
Confederate memories of a noble “Lost Cause,” they never publicly castigated their former
enemies. In such efforts, Lee’s former staff officers were very similar to the majority of white southerners who outwardly adopted the rhetoric of national reconciliation. With the onset of popular Confederate “revivals” of the 1880s, Lee’s former staffers wrote and spoke even less about themselves than they had before. The staff had come from different backgrounds and had different personalities, and thus their messages about Lee were not always exactly alike, but they were firmly united in presenting the human qualities of Lee and his exploits as a great leader. They had served with Lee too long and seen too many of his foibles to deify him, but they still insisted that he had been one of the greatest men who ever lived.

Walter Taylor was the first of Lee’s former staffers to write or speak at length. He had not limited his research efforts on the strength of the Army of Northern Virginia to Gettysburg. His article for the Philadelphia Weekly Times was a small part of his much larger book, Four Years with General Lee, which he published in 1877. As one of the first books about the Civil War written by a Confederate participant, it was highly anticipated. Despite critiquing Taylor’s article, even Jubal Early wrote that his book would prove highly valuable. Taylor very carefully wrote his volume. Upon witnessing the disputes among former Confederates about whose recollections were more accurate, Taylor explicitly identified himself, stating in the beginning of his work that he had the “peculiar privilege to occupy the position of a confidential staff-officer with General Lee during the entire period of the War for Southern Independence.” He quickly added that “some facts concerning him and the army movements which he directed are known to me, which are not of public record; and perhaps some value will attach to my statements in regard to those matters of fact which came under my immediate observation, and the recollection of which is still fresh in my memory.” Having thus escaped one possible source of Early’s criticism, Taylor explained at length why he had written his work, writing that “mine is the more
humble task of giving a summary of the more prominent events in the career of the great Confederate leader, together with a comparative statement of the strength of the Confederate and Federal armies that were engaged in the operations in Virginia.” He then reminded his readers that he had prepared the army’s strength returns for years and had recently been permitted to examine them. Taylor explicitly defined the parameters of his work. He was not attempting a narrative of the Army of Northern Virginia’s campaigns or evaluating Lee’s skills. As Lee’s assistant adjutant-general, Taylor had been in charge of army personnel matters. Thus, he intended *Four Years* to serve as a sort of extension of his wartime duties. Avoiding the controversies over who should control Confederate memory and why the South had lost the war, he focused very narrowly on the field he had worked in so energetically during the conflict.

In fact, Taylor had been inspired to write his book by Lee’s queries to his staff and his own unsuccessful attempts to write his own memoirs. At the time, Taylor and the general’s other former staffers had only been able to give Lee the information he had asked for by consulting their own memories. Since Lee’s death, however, Taylor had gained access to other sources. Other former Confederates had previously applied for permission to examine the official records of the Confederate armies, which were still in Federal hands, and all had been denied. While Taylor was dismayed by this, he applied for permission anyway, relying, as he would in writing *Four Years*, on his past staff service to help sway United States authorities. His petition was successful, and thus Taylor became the first former Confederate to be granted access to the material that would eventually be published in the *Official Records*. While Taylor had utilized his record on General Lee’s staff to promote his own activities, he had done so more to salvage Confederate memory than for his own socioeconomic advantage.
Looking back on his time in the archives, Taylor commended the United States officials who had granted him permission to examine them. In contrast to the “die-hard” rhetoric of “unreconstructed” Rebels like Jubal Early, Taylor embraced the rhetoric of reconciliation, hoping that “the next generation will cherish, with pardonable pride, the remembrance of the deeds of valor, sacrifice, and noble daring, with which the history of that war so richly abounds, whether the heroes thereof wore the blue or the gray.”

In his writing, Taylor anticipated many of the themes of the emerging “Lost Cause” as embraced by most Confederate veterans. Using biblical language, he urged his readers to focus on more “noble” aspects of the Civil War. In one of the few overt attempts he ever made to seize control of Confederate memory from women, he added the criteria “manly” to the list. From Taylor’s perspective, centering on masculine aspects of the war made sense; the war was much “cleaner” for the men in the armies, as one side definitely defeated the other, and the Confederate armies had surrendered. Southern white women, however, had mostly escaped battlefield horrors and had never formally surrendered their Confederate allegiance; thus, they often continued to resist reconciliation movements well into the twentieth century. As Taylor’s own wife remarked, “we started life anew, poor but proud, for though our men had been paroled, our ladies owed no allegiance to the Federal Government. They fought with their tongues and will do until they die.” Such ongoing bitterness had no place in Taylor’s neat, clean world of soldiering.

In fact, Taylor expressly denounced those who wished to keep discord alive as less than honorable. Using gendered language, he claimed that such people, most of whom he implied were northerners, were the only real “villains” of the war, writing that “let censure fall only where fanatics feigned to be patriots, or men forgot their manhood, and, screened behind an alleged military necessity, gave evidence of an evil heart in deeds of malignant cruelty or wanton
destruction.” Here, Taylor came as close as he ever would in his first book to venting the frustrations he often experienced during the war. He had despised the idea of emancipation and dreaded even more the thought of black soldiers. While on Lee’s staff, he had denounced what he regarded as the Federals’ “atrocities” with increasing bitterness as the war progressed. Now, like an increasing number of veterans on both sides, he was choosing to remember the bravery of soldiers rather than the social, racial, or political issues behind the conflict.

For Taylor, no soldier was more worthy of popular acclaim and public memorialization than Robert E. Lee. While Taylor’s General Lee remained occasionally fallible, he stood far above ordinary men. Taylor consistently credited Lee with feats of military foresight and battlefield prowess far above those of any other commander. He claimed that Lee alone foresaw the high costs of the Civil War from its earliest days and denied that he lost any battles at all, even Antietam and Gettysburg. According to Taylor, Lee’s few flaws mostly stemmed from his excessive regard for the feelings of others; he tolerated underperforming subordinates in order to spare their reputations. While Taylor was just as eager to defend southern martial honor and Lee’s reputation as Early, he was not willing to attack fellow Confederate veterans to do so. His chapter on Gettysburg, for example, was a reprint of his Philadelphia Weekly Times article, spreading blame between Stuart, Ewell, and Longstreet for the defeat while absolving Lee.

Taylor also faulted Lee for not being “revolutionary” enough. According to Taylor, his former commander should have assumed dictatorial powers in order to save the Confederacy; he wrote that “it may be said that he was far too law-abiding, too subordinate to his superiors in civil authority,” adding that “General Lee should have been supreme in all matters touching the movements and discipline of his army.” He concluded that Lee was “more or less controlled by political considerations,” and thus was not responsible for his own ultimate defeat. According to
Taylor, Lee felt that he had to obey President Jefferson Davis and his various secretaries of war, so he subordinated his own superior judgment to theirs, and ultimate defeat resulted. As Taylor concluded, “the traits of character alluded to, excessive generosity and perfect subordination, while they adorned the life of General Lee, are not compatible with the generally accepted notions of perfection in a revolutionary leader.”

Thus, for Walter Taylor, General Robert E. Lee was by far the most important figure of the war. He certainly eclipsed Taylor; the former staff officer mentioned himself in his own book fewer than twenty times, and mentioned his former commander over fifty times in the work’s index alone. In one such case, he insisted that his own memory, was irrelevant compared to Lee’s achievements, writing that their “only value, if indeed they have any, is derived from the fact that they were written by one who was brought into daily and intimate relations with General Lee, and whose position made him thoroughly informed as to all matters of routine in the Army of Northern Virginia; and therefore, their tone may be regarded as in some measure indicative of the spirit and temper of that army.” Thus, Taylor regarded himself as unimportant; only Lee mattered. While it is tempting to dismiss statements like these as traditional self-effacing or as Taylor’s cynical way to place Lee on a pedestal and then sit on his right hand, the former staffer demonstrated that he meant what he wrote. For Taylor, compared to Lee, the Army of Northern Virginia itself was nothing. For example, remembering the Battle of Antietam, Taylor likened the army to a sword and Lee to its user, writing that “the weapon used was admirably tempered; but much as we may praise the blade, we should not forget the extraordinary skill and vigor with which it was wielded in that memorable engagement by the great Confederate leader.”

Such a leader could never have been defeated had he possessed comparable numbers and resources as his enemies, and thus Taylor dedicated much of his book to showing the enormous
numerical odds that Lee had to face. Twelve years after Appomattox, Taylor still had difficulty accepting the reality of Lee’s battlefield defeat, and after spending 140 pages on the first three years of the war, he reserved only thirty pages for the entire last year of the conflict. He devoted twenty pages of his 189-page work to the Army of Northern Virginia’s official strength returns that he had examined. At the end of his book, Taylor explained that he wrote it to promote the memory of Lee and his army, writing that “in behalf of my former comrades of the Army of Northern Virginia, I here rest our case, and declare our readiness to accept the judgment of the world, as to the genius and skill of the commander, and the valor and endurance of the men, who fought so nobly and fell so bravely, full of honors, though denied success.” He claimed to be writing to “assist in making clear some matters touching the history of General Lee” and also “to present a statement of the strength of the army which he commanded, that could be relied upon as accurate.” Taylor viewed his book as an extension of his wartime service, and argued that he had vindicated southern masculinity and martial prowess by proving that the Lee and his army had resisted an enemy possessing insurmountable numerical superiority.

*Four Years* attracted widespread acclaim. In the words of historian James I. Robertson, Jr., it became “a collector’s item.” Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, as Confederate veterans wrote their memoirs, Taylor’s book was probably their most-cited source. Even Early’s *Southern Historical Society Papers* lauded the work as “a book of rare historic value, and which settles the question of relative numbers engaged in all the great battles of the two armies,” and as “a book which must have the widest circulation, and go down to posterity as of highest authority on the point of which it treats.” The Papers’ remarks proved accurate, for until the *Official Records* were published a decade later, Taylor’s book was almost the only source on the Army of Northern Virginia’s strength available to former Confederate writers. One of the few southerners
who disputed Taylor’s conclusions was Longstreet, who ridiculed his assessment of Pickett’s Charge. Longstreet, however, was by this time anathema to many former Confederates, and Early, realizing he had enough from Taylor and his other sources to finish Longstreet’s public reputation, strongly defended Lee’s former assistant adjutant general. In the next twenty years, the former First Corps commander made increasingly ill-considered, poorly-reasoned attempts to justify his conduct at Gettysburg, and only succeeded in further vilifying himself in the memory of most white southerners. Jubal Early had won his “war of words” with Longstreet.

Early’s victory did not totally ease his concerns, and he grew paranoid that Longstreet would somehow salvage his public image. Lee’s former staff officers did not share his concerns. Even while his Gettysburg series in the Papers was being published, Early wrote to Charles Venable complaining that since Lee’s former staff officers were not providing him with the “information” he needed to complete his case against Longstreet, he would obtain it elsewhere. After Taylor’s book was published, Early did not relax either his campaign against Longstreet or his pressure on the former staff officers, continuing to edit Long’s forthcoming manuscripts with “notes and comments” and trying to get Venable to actively join his efforts.

Long finished his book, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee: His Military and Personal History, Embracing a Large Amount of Information Hitherto Unpublished, in 1886. While he took some chapters from his earlier articles in the Southern Historical Society Papers and the Annals of the War, most of the work was new. As Long explained, he wrote the book in part “to overcome the inactivity to which the loss of sight has for some years subjected me,” and dedicated his work “to the disabled Confederate soldiers, the gallant men with whom he has a right to sympathize” due to his blindness. By this time, even Long, the former artillery chief of Early’s Second Corps and the staff officer most willing to criticize Longstreet for him, displayed that he had wearied of
Early’s bullying. In his preface, Long credited his family and various former Confederates, including Charles Venable, the Lee family, and two former staff officers of the Second Corps for helping him write and edit his work, but he did not mention that Early had ever assisted him.^{19}

While Long did not credit Early, he acknowledged many other contributors, especially his late commander’s kin. As Long wrote, “I have been greatly encouraged in the publication of this work by the cordial concurrence of General G. W. Custis Lee, General W. H. F. Lee, Major R. E. Lee, Miss Mildred Lee, Governor Fitz Lee, and other members of the family.” Quite possibly, the Lees saw that Marshall was never going to finish his promised “military life” of Lee, and gave their materials and encouragement to Long instead. After all, Long had been personally the closest to Lee of all the general’s former staffers and his blindness afforded him ample free time to write. Long had been collecting testimony about Lee’s early years from eyewitnesses for some time, and he quoted extensively from them to fill gaps in his narrative.

By this time, Lee had become a near-Christlike figure to many southerners, and Long wished to further enshrine his chief’s memory. He was not selective in choosing which sources to use; all of them attributed saintly qualities to Lee.^{20} Long’s purpose was not to examine Lee critically or even professionally, but to write an encomium of his former commander’s life. His publishers emphasized Long’s relationship with his former commander as proof that the work would serve this purpose. They claimed Long’s work was “as nearly an autobiography as any it would be possible to obtain from another hand than that of General Lee himself.”^{21}

Despite his great accomplishments, Long stressed that Lee’s main goal was to serve his fellow men and his God. Looking back on his former friend, Long found very few flaws, writing that “He was singularly free from the faults which so often mar the character of great men,” and explaining that “he was without envy, jealousy, or suspicion, self-seeking, or covetousness; there
was nothing about him to diminish or chill the respect which all men felt for him.” Long highlighted every example that he could find of Lee’s nobility and selflessness, no matter how trivial. Some of these incidents were plausible, as when Lee allegedly blessed a wounded-but-still-defiant Federal. In other cases, Long’s narrative strained believability; he wrote that Lee risked his own life at Petersburg to put a baby sparrow back in its nest. To Long and many other devotees of the romanticized Lost Cause, the credibility of such stories was unimportant. They “knew” that Lee had been a saintly figure and a flawless commander, and because he was, the Confederacy itself had been justified. If Taylor’s *Four Years with General Lee* had helped provide a factual basis for the legend of heroic resistance against overwhelming numbers, Long’s *Memoirs* supplied a sinless hero to lead such outnumbered legions against the enemy hordes.

According to Long, a stainless hero like Robert E. Lee must have come from a suitably exalted family. Long accordingly began his work by tracing Lee’s lineage, declaring his family “illustrious in both England and America…worthy of him as he was worthy of it.” He claimed that Lee’s ancestors distinguished themselves as long ago as the Norman Conquest, noting that English kings had relied on them and pointing out that two members of the Lee family had been involved in the Continental Congress. Long overlooked the indiscretions of Robert E. Lee’s father, Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee. While “Light Horse Harry” had deserted his family while Robert was still a boy, Long simply stated that “declining health” had forced him out of the country. As great as the Lees were, Long concluded that Robert was the most accomplished, claiming that he was his family’s “culminating point” and “the greatest commander of modern times, and a military genius who may fairly be placed in comparison with the noted captains of the world as in some respects the noblest and ablest of them all.”
Having established that Lee was the most virtuous member of a peerless lineage, Long provided a narrative of his former commander’s life. After representing Lee as a child full of “thoughtfulness of character” and “earnestness in the performance of every duty,” he recorded Lee’s near-perfect performance at West Point while stressing Lee’s moral virtues. He then traced Lee’s antebellum career, noting his demonstrated ability in Mexico and in peacetime service. According to Long, for Robert E. Lee, duty was everything, and Long described his former commander’s decision to resign his commission and join Virginia when it seceded as a moral dilemma. He noted that Lee had been offered command of the Union army in 1861, and regarded it as a near-sinful temptation which only Lee’s “supreme sense of duty” enabled him to resist. In justifying Lee, Long defended the actions of all other former United States officers like Lee and himself who had resigned their commissions and fought for the Confederacy.24

Long devoted one-third of his book to the two years he served on Lee’s staff. He spent most of this space on Lee’s tenure as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. Throughout these pages, Long emphasized that Lee was a military genius whose final defeat was the result of attrition, not because the Union army had possessed capable generals. Long grossly exaggerated the disparity in numbers between Lee’s army and its “overwhelming foe,” who gained no glory by defeating such a weaker adversary.25 Long described the planning and execution of Lee’s greatest triumphs, giving Lee virtually all of the credit. Although Long occasionally mentioned himself and his fellow former staffers in his account, they were mere observers, not assistants, in Lee’s victories and could only marvel at his genius.

Long spent only one hundred and twenty pages describing the last year-and-a-half of the war. He may have been heeding Early’s insistence that he refrain from describing events he had not seen, and he may have shared the aversion common among former Confederates to discuss
the decline of southern fortunes. Long had not served on Lee’s staff after September 1863, having commanded the Second Corps artillery from that time until Appomattox. From June to October 1864, the Second Corps was absent from the Army of Northern Virginia, conducting a disastrous campaign to keep the Federals from the Shenandoah Valley. Although he had been away from Lee throughout much of this period and been associated with an infamous military fiasco, Long did not try to defend himself or Early in his book.26 Rather, he continued focusing his narrative on Lee, devoting only seventeen pages to the 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign. He lamented that Lee had doomed himself and his army by obeying his constitutional superiors; according to Long, Lee might have saved the Army of Northern Virginia as late as February 1865 if he had not been required to defend Richmond.27 In the end, Long insisted, “Lee had most thoroughly proved his soldiership,” and had lost as a result of “the process of attrition.” Long thus repeated the “overwhelming numbers and resources” explanation for Lee’s defeat first somewhat unwittingly postulated by his former colleague Charles Marshall and popularized by the 1880s. For him, Lee was the thoroughly tragic hero who fell victim to such dreadful odds.

Thus, Long completed his tribute to his former friend and commander by concluding that he had possessed “the very flower of military genius.” He credited Lee with almost “magic” gifts of organization and with an incredible strategic and tactical mind. According to Long, Lee’s men practically worshipped him, and his example alone had held them to the colors long after their ultimate defeat was manifestly inevitable. Long compared Lee with other Confederate generals including Albert Sidney Johnston, A. P. Hill, and “Stonewall” Jackson, and declared that Lee surpassed them all. Of Lee’s opponents, Long wrote that while “some may have equalled [sic] him in single qualities, none in the combination of qualities,” adding that “they were great in some directions; he in many.” He concluded his narrative of Lee’s life by praising
his career as a college president as yet another example of his great ability and his humility, describing it as a final service Lee performed ably for his family and countrymen.²⁸

Eschewing Taylor’s careful, data-centric approach, Long both reflected and developed a romantic image of Lee as a knightly warrior. He declared Lee “the greatest military genius of the nineteenth century,” and many Confederate veterans accepted his verdict.²⁹ Employing gendered language, Long concluded that Lee’s virtues made him a perfect man and role model of “self-abnegation, of moral grandeur, and of humane solicitude which constitute the true ideal of manliness.” Lee’s mature, incorruptible, stalwart masculinity was proof that white southerners retained their manhood even in the face of defeat. By emulating Lee, Long implied, former Confederates could reassure themselves of their gender roles and reclaim their honor.

Such a message found a very receptive audience. Long’s lengthy volume remained widely popular among southerners and was advertised prominently in the new Confederate Veteran magazine for years. For many southerners, Long’s words and tales of Lee’s greatness defined their greatest military and personal hero. Long’s book was much longer and thus less accessible than Taylor’s work, but it established many enduring myths of Lee’s greatness. Long died in 1891. The Memoirs was the culmination of his contributions to Confederate memory, and with the book published, he did not participate further in the “Lost Cause.” Clearly, Early influenced many of Long’s ideas about Longstreet, but Long needed little convincing. For Long, Lee was the superhuman figure to be emulated, and compared to him all others were irrelevant.

Similarly, although he had assisted Long with his manuscript, Venable was too consumed with his professional responsibilities to respond to Early’s whims. Although he was no longer chair of the faculty at the University of Virginia, his efforts to expand and strengthen that school only increased after 1877. Sensing that southern youths would come to the institution in larger
numbers if an education there was demonstrably practical, he pressured the administration to establish new departments in applied sciences and humanities, and headed the school’s search for a dean of its new College of Medicine.\textsuperscript{30} He stressed practical training for Virginia’s students, sending his engineering pupils to work on local projects and encouraging biology students to help prepare the state’s oyster beds.\textsuperscript{31}

Additionally, Venable continued to publish mathematics textbooks. While writing such materials seemed safely nonpolitical, Venable had a deeper purpose in producing math texts; he believed his work “would accomplish much for the intellectual independence of the South and thereby of the whole country.” He had followed his own recommendations from his speech at Hampden-Sidney, helping to organize high schools across Virginia and assisting other southern universities to acquire better books and facilities.\textsuperscript{32} As he explained, Venable felt that the key to the preservation of southern culture and memory was intellectualism, and the South could best demonstrate its mental acuity by producing scholarly works. Venable boasted of them at length, claiming that southern books like his own were now in northern universities’ libraries despite what he called “great prejudice as to the ability of southern men to accomplish anything.”\textsuperscript{33}

Venable was willing to cooperate with northerners to help recognize southern intellectual achievement and independence; as he explained, “I believe that building up of the South in this fort of intellectual independence is best for this whole country,” adding that “we must challenge the respect of our conquerors in every department of manly effort in order to have an equal and enduring Union.”\textsuperscript{34} Thus, Venable both echoed and enhanced many aspects of the emerging “Lost Cause.” He was just as eager as other former Confederates to reclaim his “manhood,” but he was determined to do so on mental grounds rather than military prowess. He agreed with Early that the South need not feel shame at either the war or its current state, but disagreed with
Early’s methods. He had little interest in refighting a war to render the Union asunder. Instead, Venable embraced a firmly reconciliatory ideal. For him, producing high school and college textbooks on geometry, algebra, and trigonometry was “rebellion.” By turning out high-quality professional work, he was proving that white southern men were indispensable to the United States. He was just as willing as many other southern whites to insist that northerners respect them, but he was determined to achieve that aim through intellectual achievement.  

Thanks to this outlook, Venable grew increasingly deaf to the controversies among his former comrades. By 1878, savaged by Early’s attacks, Longstreet was desperate to salvage his reputation. Encouraged by Venable’s earlier remarks praising his conduct at the Wilderness, Longstreet wrote to the professor repeatedly asking for specific recollections about how he had promptly moved his First Corps and saved the Army of Northern Virginia on that battlefield. By this time, Venable was exasperated by the whole debate, and he seldom replied to Longstreet. When he did, he strongly implied that Lee had expected the First Corps earlier at the Wilderness as well as Gettysburg. At the same time, despite angry missives from Early, he did not participate in that general’s ongoing campaign against Longstreet. Although he continued to give speeches at the dwindling meetings of the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia, they followed the same tenor as before; Venable praised the common valor and devotion of all former Confederates. Exasperated, Early tried to browbeat Venable into conforming to his version of Confederate memory, sending the professor a six-page letter describing each of his alleged “errors” in exact detail and blasting him for not condemning Longstreet and absolving all other former Confederates, writing that “I have called your attention to these inaccuracies not to criticize you, but….Very naturally what one of General Lee’s staff officers says will be taken as
historically correct.” Early was frightened of losing his control over Confederate memory and frustrated that most of Lee’s former staff officers did not enthusiastically support his crusade.

Indeed, to Jubal Early, all of Lee’s former staff officers seemed indifferent to the alleged “slanders” that Longstreet was leveling. In a letter to Venable, he professed indignant shock regarding the staffers’ “negligence,” writing that “In Longstreet’s former article, there was a very base insinuation about General Lee, and I have been surprised that some of his former staff officers have not resented it.” As he had before, Early demonstrated his willingness to disregard the official reports, including Lee’s, whenever they proved insufficiently critical of Longstreet. He even faulted Marshall for making the reports available and urged him to publish a statement condemning Longstreet. As Early confessed, though, he had not been able to get “one word” out of Marshall except through direct and incessant pressure.

In fact, no one had been able to get Marshall to publish much at all. Engrossed in his law practice and unwilling to proceed with his biography of Lee without mountains of data, Marshall had contributed little to Confederate memory beyond his donation of the general’s reports to the Southern Historical Society. While in no hurry to complete his manuscript, Marshall was always willing to reminisce about the conflict. At a dinner party in 1887, Marshall dismissed Early’s concerns, refusing to let his work be published just to save Lee’s reputation. In this statement, Marshall expressed the idea common among Lee’s former staff. Their general was rightly and increasingly being seen as an almost superhuman military genius. Against such a tidal wave of popular acclaim, no critic, whether a foreign observer, a Union veteran, or a former Confederate, could ever besmirch Lee’s illustrious name no matter how hard he tried.

Marshall’s low personal opinion of Longstreet had not changed, however; as a matter of fact, the former First Corps commander’s increasingly frantic attempts to justify himself only
pushed the former staff officer to remember him in an even more unflattering light, claiming that Lee had often traveled with Longstreet instead of Jackson because unlike “Stonewall” Longstreet could not be trusted to comply with Lee’s orders when Lee was not present to oversee them. He also claimed that Longstreet’s behavior had become increasingly erratic during the war, and that he had often given Lee impractical, unsolicited advice. On one such occasion, Marshall claimed that he had laughed aloud upon reading the First Corps commander’s rambling written messages, and that Lee had mildly admonished him, saying that “You ought not to laugh, Colonel, you know that bullet in the Wilderness hit him very hard.”

Marshall’s memory of this incident reveals that although he had not actively participated in Early’s verbal war with Longstreet, his memory of the conflict had been influenced by Early’s efforts. Offering unsolicited advice was typical of Longstreet; his war record shows that he was uncommonly outspoken and did not hesitate to criticize Lee’s plans. If Lee actually reminded Marshall of Longstreet’s wounding, he probably had meant to call for sympathy for Longstreet. He was admonishing Marshall to remember that Longstreet had suffered greatly for the cause and was in chronic pain as a result. Because of this, Marshall should demonstrate patience and respect for the corps commander. When he recalled this incident at the dinner party, however, Marshall heavily implied that Longstreet was never in his right mind, and that his wounding had only served to accentuate his already heavily negative tendencies. Lee’s staff had helped shape Confederate memory, but its former members were not immune to being affected by it in turn.

Although he would never publish his biography of Lee, Marshall did finally contribute publicly to his former commander’s memory. Owing to his staff service with Lee, Marshall was invited to deliver the keynote address at the laying of the cornerstone of the Lee Monument in Richmond by the Lee Monument Association in 1888. For Marshall, this speech was a chance to
demonstrate that Lee deserved the praise heaped upon him not only by fellow Virginians, but by all Americans. With his legal background, Marshall reasoned that he could best prove that Lee’s goodness by first demonstrating that the Confederate cause was legitimate; as he argued, “history tears down statues and monuments to great attributes and deeds, unless those attributes have been devoted to some noble end, and those deeds done in a righteous cause.”41 In this statement, Marshall presented a unique perspective on the Lee legend. In his mind, Lee’s perfect character did not itself justify the Confederate cause. For him, the reverse was true; if the South had acted legally in seceding from the Union and if the United States had broken its own laws by waging war, then Lee had been a moral man whose actions were the correct ones.

As Marshall continued his speech, he kept his focus on the legal issues of secession, but used them to construct a carefully reasoned argument that upheld the South’s actions. In much of his rhetoric, he employed the verbose language often seen in his other writings, but as he dedicated the monument to his former commander, he used such terms to defend the Southern cause and to uphold Lee’s memory. Like many other reconciliationists, Marshall eschewed harsh feelings toward the United States and referred to Lee as the great example of doing so, stating that “No one accepted the results of the war more frankly and unreservedly than the illustrious man to whom we are now offering the tribute of our gratitude and love, and it would be impossible move grievously to mistake the teaching of his life and example, then to draw from them encouragement to a renewal of sectional strife, or a withholding of genuine fealty to the Federal Union as it is now established.”42

In his speech, Marshall became the only one of Lee’s former staff officers to directly confront the issue of slavery. He pointedly denied that the Union had ever fought to liberate the slaves, asserting that “If we may put faith in the solemn acts and dedications of the Federal
Government, it is easy to show that it did not make war to emancipate the slaves, but that it liberated the slaves to help it to make war.” Characteristically, Marshall meticulously proved his point by reciting the facts of the military situation when the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in detail, quoting Abraham Lincoln’s words to show that liberating the slaves was nothing more than a wartime measure. As Marshall concluded, emancipation was thus “a threat to the States that might continue to resist the Federal arms after the first day of January 1863,” not a matter of principle, and certainly not a cause of the war.43

Having established to his satisfaction that the Civil War had not been caused by slavery, Marshall then insisted that the Confederacy owed its very existence to Lincoln’s actions. He admitted that this assertion was “rather startling,” but proceeded to explain that the president’s actions had exacerbated a minor legal dispute into fratricidal war. He thus claimed that secession had not really changed the relationship of the Deep South states to the United States, arguing that “the general result of the secession movement…was to place the seceding States under the laws of the Government from which they seceded, the only change being that those laws were to be administered and executed by Confederate officers instead of by Federal officers.”44 According to Marshall, large majorities in both the Upper and Lower South had never favored secession, but were willing to abandon the United States if it abandoned “American” for “Russian” methods of maintaining the Union. When Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to defeat “insurrection,” Marshall stated, the president had broken constitutional law and thus employed “Russian” ways. To him and the other citizens of the Upper South, Lincoln’s measures meant “the most odious of all tyranny- the tyranny of numbers unrestrained by law.”45 Facing such an alternative, the Upper South had joined forces with the original seven Confederate states. Thus, Marshall stated that “Mr. Lincoln had created a new cause, one worthy of the support of all men who preferred
constitutional to arbitrary government,” adding that “Such was the actual cause of Virginia and her sister States, and such the cause in defence of which Robert Edward Lee drew his stainless sword and won his imperishable fame.”\textsuperscript{46} Since the Confederate cause was thus a just struggle against “despotism,” Marshall concluded that Lee had been heroic in serving as its champion.

As Marshall continued, he argued that not only had Lee fought for a worthy cause, but claimed that he had done so with unparalleled skill. He claimed that his former commander had routinely faced and overcome four-to-one odds and deserved “a foremost place among the great soldiers of ancient and modern times.” Having asserted Lee’s genius, Marshall focused more on the general’s relationship with the men and their cause. Here, Marshall came the closest he ever did publicly to attributing divine greatness to Lee, claiming that “such was the love and veneration of the men for him, that they came to look upon the cause as his cause, and they fought all the more bravely, and suffered all the more patiently because of their love for him.”

As Marshall concluded, “Napoleon was the idol of his soldiers. Lee was the idol of his men…. there was not an officer in his army who did not feel bound to him by ties stronger than those of discipline, and to whom his approval was not a sufficient recompense for any service.”\textsuperscript{47} Thus, according to Marshall, the Army of Northern Virginia practically worshiped Lee, and with good reason. Such a virtuous man was duty-bound to serve such a righteous cause.\textsuperscript{48}

In this speech, which served as his last public statement about the war, Marshall both echoed and enhanced the themes of the Lost Cause. Although his legal background led him to approach the subject in a more jurisprudential way than most other former Confederates, he still reached the same conclusions regarding both the Confederacy and its foremost military leader. At the same time, Marshall enhanced Lee’s legacy by demonstrating that he had been “forced” to bare his sword against tyranny and that he inspired his men to keep struggling in their righteous
cause. Marshall thus offered white southerners yet another justification for both Lee and the war; the cause would have been just even without Lee, but his personal strength of character only further proved its worthiness. Like many of his comrades, Marshall was fully conscious of the power of memory, especially as the Civil War generation passed, and he was determined to keep white southern discourse firmly fixed to honorable notions of the Confederacy.\(^{49}\)

Despite this conviction, Marshall remained too busy to ever finish his promised book on Lee. In his last years, he became increasingly sentimental, touring Maryland and Washington, D. C., where he usually spoke on Gettysburg or more often on Appomattox.\(^{50}\) As the only one of Lee’s staffers present at the McLean House, he could speak with particular authority on the surrender proceedings. Even on this subject, however, he revealed that he did not possess Jubal Early’s obsessive devotion to the Confederacy; he always gave almost the exact same speech. In addition, Marshall often praised the magnanimity of the Federals, particularly Ulysses S. Grant, for their generous surrender terms.\(^{51}\) Additionally, he published two more articles clarifying disputed points regarding Appomattox, vividly depicting the desperate condition of Lee’s Army in April 1865 but denying that Lee ever publicly humiliated himself by offering his sword to Grant.\(^{52}\) In any event, Appomattox was not a popular topic amongst former Confederates, and thus Marshall largely removed himself from further major contributions to the “Lost Cause.”\(^{53}\)

While Marshall had initially reacted bitterly to Confederate defeat, he displayed the warmest feelings toward the North among Lee’s former staffers. In part, this was likely due to the fact that he had always identified himself as a Marylander, and Maryland had never seceded. Unlike many other former Confederates, he continued to interact with northerners and publish his views for northern audiences. His last article was published in *Century*, a northern magazine. Marshall displayed the full extent of his desire for reconciliation, however, when he was invited
to speak at Ulysses S. Grant’s tomb in New York City on Memorial Day in 1892. In this address, as he had in his comments on Appomattox, Marshall applauded Grant’s generosity in victory, lifting the general and president up as a shining example of reconciliation, claiming that Grant’s “crowning glory was as a peacemaker, and that to him belongs the blessing promised the peacemakers.” Such language could never have come from Jubal Early, or even from most of Lee’s other former staff officers, especially in a public setting. While Marshall had shared Early’s indignation at Longstreet’s most inflammatory remarks, he had never allowed himself to be bullied into vilifying Longstreet or harshly denouncing all Federals.

Thus, Marshall fully embraced and promoted sectional reconciliation. He endorsed a version of Civil War memory in which both sides fought valiantly. Although southerners had waged war under a superior leader for a superior cause, they had not enjoyed a monopoly in courage or compassion. For Marshall, it was important for both northerners and southerners to embrace this memory of a war bravely fought. In the last decade of his life, former Confederates usually remembered him as one of Lee’s staff officers, and gave his family places of honor at Confederate reunions. Although he attended many of these reunions, Marshall himself did not publicly contribute any further to the “Lost Cause.” Instead, he continued to practice law, and thanks to his professional success and the prestige of his family name, he held a “prominent position” in Baltimore society until his death in 1902. His family remained very dedicated to Confederate memory after his death, for they rewarded Frederick Maurice for his complimentary Robert E. Lee, the Soldier by allowing him to edit and publish Marshall’s papers in 1925.

Similarly, although Charles Venable felt the necessity of preserving heroic memories of the Confederacy, he was too preoccupied with personal and professional matters to participate in most public efforts to promote the “Lost Cause.” He continued to correspond with other former
Confederate officers to clarify disputed issues ranging from the positions of various units and Lee’s headquarters during battles to the number of cattle captured by Hampton’s cavalry in 1864. Venable welcomed such inquiries, and joined local historical associations to promote Confederate memory, writing that “I esteem highly the work of such societies in collecting and preserving the materials for local and state histories.” Because of his Confederate sympathies, Wade Hampton offered him the presidency of the University of South Carolina in 1882.

Venable was far too attached to the University of Virginia to leave it even to head another institution. He campaigned relentlessly in the state legislature to raise the school’s budget, and even had a friend track down long-forgotten documents in the state archives to prove that the university’s funds were guaranteed by law. His efforts were largely successful; as one of his colleagues remembered, “No one was more active or more efficient than he in securing from the Legislature of Virginia the increase of the annuity from $15,000 to $30,000, and again from $30,000 to $40,000.” Similarly, Virginia’s Board of Trustees commended him, proclaiming that his “intelligent zeal and energy… in protecting and advancing the interests of the University have proved very valuable to the Institution.” In a sense, Venable was even more loyal to the University than he was to Confederate memory, advocating that many of Robert E. Lee’s papers should be sold in order to establish a “Lee Donation” for the institution. For Charles Venable, although the South should remember its history proudly and revere General Lee as an almost-flawless commander, the region should not allow itself to become trapped in the past.

Nevertheless, probably moved by the examples of fellow Confederates who spent their last years writing of their war experiences, Venable finally decided to commit his own memories to paper in 1889. By this time, however, the strains of age and ill health began to exact a toll on him. His writing began with a firm hand and expressed clear, lucid memories of events.
a few pages, however, Venable’s script became fainter and his memory became more clouded. By its final few pages, Venable’s writing was almost indecipherable and no longer adhered to the lines on his notebook pages. He had waited too long to compose his own account of the war and he never finished his “personal recollections.” Interestingly, unlike the writings of Lee’s other former staffers, Venable’s writings centered almost entirely on his own exploits, not those of his famous general. Facing his death, Venable likely was both reassured by his own professional accomplishments and somewhat fearful that his wartime endeavors might be forgotten.64

In the meantime, Venable’s health forced him to resign from Virginia’s faculty in 1896 with the designation of professor emeritus.65 He died in 1900, probably from a heart attack. Henry McClellan, who had briefly served on Lee’s staff alongside Venable, remembered him as an able officer, good friend, and experienced teacher.66 His colleagues, however, remembered Venable primarily not as one of Lee’s staff officers, but as an educator and intellectual.67 Although his eulogist acknowledged Venable’s services as a soldier, he focused instead on his professional life and character as an honorable man whose life was worth emulating.68 Given Venable’s emphasis on his own scholarly pursuits and the long period of ill health preceding his death, it seems very likely that he had consulted with his eulogist, who was one of his colleagues at Virginia, regarding his remarks. He wanted to be remembered for his own achievements, not merely or primarily because he had served Lee. His fame spread even to the North, where the Massachusetts Institute of Technology posthumously awarded him a doctorate in philosophy.69

Charles Venable thus offered a unique perspective on the Lee Legend and the Lost Cause. For him, while preserving Confederate memory was important, it was even more crucial that the South free itself from northern intellectual and economic domination. Having helped establish Lee’s reputation, he took little interest in what he regarded as the petty squabbles of
other former Confederates. After all, they could never hurt Lee’s legend, and Venable could best
serve his state and region by continuing to focus on and excel at his professional endeavors. He
and his family were never ashamed of the Confederacy, but while they believed in the Lost
Cause, they did not allow themselves to be trapped within a semi-mythical past. In the end,
Venable’s contemporaries remembered him as both a Confederate and a scholar. Recognizing
Venable’s contributions both to Lee’s wartime success and the postwar Lee legend, the United
Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) awarded his widow its “Cross of Honor” in 1913.70

Charles Venable had not been the only Confederate who, feeling the onset of advanced
age, desired to preserve his recollections of the war. Throughout the 1890s, many southerners
wrote their memoirs or edited their wartime diaries for publication. Although Early died in
1891, his campaign to vilify Longstreet continued to bear fruit.71 In Longstreet’s memoirs, From
Manassas to Appomattox, he responded to his critics with harsh and ill-considered statements.
Longstreet heavily criticized Lee and claimed credit for the Army of Northern Virginia’s greatest
victories. He implied that if Lee had taken his advice, the Confederacy would have triumphed,
and blasted Early and his other critics both personally and professionally. His book was poorly
received, and even historians sympathetic to Longstreet have hesitated to defend his statements.

While Lee’s other former staffers did not respond publicly to Longstreet’s tirade, Walter
Taylor felt obligated to publish another book defending his former commander’s reputation.72
As he explained, he had not originally intended to write another book, but others had “frequently
urged” him to write what he called “a critical account” of Lee’s campaigns. As Taylor wrote,
because he had written his first book to demonstrate “the great numerical odds against which the
army under General Lee had to contend,” he had not believed that his own recollections were
appropriate in it. Once the twentieth century dawned, however, Taylor decided to write a more
detailed account “in the hope that [it] may contribute in some degree to the clearer understanding of the events and operations in Virginia…and as an humble tribute to the noble character of the Great Commander who so often led the Confederate troops to victory.” Thus, in 1906, Taylor produced *General Lee: His Campaigns in Virginia, 1861-1865, With Personal Reminiscences*.

By the turn of the century, Taylor had achieved a prominent place in southern society without relying on his record on Lee’s staff. As a result of his demonstrated administrative ability, abundance of energy, and eye for detail, he had been appointed president of the Marine Bank of Norfolk in 1877. He led the bank to great prosperity, and from 1885 to 1895, he had also served as president of the Norfolk and Western Railroad.\(^7\) Taylor thus possessed ample financial resources, and was so determined to publish his manuscript that when his publisher balked at its length, the former staff officer published it himself.\(^4\) Not only did Taylor possess the means to promote Confederate memory, he possessed a great willingness to do so. He served as chairman of the Pickett-Buchanan Camp of the United Confederate Veterans in Norfolk, which erected a large monument in the center of that city.\(^5\) For Taylor, all former Confederates should be honored, especially but not exclusively his former commander. To that end, Taylor was very active in supporting his alma mater, the Virginia Military Institute, where he served on the Board of Visitors and raised money for a monument commemorating V. M. I. alumni who had served the Confederacy.\(^6\) In 1914, V. M. I. invited him to give the keynote address at the 75\(^{th}\) anniversary of the school’s founding.\(^7\)

Taylor’s *General Lee* was far more detailed and bolder in tone than *Four Years*. Perhaps drawing inspiration from his fellow staffers Long and Marshall, Taylor began by justifying the South’s actions on constitutional grounds. He insisted that although secession may have been unwise, it had certainly been legal under the original Constitution, and declared that in 1861 “the
Union was not a nation; the United States was a confederation, not a kingdom.” He explicitly likened the Confederate struggle for independence to the American Revolution against Great Britain, claiming that the North had “completely subverted” the principles of the Declaration of Independence in forcing a government upon the South without its consent. Taylor concluded that “the grievances that led to the revolt of the thirteen American colonies were no more serious than those that prompted the secession of the eleven Southern States from the Union.” Thus, like Marshall, Taylor sought to prove that Lee had fought for a just cause, and did not argue, as Long had, that Lee’s stainless character itself sanctified the “Lost Cause.”

Having established to his satisfaction that the Confederacy had been morally right, Taylor shifted the focus of his book to his former commander. In General Lee, Taylor praised him as a tireless worker with “utter self-abnegation.” Even Lee’s Spartan headquarters, which Taylor had often complained about during the war, were now further proof of his selfless virtues; as Taylor concluded, “He preferred to share discomfort with his men.” Lee was self-denying, but he was human; he disliked paperwork and grew frustrated occasionally. In the end, he remained a hero; as Taylor summarized, “General Lee was naturally of a positive temperament, firm, resolute, occasionally irascible, but always responsive to the sober second thought, and ready to make the amende honorable; holding himself in check by the exercise of his will and conscience.”

Unlike Long, Taylor had served on Lee’s staff during the discouraging final year of the war when ultimate defeat was manifestly inevitable, and had assumed an enormous administrative role once Lee’s staff had diminished and the commanding general’s health began to fail him. Taylor had seen too many of Lee’s foibles to uphold him as a saintly figure as Long had. For Taylor, Lee remained a great man, but still a mortal and fallible one.
Taylor agreed with his former staff colleagues that Lee had been a near-flawless general. While Taylor did not agree with Long that Lee’s staff and subordinate generals were irrelevant compared to his greatness, he continued to insist, as he had during the war, that Lee had never truly been defeated. At Antietam, Taylor claimed that Lee had repulsed every attack just as George Meade had at Gettysburg. Even at Gettysburg, Taylor argued, Meade’s army was badly shaken and far too damaged to finish the job by smashing the Army of Northern Virginia into the Potomac. While Grant had forced the Confederates to surrender, he could not overcome Lee’s “brilliant genius,” and had been forced to rely on “brute force,” not military skill. Thus, while he differed in particulars from Long, Marshall, Talcott, and Venable, Taylor concurred with their overarching premise that Lee was a military genius almost without equal in world history.

Although Taylor had refused Early’s demands that he condemn Longstreet as a traitor to the South, he felt compelled to answer Longstreet’s extreme statements in *From Manassas to Appomattox*. The former First Corps commander had claimed that Lee was “excited and off his balance” and “labored under that impression until enough blood was shed to appease him” at Gettysburg, and Taylor could not ignore such a blunt assault on Lee. Barely concealing his rage, Taylor almost sounded more disappointed than angry, and professed that he could hardly believe that Longstreet had really authored such a “groundless, monstrous charge.” While Taylor admitted that “the war record of General Longstreet was a brilliant one,” he insisted that “in the attempt to prove himself invariably right he should have found it necessary to assail General Lee’s motives and defame his character, while claiming for himself qualities as a soldier and leader superior to those possessed by his old commander.” Taylor examined Longstreet’s arguments justifying his behavior at Gettysburg and found then all unsatisfactory. Even then,
though, while Taylor continued to argue that Longstreet willfully disobeyed Lee’s orders at Gettysburg, he was not willing to denounce him as a traitor to the Confederate cause.\footnote{85}

In \textit{General Lee}, Taylor authored the most explicit thoughts on slavery ever published by a member of Lee’s staff. He admitted that “it is extremely doubtful if any attempt to dissolve [the Union] would ever have been made had the institution of slavery not existed,” but insisted that both North and South were to blame for both the “peculiar institution” and the Civil War. After all, Taylor pointed out that northerners had renounced slavery shortly after 1776 because it had proven unprofitable, not because they felt moral qualms about holding human beings in bondage. According to Taylor, “wise” men had opposed slavery as long ago as 1800 in order to preserve the \textit{white} race from having to interact with an inferior people. In Taylor’s view, such men were obviously superior to abolitionists, whom he denounced as “cranks,” “fanatics,” and an “execrable class.”\footnote{86} Taylor reserved his harshest words for those who had armed blacks and promoted their civil rights during Reconstruction. He embraced the emerging view that African-Americans had been “happy and contented” under slavery, and that there had only been “trouble” between the races when ignorant northerners had “interfered.” Having bitterly denounced the idea of black troops during the war, by 1906, Taylor pretended that they never existed. He did not mention Union black troops at all, and pointed out that Confederate black units never saw combat.

According to Taylor, abolitionists had started the Civil War, and they continued to inspire bitterness and impede reconciliation after it. He applauded moderate northerners for trying to make peace between the two sections and blamed Radical Republicans and abolitionists with keeping bitter feelings alive. If moderates had only managed to reach a negotiated settlement of the war, Taylor wrote, the “horrors” of Reconstruction might have been avoided; in his words,
“then we would have escaped the heart-burning and bitterness that attended absolute defeat, the humiliating legislation demanded as a condition of our rehabilitation as States of the Union, the wrongs of reconstruction, and the fatal enfranchisement of the negroes.”

Like many upper-class white southerners who professed antebellum ideals of paternalistic noblesse oblige, Taylor found the race-baiting tactics of Democratic politicians in the 1890s distasteful and demagogic. Like other reconciliationists, he avoided referencing race whenever possible, preferring to view the Civil War as a misunderstanding perpetuated by “fanatical” northern abolitionists. Thus, Taylor laid the primary blame for the “Solid South” of at the feet of those radicals who had subjugated the South and forced black suffrage on its downtrodden white people. By giving former slaves the vote, he concluded, northerners were guilty of “the greatest political blunder of the nineteenth century.”

Since the Confederacy had thus possessed a just cause, a noble leader, and a solid basis in racial supremacy, Taylor found its ultimate defeat puzzling. In part, Taylor echoed the familiar Lost Cause argument that Lee had simply lost to “overwhelming numbers and resources,” but for Taylor, such a simplistic argument was not totally satisfying. Reviewing such unlikely incidents as the loss of Special Orders No. 191 in the 1862 Maryland Campaign, Taylor declared that, for some inscrutable reason, God Himself had ordained that the Confederacy should not succeed. Similarly, Taylor attributed “Stonewall” Jackson’s mortal wounding at Chancellorsville to the will of God for ultimate southern defeat. By fatalistically accepting the Civil War’s military verdict even as he denounced the changed condition of the slaves, Taylor followed the example of his former commander and placed himself firmly in the mainstream of white southern opinion. Taylor promoted Lee as a model citizen in the face of defeat, and followed Lee’s example in not fixing blame on any particular subordinate or event as a scapegoat.
Thus, while Taylor mentioned himself far more often in *General Lee* than he had in *Four Years*, his second book remained focused on Lee and the cause whose forces he had commanded. This book was not a recitation of numerical data as his first work had been, but was an often very emotional account of Lee’s Civil War career and subsequent Reconstruction example. Taylor’s Lee remained a human being who did not himself justify his cause, but that cause was righteous nevertheless. Lee was a brilliant commander and an exemplary man whose reputation was worth defending, but no former Confederate, even James Longstreet, should be ostracized.

Like *Four Years*, *General Lee* was well-regarded. By 1906, Robert E. Lee had been firmly established as the icon of the white South, and Taylor’s book offered more “inside information” than they could get from any other surviving source. In addition, with Confederate veterans increasingly passing from the scene, many southerners were anxious to hear their final statements on the war that dominated their worldview. Taylor’s hometown newspaper, the *Virginian-Pilot and the Norfolk Landmark*, remembered his work as “the most authoritative book dealing with the campaigns of Lee” because of Taylor’s words about his former commander. Taylor had provided Lee’s staff’s last contribution to southern memory. In doing so, he tried to give the South a well-rounded hero and a political and racial cause worth fighting for.93

By 1906, Robert E. Lee’s former personal staff officers had completed their public contributions to Confederate memory, and they had helped influence the idea that their general had been a warrior almost unsurpassed in history. They still did not speak with a united voice; each contributed his talents, his memories, and his beliefs to the emerging public myth. In his two books, Walter Taylor had established the idea that Lee had fought against very long odds, and explained that Lee was an ideal human being whose cause had been tragically unsuccessful. Armistead Long’s *Memoirs* presented Lee as a selfless superhuman leader whose example was
near-Christlike in its moral purity. In his speeches and papers, Charles Marshall demonstrated to white southerners that Lee had fought for a legally just cause and appealed to them to remember their history. Even Charles Venable, apparently too consumed with his professional pursuits to trouble himself over southern memory, wrote of his own accomplishments as proof of southern intellectual independence and insisted that white southerners should be proud of their region. Lee’s former staffers spoke to a wide variety of southerners, from intellectuals to sentimental veterans, and although they usually confined their remarks to military matters, they were united in upholding Lee’s memory. While Lee’s staffers could not help him command his army to ultimate victory, they succeeded in helping the white South enshrine his memory for generations.
Epilogue: The Memory of General Lee

Robert E. Lee’s surviving staff officers did not publish anything else about the war after 1906, yet their essential contribution to Confederate memory was complete. By the turn of the twentieth century, the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia represented the fallen “Lost Cause” of the Confederacy to many southerners and northerners alike. Although a few, such as Union veteran and historian George A. Bruce, continued to question some of Lee’s decisions, most accepted the image that the general’s staffers had helped to create. According to them, Lee was a heroic leader whose tragic final defeat had been the result of “overwhelming numbers and resources,” or perhaps the failure of his subordinates. Because he had been above reproach, the cause he fought for had been a worthy one.¹

Lee’s reputation had grown so great that his subordinates were often lost in its shadow. While this was true of every general in the Army of Northern Virginia with the exception of Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson, it especially applied to Lee’s personal staff officers. They had seldom mentioned their own considerable wartime contributions in their writings, and those who wrote about the war using their works largely overlooked their actions. To a great extent, the former staffers had intended this; with the exceptions of Robert Chilton and Armistead Long, they had all prospered on their own merits after the conflict ended. As they died off, however, their personal accomplishments attracted even less popular notice than before.

Walter Taylor continued to prosper as president of the Marine Bank of Norfolk until his death. He was very active in Christ Episcopal Church in Norfolk and contributed to several local charities.² Taylor also served as the president of the local Pickett-Buchanan Camp of the United Confederate Veterans. Despite this, he was still reluctant to speak or write of his own wartime accomplishments.³ The former staffer maintained a very busy professional schedule, and despite
pleas from friends and family to curb his activities, remained so busy with what he dubbed “multiple enterprises” that he was forced to decline an invitation to give an address commemorating the Virginia Military Institute’s seventy-fifth anniversary in 1914. Two years later, his exertions finally exacted their toll on him and he stopped visiting the bank in early February 1916. It was soon evident, however, that he was dying, and he expired on March 1, 1916, at the age of seventy-three, survived by his wife and eight children. His epitaph appeared in three leading newspapers in central and southeast Virginia, one of which was simply headed “Widely-Known Man Claimed by Death.”

While Taylor was indeed “widely known,” he was not thoroughly remembered. All of his epitaphs centered not on his own life and accomplishments, but on his relationship with and insights on Robert E. Lee. Two of the three even subordinated Taylor to his former commander in their headlines, reading “By Order of General Lee, Walter H. Taylor, A. A. G.,” and “Col. W. H. Taylor, ‘Trusted Adjutant’ of Lee, is Dead.” The latter epitaph, written for his hometown newspaper Virginian-Pilot and the Norfolk Landmark, summarized Taylor’s life from before the Civil War until his death, describing him as “a man of earnest Christian character, of noble ideals, a splendid son of a splendid state.” It described Taylor’s business accomplishments in detail, and noted the former staff officer’s service under Lee, devoting roughly the same amount of space to both aspects of his life.

In an untitled follow-up article a week later, the Norfolk newspaper elaborated on Taylor’s life, but this time focused on his relationship with Lee. It summarized, “There ought to be no need of words to fix the place Walter Taylor held in the esteem of this community,” and added that “he was loved best by those who knew him best and in the hearts of those will be embalmed the graces and virtues of a character that from bud to bloom was one to be revered.”
Having thus praised Taylor, the paper admitted that “to speak of Colonel Taylor is to recall that his name is inseparably linked with that of General Lee.” Using elaborate imagery, the paper explained that Taylor had lived his virtuous life largely because of Lee’s influence. It described Taylor as a “debtor to the example of which he had been a daily witness,” and added that “it was not his thought that aught he might say or do could dim a fame already irrevocably established, but that he must observe right standards or himself be judged unworthy of an experience vouchsafed to few.” Thus, Taylor had met Lee during his “formative years,” and Lee’s heroism inspired Taylor as it continued to inspire other white southerners. To the Virginian-Pilot, Taylor had achieved many things for the city, but they had all been motivated by his service with Lee.  

If the Norfolk newspaper regarded Taylor’s considerable accomplishments as proof that his life had been shaped by Lee’s greatness, the Richmond-based News Leader regarded Taylor’s life itself as irrelevant except in its connection to Lee. Taylor’s epitaph in News Leader did not mention his private life or public achievements at all, devoting its considerable length to discussing the former staffer’s commander. According to the newspaper, Taylor had been but a “boy” when he reported to Lee’s staff in 1861, and thus came into “intimate contact with the noblest spirit of our age.” As the epitaph continued, it referred to Taylor’s books, especially his more popular Four Years with General Lee, as his life’s work, and reproduced extensive selections verbatim from them to prove how Taylor had revealed hidden aspects of General Lee, whom the paper described as “at once leader and father, director and friend” to his staff.  

Thus, according to the News Leader, Taylor’s entire life had been dedicated to Lee above all else; in its words, “Through life, [Taylor] lived under the stimulus of having known and enjoyed the fullness of the confidence of Lee.” It was as if Lee had given Taylor a reason for living. The newspaper claimed that Taylor had “never hesitated, when called upon, to sustain the
record of his captain alike against the venom of irreconcilable enemies and the spleen of a disappointed and senile lieutenant who owed his all to the general whom he criticized.” In conclusion, *News Leader* likened Walter Taylor to a disciple of Jesus Christ Himself. None of Lee’s staff, not even Long, had likened his former commander to Christ. The staffers had known Lee too well to assert his literal sainthood. To many southerners, however, Lee was a messianic figure, and Lee’s staff was only remarkable because they had spent so long in close contact with such a perfect hero. Because of his wartime role as Lee’s de facto chief of staff and his postwar publications, Taylor had been the most recognized member of the staff, and even his memory had been almost totally obscured by his former commander’s by the time he died.

Although he had taken little part in the debates over Lee, Thomas M. R. Talcott was active in Confederate commemoration. He never demonstrated any eagerness to write about the war; his only contributions to Confederate historiography were brief replies to Lee’s critics. Talcott remained committed to Confederate memory, though, collecting newspaper clippings commemorating the Confederacy and taking part in multiple veterans’ reunions and parades. Quite possibly, Talcott simply did not find the time to write much about the war, for he enjoyed considerable success as a railroad executive. By the time of his death on May 8, 1920, as one newspaper summarized, Talcott was “one of the best known citizens of Richmond.”

Since Talcott had served roughly half of the war outside Lee’s staff, the Confederate icon did not totally dominate his memory the way he loomed over Taylor’s. Nevertheless, all reports of Talcott’s life dwelt on his service with Lee. In its epitaph, the Richmond-based *Washington Star* almost dismissed Talcott’s entire life outside his time on Lee’s staff. It blandly noted that Talcott was not on the staff at Appomattox, and instead of discussing the former engineer’s own career, dwelt at length on the fact that Giles B. Cooke still lived. Cooke had been temporarily
attached to Lee’s personal staff for about three months before Appomattox, yet the newspaper hailed him as “the only survivor” of General Lee’s staff. The paper summarized Cooke’s life since the war, but did not even mention Talcott’s profession. As far as the Star was concerned, because Talcott had not been in Lee’s “military family” at his surrender, his life was largely irrelevant compared to someone who had.11

The Richmond Insider still remembered Talcott primarily as a member of Lee’s staff, but was at least willing to consider other aspects of his life. In fact, the Insider devoted only a single sentence to Talcott’s staff service and dwelt at more length on his overland journey westward to join the Confederacy in 1861, his service as an engineer later that year, and his tenure as colonel of the First Regiment of Confederate Engineers. The paper also discussed Talcott’s considerable postwar achievements, claiming that he “tried to discover the underlying and compelling forces that controlled alike the running of railroads and the directions of battles,” and adding that “he was one of the first men in the world to make a scientific study of the cost of transportation.” Despite all of this, however, in the end, the Insider referred to Lee as Talcott’s great example.12 Thus, while Talcott had unquestionably achieved wartime success on his own and enjoyed great personal success after Appomattox, he could not escape the shadow of General Lee. Judging by his silence except in defense of his late chieftain, he would have preferred it that way.

An analysis of the archival correspondence, order books, and published official reports reveals that General Robert E. Lee’s personal staff had served him well during the Civil War and defended his image capably afterward. With the exception of Chilton, Lee had selected every one of them with great care, and he set high standards for their work. Although only three of the six men who had formed the core of the personal staff possessed antebellum military training, they all had professional qualifications and displayed those qualities on multiple battlefields.
Between the great armed clashes, Lee’s personal staff had helped him keep the Army of Northern Virginia in the field and assisted him with commanding and controlling the often unwieldy mass of volunteer soldiers and their temperamental officers. Without Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall, Charles Venable, Armistead Long, Thomas Talcott, and even Robert Chilton, the Army of Northern Virginia could never have achieved its remarkable record.

After the shooting stopped, Lee’s personal staff continued to serve their chief by helping create and sustain his memory. As their private correspondence revealed, many of them retained friendly relations with him until his death, when they were still recovering economically and emotionally from the war. Once Lee’s death galvanized the former Confederates into active efforts to preserve the memory of their cause, most of Lee’s former staffers played active roles. In their published articles, speeches, and books, they constantly portrayed Lee as a great man and a hero for the South. They admitted, however, that he was still a man; he was a mortal, fallible human, not a saintly “Marble Model.” While they consistently defended Lee and his cause, the general’s former staffers were not willing to condemn any former Confederates as traitors, no matter what their political affiliation. Thus, while they were somewhat receptive to Jubal Early’s prodding, they never participated in his campaign to destroy James Longstreet’s reputation.

In the minds of Lee’s former staffers, their own wartime records were irrelevant. In part, this attitude stemmed from their own successes; having achieved distinction in business, in law, or in academia, they had little need to emphasize their connection to the growing legend of Lee. Their writings accordingly stressed Lee’s brilliance and the virtues of all Confederate soldiers and seldom mentioned themselves. Having helped to create the Lee Legend, the general’s former staffers were content to let it stand as an emblem of the Confederate cause, no matter how history might remember or forget their own performance during the war.
Even after its last member died, General Lee’s staff indirectly contributed to its own obscurity. As a young historian, Lee biographer Douglas Southall Freeman considered himself privileged to have met several aging Confederate luminaries. While he prominently recorded the deep impression Jubal Early had made on him as a boy, Freeman less conspicuously noted that Lee’s staff officers had influenced him as well. In the credits of Volume 4 of *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, Freeman acknowledged that three of Lee’s six personal staffers or their families had either read portions of his work or supplied him with material. Taylor and Talcott answered his questions about Lee and his headquarters, while Long’s family supplied other materials. Through these interactions, Lee’s staffers and their families most likely knew how the historian would portray their former commander. Although none of the staff lived to see the publication of Freeman’s work, they must have known that he would depict Lee as an almost invincible commander whose final defeat resulted simply from “overwhelming numbers and resources,” combined with a few crucial mistakes by his key subordinates. In the process, Freeman claimed that Lee’s staff was too small and even incompetent. While they might have objected to being personally categorized as inept, Lee’s staffers would have agreed that their proper place was firmly in Lee’s shadow. They have yet to fully reemerge and receive their due.13
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Endnotes

Introduction
2 For example, see Bell Irwin Wiley, The Life of Johnny Reb: the Common Soldier of the Confederacy (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1943), 343.
4 For more on the different duties of general staff and personal staff members, see Barholommes, 13-146.
8 See Carol Reardon, With a Sword in One Hand and Jomini in the Other: The Problem of Military Thought in the Civil War North (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 1-53. Some scholars have suggested that American Civil War generalship should be evaluated based both on Jomini’s theories and those of another well-known military theorist and veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, Karl von Clausewitz; see Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., Why the South Lost the Civil War (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1986). Such an evaluation is highly problematic, however, since Clausewitz’s writings were not translated into English until 1864.
9 Jomini Art of War, 256-257 (emphasis added).
10 Ibid, 57-59.
13 Namely, Freeman consulted with Colonel T. M. Talcott, Lieutenant Colonel Walter H. Taylor, and Major Giles B. Cooke, and used a manuscript provided for him by the son of Armistead Long; see Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography, vol. 4 (New York, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 533. As Cooke only served for a short period on Lee’s personal staff, he is not among the subjects of this work.
15 In his words, “Few armies are better than their stiffs. General Lee took this army, with its wretched staff, with men distrusting him, and he created morale by successful aggressive action.” See Douglas Southall Freeman,
23 James I. Robertson, Jr., Stonewall Jackson: The Man, the Soldier, the Legend (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1997), 484.
26 See DiNardo, 1011-1032. DiNardo implied that Longstreet possessed a “modern” attitude toward staff work.
27 Bartholomees, 8-9.
28 Ibid, 279 (emphasis added).
29 On the whole, Bartholomees defended Army of Northern Virginia staffs fervently, arguing that they did virtually everything present-day military staffs do except plan operations; see ibid, xiii-xv; 280-281.
31 Ibid, 407. Pryor admitted, though, that Lee’s former staff softened their hard feelings after they left his service.
32 D. Scott Hartwick, To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of 1862 (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 63.
33 Ibid, 78.
37 See Foster, 58.
39 Ibid, 48-49.
41 Ibid, 187.
42 Ibid, 128.
44 See Maurice, Aide-de-Camp, 199-218.
Chapter 1


2 In John Keegan’s words, “No staff college existed to teach students routines or formalities. Mexican War veterans, and regulars who had seen service on the western frontier, were familiar with the paperwork of minor campaigning. No one, except [George] McClellan and [Irwin] McDowell, who had been sent to see European armies, knew how large forces conducted themselves. The war, as a result, would be fought by commanders and staff officers who were learning on the job.” See John Keegan, The American Civil War: A Military History (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 98.

3 For a similar, more succinct argument, see William C. Davis, Crucible of Command: Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee-The War They Fought, The Peace They Forged (Boston, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2014), 139.

4 Freeman claimed this was Lee’s only real flaw as a general; see Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography, vol. 4 (New York, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), 168-169. Unsurprisingly, many other writers followed his lead; or example, see J. F. C. Fuller, Grant and Lee: A Study in Personality and Generalship (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1957), 123-131, and Thomas L. Connelly, The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 177-200. Many of these writers based their arguments on a single quotation in which Lee allegedly told Prussian observer Justus Scheibert, “I rely on my division and brigade commanders. How terrible if I could not. I plan and work as hard as I can to bring the troops to the right place at the right time. I have done my duty then. The moment I order them forward, I put the battle and the fate of my army in the hands of God.” See Justus Scheibert, A Prussian Observes the Civil War: The Military Studies of Justus Scheibert, trans. Frederic Trautmann (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 8-49; 194. This quote has often been taken out of context, for Scheibert later repeatedly stressed that Lee observed as much of the action as he could and did not interfere with his subordinates because of the limitations of commanding an army using nineteenth-century equipment in the dense forests of Virginia. For arguments that largely agree with the view expressed here, see Gary Gallagher, “An Old-Fashioned Soldier in a Modern War? Robert E. Lee’s Confederate Generalship,” in Gary Gallagher, Lee and His Army in Confederate History (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 151-190, and Davis, Crucible of Command, 79.


6 The Regulations for the Army of the Confederate States in 1863 regulations said virtually nothing about the proper training, selection, or use of personal staffs. Only three paragraphs out of the 1,536 in the manual mentioned aides-de-camp, and they stated simply that “Generals shall appoint their own Aides-de-camp.” While the regulations spelled out the duties of adjutants and inspectors-general in more detail, most of what they said pertained to routine personnel and inspection duties, not battlefield orders or situations. The regulations did state that “written communications from a commander to those under his command, may be made by his staff officer,” and “in the field, verbal orders and important sealed orders are carried by officers, and, if possible, by staff officers.” See Regulations of the Army of the Confederate States, 1863 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The National Historical Society, 1980), 4; 47; 57.

7 R. E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, March 21, 1863, in Lee’s Dispatches, 82-83.

8 R. E. Lee to “My Dear (unknown),” April 25, 1861, in Wartime Papers, 12 (emphasis added).

9 Freeman, R. E. Lee, vol. 1, 296; see also discussion above.

10 R. E. Lee to G. W. C. Lee, December 29, 1861, in Wartime Papers, 98.


12 R. E. Lee to G. W. C. Lee, April 9, 1864, in Wartime Papers, 695.


14 R. E. Lee to Mary C. Lee, February 14, 1864, in Wartime Papers, 671.
15 Although the Museum of the Confederacy has a handwritten five-page manuscript biographical sketch of Chilton, it offered few details about his wartime service; see unidentified manuscript, Robert Hall Chilton Papers, Museum of the Confederacy.
17 See “Third Class Record, 1855,” in Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute Archives. The cadet with the second-most demerits in Taylor’s class had seventy-four, and all but five cadets had at least one hundred.
19 See Francis H. Smith to Walter H. Taylor, July 23, 1855, in Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute Archives, and Francis H. Smith to William E. Taylor, July 23, 1855, in Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute Archives. The Walter H. Taylor to whom Smith wrote in the first of these two letters was the father and namesake of the Walter Herron Taylor who would serve on Robert E. Lee’s staff.
21 Walter H. Taylor to “My Dear Friend [Colonel Smith], October 9, 1855, in Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, Virginia.
22 Upon first hearing of his father’s death, Taylor wrote that he was consciously suspending his Institute studies and focusing on “Arithmetic,” and “my bookkeeping, etc.” See Walter H. Taylor to “My Dear Friend,” September 19, 1855, in Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, Virginia.
23 Walter H. Taylor to Francis H. Smith, July 20, 1857, Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute Archives, and Walter H. Taylor to Francis H. Smith, October 15, 1857, Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute Archives. In the latter letter, Taylor wrote that “I would not trouble you, but in these precarious time every dollar must tell.”
25 Ibid.
27 See Armistead L. Long, “Recollections of a U. S. Lieutenant,” manuscript in Armistead Lindsay Long Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
29 Ibid, 21; 50.
33 Confederate Veteran 19 (1911): 25.
34 Students at the University of Virginia: A Semi-Centennial Catalogue, With Brief Biographical Sketches (Baltimore, Maryland: Charles Harvey & Company Publishers, 1878), 96.
35 Marshall wrote that, while on Lee’s staff, he was at General Joseph E. Johnston’s headquarters during the Battle of Seven Pines (May 31-June 1, 1862). In his words, “I had never heard the sound of musketry before, and as we stood on the opposite side of the house from that on which General Lee and General Johnston were, I heard the sound for the first time and was told by the other officers that it was musketry.” See Charles Marshall, An Aide-de-Camp of Lee: Being the Papers of Colonel Charles Marshall, Sometime Aide-de-Camp, Military Secretary, and Assistant Adjutant-General on the Staff of Robert E. Lee, 1862-1865, ed. Frederick Maurice, introduction by Gary Gallagher (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 57.
36 See notebook of Charles S. Venable, Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. This notebook contains a copied English lesson on Joseph Addison, a quotation from Homer, a lesson in ancient Greek grammar, and a Latin lesson. As Venable’s later academic colleague, William Thornton, pointed out, Venable’s great-grandfather was one of Hampden-Sydney’s founders. See William Thornton, Charles Scott Venable, in Rare Virginia Pamphlets, University of Virginia, 5.
37 Thornton, 6. In his words, Venable’s “record of work accomplished…seems well-nigh incredible.”
38 Ibid, 7-9.
39 John B. Minor to the Admirable Alex. M. Clayton, 1848, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
40 Diritto Toscam to Charles S. Venable, Juni 15, 1853, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina; C. Frank Boeessgen to Charles S. Venable, Juli 28, 1853, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina; and Charles S. Venable to “Miss Cantey,” July 9, 1855, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
41 “Cantey” later became Venable’s wife.
42 Frank, born in 1856, was the eldest child of Charles and Mary Venable. Frank pointed out that a majority of Georgia’s faculty resigned over being forced to grant a degree to a delinquent but politically connected student.
43 Charles S. Venable to “My Dear Sis,” October 20, 1857, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
44 M. King to Charles S. Venable, 1859, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. As Mary Venable’s letters revealed, neither she nor Charles Venable was satisfied with the couple’s housing accommodations in Athens, but it was a dispute over a student’s grades that drove Venable to resign his professorship. The originals of these letters have not been preserved, but they have been typescripted in Frank Venable, “Memories of Mary Cantey (McDowell) Venable,” McDowell Family Papers, University of Virginia, 16-22.
45 Frank, born in 1856, was the eldest child of Charles and Mary Venable. Frank pointed out that a majority of Georgia’s faculty resigned over being forced to grant a degree to a delinquent but politically connected student.
46 As Mary Venable’s letters revealed, neither she nor Charles Venable was satisfied with the couple’s housing accommodations in Athens, but it was a dispute over a student’s grades that drove Venable to resign his professorship. The originals of these letters have not been preserved, but they have been typescripted in Frank Venable, “Memories of Mary Cantey (McDowell) Venable,” McDowell Family Papers, University of Virginia, 16-22.
48 Thomas M. R. Talcott was the fifth child and second son of Andrew Talcott and Harriet Randolph Hackey. See Talcott Family Register, Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
52 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, August 8, 1863, in ibid, 68-69.
53 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, December 13, 1863, in ibid, 97.
54 When Chilton left Lee’s staff in March 1864, Taylor felt that no one would take him seriously as the new chief of staff because of his youth; see Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, March 20, 1864, in ibid, 139.
55 See Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, January 28, 1864, in ibid, 109.
56 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, February 23, 1864, in ibid, 128; Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, March 4, 1864, in ibid, 130; and Walter H. Taylor to “My Dearest Mother,” March 23, 1864, in ibid, 142.
58 For examples, see ibid, 29; 66-67; 76-78; 95-96.
59 Ibid, 9; 157-189.
60 Ibid, 140.
61 Walter H. Taylor, General Lee, 55-56 (emphasis added).
62 Ibid, 221-222.
63 This was much to Taylor’s chagrin; as he remembered it years later, after General Lee briefly and unsuccessfully experimented with randomly distributing assignments to his personal staff, “he called me to him and said that he would have to put me back in the office. I knew what he meant, and I acted accordingly.” See ibid, 56. Taylor’s wartime letters to his fiancée were full of complaints about the enormous amount of paperwork he had to do; see Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, November 15, 1863, in Taylor, Lee’s Adjutant, 86-89, and Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, in Taylor, Lee’s Adjutant, August 15, 1864, in Taylor, Lee’s Adjutant, 181-182.
64 Marshall, 30: 80.
65 Ibid, 84-88; 218-220.
67 For examples of this, see ibid, 89; 130.
For examples of this, see Armistead Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee: His Military and Personal History* (Seacaucus, New Jersey: The Blue & Grey Press, 1983), 180; 215; 236; 277.

68 Ibid, 178-179.  Lee was a painstakingly meticulous editor; in Marshall’s words, “He weighed every sentence I wrote, frequently making minute alterations, and questioned me closely as to the evidence on which I based all statements which he did not know to be correct.”

69 More postwar correspondence survives between Lee and Long than between the general and any of the other members of his personal staff.


71 Ibid, 230.

72 Robert E. Lee to unknown, January 1863; Lee Family Papers, Museum of the Confederacy.


77 For multiple samples of the monumental administrative work that Lee and his staff accomplished between April-July 1861, see *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (United States War Department, 1880-1901; henceforth cited as O. R.), Series I, Volume II, and O. R., Series I, Volume L.  Lee’s temporary staffers during this period included future Confederate General Robert S. Garnett and a naval lieutenant.

78 For accounts of Lee’s West Virginia campaigns, see Jack Zinn, *R. E. Lee’s Cheat Mountain Campaign* (Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Printing Company, 1974), and Tim McKinney, *Robert E. Lee at Sewell Mountain: The West Virginia Campaign* (Charleston, West Virginia: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1990), 1-23; 46-47.  Although both works are highly unscholarly in tone and published by obscure presses, they remain the only books of any type or length on these campaigns.  Even the meticulous Douglas Southall Freeman only devoted fourteen pages to the campaign; see Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography* vol. 1 (New York, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934), 587-601.  See also Army of the Northwest Order Book, West Virginia & Regional History Center, West Virginia University, and O. R., Series I, Volume V.


80 Robert E. Lee to unknown, September 27, 1861; Lee Family Papers, Museum of the Confederacy.


83 Ibid, Memoirs, 22-23.


85 Long, *Memoirs*, 139-140.  Elizabeth Brown Pryor has implied that Lee was somewhat abusive when he teased his staff, since he knew they could not retaliate; see Pryor, *Reading the Man*, 406-407.

Capers, 36-38.

Ibid, 42, and *O. R.*, Series I, Volume VI, 357; 367.


See *O. R.*, Series I, Volume VI, 75-82, and *O. R.* Series I, Volume LIII, 189; 191-197.


*O. R.*, Series I, Volume LIII, 204.


Taylor, *Four Years*, 37.

Long, *Memoirs* 142-143. In his words, the Union commander had given “a petty financial enterprise and a negro sentimentality precedence over military operations of the highest importance.”


Thomas Jordan, “Seacoast Defences of South Carolina and Georgia,” in *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. 1, no. 6 (June 1876): 403-407; 404.

 Ibid, 407.

 Ibid, 407.

James Longstreet’s former staff officers did not directly respond to Jubal Early or any of Lee’s staff officers when they criticized him, but they did supply Longstreet with quotations and statistics to fuel his own increasingly ill-considered responses; see Thomas W. Cutrer, *Longstreet’s Aide: The Civil War Letters of Major Thomas J. Goree* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 157-178.


See *O. R.*, Series I, Volume VI, 402. Washington was himself recalled to Richmond and was apparently reassigned back to Lee for a very short time, as he signed two short dispatches in the *Official Records* in Lee’s name; see *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XI, 419, and *O. R.*, Series I, Volume LI, Part II, 534. See also Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, vol. 1, 641. Washington was certainly gone from Lee’s personal staff by May 10, as Special Orders No. 108, which announced the officers of the staff, listed only Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall, Charles Venable, Thomas M. R. Talcott, and Armistead Long; see *O. R.* Series I, Volume LI, Part II, 554.

Taylor, *General Lee*, 42. These remarks were intentionally ironic, for as events unfolded once Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia, Taylor was in fact almost totally confined to the office and denied furloughs while being smothered under mountains of paperwork. See Charles Marshall, *An Aide-de-Camp of Lee: Being the Papers of Colonel Charles Marshal; Sometime Aide-de-Camp, Military Secretary, and Assistant Adjutant General on the Staff of Robert E. Lee, 1862-1865*, ed. Frederick Maurice (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 8.

See Walter H. Taylor to Francis H. Smith, letter of May 27, 1861, in Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia. In this letter, Taylor complained that his staff position was not a “military” one, and expressed his desire to be a line officer.

Marshall, *Aide-de-Camp*, 8. A major of cavalry drew more pay than a major of infantry.


In a typical message to Magruder (ibid, 434), Taylor wrote that “the general desires to impress upon the commanding officers the great importance of caring for the ammunition and preventing its waste by the men.” See also ibid, 430.

Ibid, 514; 527-528; 554-556.


Ibid, 505-506; 518. The *Official Records* did not say whether Taylor succeeded in mending fences with Johnston, as they contained no reply from the general. This incident may have contributed to the content of Taylor’s two
postwar memoirs, as he passed over his time in Richmond mentioning himself even less than usual; see Taylor, *Four Years*, 37-39, and Taylor, *General Lee*, 42-49.


43 Ibid, 6.

44 Marshall recorded conversations and written exchanges he had during and after the war with Judah Benjamin, Louis T. Wigfall, and Joseph E. Johnston. It should be noted that Benjamin was very loyal to Jefferson Davis both personally and politically, while Wigfall and Johnston bitterly opposed the president. Marshall was thus very good at making friends “on both sides of the aisle;” see ibid, 14-18; 37-50.


47 Andrew Talcott, Lee’s former superior and father of Lee’s future staff member Thomas M. R. Talcott, had served notably in erecting defenses along the state’s waterways to help defend against the Union Navy, and had frequently consulted with Lee and his generals on the best locations for the defensive works. For examples, see *O. R.*, Series I, Volume LI, Part II, 338-339.


50 Benjamin Huger to T. M. R. Talcott, September 14, 1861, in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; Benjamin Huger to T. M. R. Talcott, February 1, 1861, in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; and General Orders No. 25, Department of Norfolk, in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.


54 Woodward, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 283-311. While other faculty members conducted research or contributed to relief efforts behind the lines, Venable was the only professor from South Carolina College to actually serve in the Confederate army. See Michael David Cohen, *Reconstructing the Campus: Higher Education and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 32-41.


58 Charles S. Venable, “Personal Reminiscences,” 35-37, and *O. R.*, Series I, Volume VI, 517; 615-616. Lovell credited Venable and the other staff officers, writing that the government was “greatly indebted” to them for “the safety of much valuable property.”


60 Ibid, 39-41. For more on Smith’s skill as an engineer, see Gordon C. Rhea, *To the North Anna River: Lee and Grant, May 14-25, 1864* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2005). By Spring 1864, Smith was serving as chief engineer of the Army of Northern Virginia.

61 No one ever impugned that Venable had acted any less than commendably during the evacuation, and he was not held responsible for the fall of the Confederate forts guarding the mouth of the Mississippi River; see ibid, 517; 568-570.

62 John Gill Shorter to Mansfield Lovell, May 20, 1862, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. See also Charles S. Venable, “Personal Reminiscences,” 41. Lee nominated Venable without his knowledge or consent; see Frank Venable, “Memoirs of Mary Venable,” 35.

63 As Frank recalled (“Memoirs of Mary Venable,” 36), “In 1862 Mother was twenty-six years old, without a home, a refugee with two young children from house to house of relatives in Virginia—part of the time without a nurse and most of the time with very poor ones, and under the unceasing strain of anxiety about her husband.”


66 Officially, Lee’s personal staff officers were announced in Special Orders No. 108, issued on May 10, 1862; see *O. R.*, Series I, Volume LI, Part II, 554.
For a detailed scholarly account of these military actions, see Stephen W. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York, New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), 34-110.


Marshall, *Aide-de-Camp*, 57.

For an in-depth analysis of the Battle of Seven Pines, see Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 111-145. For Taylor’s official announcement of Lee’s assumption of command, see *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XI, Part III, 569.

Chapter 3

For an insightful summary of how the Seven Days’ Battles were and are viewed by contemporaries and later generations of scholars, see Carol Reardon, “From ‘King of Spades’ to ‘First Captain of the Confederacy’: R. E. Lee’s First Six Weeks with the Army of Northern Virginia,” in *Lee the Soldier*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 309-330.


Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 274; 323; 344.


For a similar argument, see Reardon, “From ‘King of Spades,’” 327.


Unusually, Walter Taylor concurred with these numbers rather than underestimating Lee’s numbers as he customarily did; however, he claimed that McClellan had 115,000 men. See Walter H. Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), 49-56.


Charles S. Venable, “Personal Reminiscences of the Confederate War,” in McDowell Family Papers, University of Virginia, 41-43.


In addition to the scholarly works already cited, see Donald R. Jermann, *Civil War Battlefield Orders Gone Awry: The Written Word and Its Consequences in 13 Major Engagements* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2012), 54. In Jermann’s words, “Chilton was no master order writer. His orders sometimes lacked something as elemental as time of origin.”


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19 Taylor, *General Lee*, 55. In fact, Mason’s first assignment under Lee was to announce a new medical director for the army; see *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XI, Part III, 572.


21 In Lee’s words, “The firing in our front has ceased. I believe it was the enemy’s shell practice. Col Long…went down early this morning to keep me advised, but as I hear nothing from them I assume it is unimportant.” See Clifford Dowdey and Charles Manarin, *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown & Company, 1961), 184.


26 See *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XI, Part III, 576. As late as June 21, Taylor was still answering Lee’s mail addressed to him from commanders as distant as Joseph Finegan in Florida; see *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XI, Part III, 610-611.

27 As Lee’s message to Stuart was deemed “secret,” it is unlikely that the commanding general discussed it with any of his staff officers. Stuart famously rode completely around McClellan’s army with 1,200 troopers, wreaking havoc in the Federal rear. See Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, Volume II, 97, and Dowdey and Manarin, *Wartime Papers*, 192.

28 For a detailed narrative of Stuart’s ride, see Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 167-174.

29 On one such ride, Lee confided in his military secretary, by now one of his closest advisors, “Colonel Long, how are we to get at those people?” See Long, *Memoirs*, 168.


32 Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 86, and Charles S. Venable, “Personal Reminiscences,” in McDowell Family Papers, University of Virginia, 42.

33 See Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 85. It is unclear whether Lee explained this while the Seven Days operations were still in progress or months later when Marshall was drafting Lee’s official report of them.

34 Dowdey and Manarin, *Wartime Papers*, 202. For a detailed recounting of the Battle of Beaver Dam Creek, or Mechanicsville as the Confederates called it, see Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 197-209. The ineptitude of Jackson’s personal staff made the situation worse; 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, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 101.


As Marshall recalled (Maurice, Aide-de-Camp, 100), “Nothing had been heard of Jackson since noon, and for two hours Hill with his single division encountered the greater part of the Federal troops north of the Chickahominy.”


Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 129. There were unconfirmed rumors that Taylor had taken a personal part in the charge at the head of a Virginia regiment, but Taylor himself never mentioned this.

For detailed narratives of the Battle of Gaines’ Mill, see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:146-157, and Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 210-248.

Chilton to Magruder, in Dowdey and Manarin, Wartime Papers, 204-205.


O. R., Series I, Volume XI, Part II, 662. For a more detailed summary of this battle plan which includes a helpful map, see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:166-169.

For a description of Magruder’s nervous, sleep-deprived condition and his subsequent battle at Savage’s Station, see Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 249-276.

Ibid, 268, and Robertson, 488-489. In Sears’ words, “It was…a contingency plan. Colonel Chilton’s dispatch failed to make this distinction clear.”


Lee to Magruder, June 29, 1862, in Dowdey and Manarin, 205.


Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 269-274, and Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:171-172.

For a detailed review of this complicated plan, see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:177-178, and Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 276-278.

O. R., Series I, Volume XI, Part II, 666; Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 149.

See Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 288.

Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 134, and Edward P. Alexander, Military Memoirs of a Confederate, 140, and Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, 110-111. For a review of this controversy, see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:572-582. Later historians have echoed Alexander’s assessment; in the words of Emory M. Thomas, Lee “seemed to resolve to do his own staff work” on June 30.; see Emory M. Thomas, Robert E. Lee: A Biography (New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 240-241.

For excellently-detailed summaries of the action of June 30, variously known as the Battle of Glendale or the Battle of Frayser’s Farm, see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:182-199, and Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 277-307.


Ibid, 907.

Ibid, 518; 708; 718-719.

Upon setting out for the hill, both generals had promptly become lost; see O. R., Series I, Volume XI, 668; 790; 818.

Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 142.

Ibid, 143.

O. R., Series I, Volume XI, 668; 790; 818.


Bartholomees, 269. In Henderson’s words (2:63), “The order…gave an opening to misunderstanding; and as is almost invariably the case when orders are defective, misunderstanding occurred.”

In Sears’ words (To the Gates of Richmond, 317), “Having determined his plan of battle, General Lee announced it to his lieutenants in an order drafted by his chief of staff, Colonel Robert H. Chilton. As he had demonstrated on June 29 in his dispatch on Jackson guarding the Chickahominy line, Chilton lacked skill in drafting orders.”


Ibid, 628. See also Sidwell, 46-47.

O. R., Series I, Volume XI, Part II, 669; 677-678; 760.

For detailed narratives of the Battle of Malvern Hill, see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:300-319, and Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 308-336.

Henderson, 2:62.

Chilton’s bungling at Malvern Hill is one of the most often-mentioned events that writers have used to “prove” the incompetence of Lee’s entire personal staff. Indeed, none of Lee’s former staff officers ever wrote at length about Malvern Hill. This might have simply allowed them to focus, as many others have done, on Lee’s overall strategic victory in the Seven Days, or it may have partially owed to their consciousness of having committed mistakes of their own.

For examples of this, see O. R., Series I, Volume XI, Part III, 586-587; 593-594.


Chilton to Davis, in Crist, Dix, and Williams, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, 296-297.

Ibid, 297-298. While there is no evidence that any other members of Lee’s staff joined Chilton’s wartime campaign against Magruder, Long placed much of the blame for McClellan’s escape on him.


Crist, Dix, and Williams, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, 298.


Ibid, 93.


Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 117.

Taylor, *General Lee*, 73.


Lee, recognizing Venable’s ignorance of the terrain, seems to have kept him close most of the time, even during the Battle of Gaines’ Mill.


For a detailed recollection of the results of the Seven Days, including casualty figures, see Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 343-345.

**Chapter 4**


3. Grabbing for his bolting horse’s bridle, Lee had tripped and fallen, breaking a bone in one hand and severely spraining the other. Among the staff officers, only Taylor provided an eyewitness account of Lee’s injury; see Walter H. Taylor, *General Lee: His Campaigns in Virginia, 1861-1865, With Personal Reminiscences* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1975), 115-116.


Kent State University Press, 1999), and Joseph J. Harsh, Sounding the Shallows: A Confederate Companion to the Maryland Campaign of 1862 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000).
8 Hartwick, 63; 77-78.
9 Ibid, 68.
10 Ibid, 63.
11 William C. Davis, Crucible of Command: Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee- The War They Fought, The Peace They Forged (Boston, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2014), 244. For a detailed discussion of Lee’s injury, see Harsh, Confederate Tide Rising, 205-207.
13 Pierro,172.
15 Although Robert K. Krick claimed that Lee began to “overhaul” his staff between the Seven Days and Maryland Campaigns, Lee had made no personnel changes in his personal staff and the only “overhaul” he did there was to shuffle much of the chief of staff’s traditional role away from Chilton. See Robert K. Krick, “The ‘Great Tycoon’ Forges a Staff System,” in Audacity Personified: Essays on the Generalship of Robert E. Lee, ed. Andrew Carmichael (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 82-106).
16 For examples of orders issued through Mason, see O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 589; 595; 614-615.
17 Long, Memoirs, 204, and O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 589-613. Even after the campaign was over, Chilton was still taking Lee’s dictation.
19 Just one day after Chilton’s above-cited general order, Mason had to issue another one imploiring the army’s officers to take extreme measures to curb straggling: see O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 595.
20 Charles Marshall to Jefferson Davis, September 6, 1862, in Army of Northern Virginia Telegraph Book, 1862-1864, Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, 1850-1876, Virginia Historical Society. Lee may have used Marshall to telegraph Davis to symbolically reward the Marylander on his staff for returning to his adopted state, or this may be another indication of how much Lee’s injury strained his overworked staff. Throughout the entire telegraph book, this is the only telegraph in Marshall’s name.
23 For a very detailed analysis of the contents of Special Orders No. 191, see Harsh, Sounding the Shallows, 160-167.
25 For the complete text of Special Orders No. 191, see O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part 2, 602-603.
26 Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, as quoted in Walter H. Taylor, General Lee, 119-120.
28 Taylor, General Lee, 120-121.
30 Edward A. Pollard, The Lost Cause (New York, New York: Gramercy Books, 1994), 314. Pollard was an editor for the Richmond Examiner during the war, and he did not hesitate to criticize Davis, Lee, or any other leading Confederate authorities using the strongest terms; his book was originally published in 1866.
31 [Daniel Harvey Hill] “The Lost Dispatch,” Land We Love 4 (February 1868): 270-284. Hill did not affix his name to this article, but he founded and edited the magazine it appeared in. Lee further added that if the dispatch had not been lost, he would have had time to reduce Harper’s Ferry, reunite his army west of South Mountain, and attack

35 Walter H. Taylor, Four Years with General Lee (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), 66-67. For a longer, more objective depiction of this procedure, see Bartholomew, 234-242.
36 Long, Memoirs, 213, and Taylor, Four Years, 67.
37 For example, see William Allan, Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and the Army of Northern Virginia, 1862 (New York, New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 2:343. Most historians have followed Venable in claiming that Hill’s staff carelessly misplaced the order; see Freeman, R. E., 2:363, and Harsh, Sounding the Shallows, 160-162. For an exception to this trend, see Bridges, 97-98.
38 Venable, “Personal Reminiscences of the Confederate War,” in McDowell Family Papers, University of Virginia, 62-63.
39 Ibid.
40 For a thorough analysis of the “Lost Order,” that concluded that couriers and both Lee’s and Hill’s staff must all share responsibility for its loss, see Sears, Landscape Turned Red, 349-352.
42 O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 606. For a detailed account of the Confederate units’ marches, see Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 168-252. The most detailed analysis of Jackson’s siege of Harper’s Ferry can be found in Hartwick, To Antietam Creek, 204-270.
45 Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:367-369, Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 244-252, and Harsh, Sounding the Shallows, 177-178.
46 Long, Memoirs, 215. Long stated that Lee sent “Colonel Long, Major Venable, and other members of his staff” on this assignment, but he never specified which “other members.” Lee certainly kept Chilton close, but the activities of the other staffers are unknown. Both Freeman and Priest believed that Lee sent his entire staff away besides Chilton; see Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:370, and Priest, Before Antietam, 187.
47 John Bell Hood, Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States and Confederate States Armies (New York, New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 39-40. Hood stated merely that Chilton “accosted me, bearing a message from the general, that he desired to speak to me.” For the order restoring Hood, see O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 609.
48 Venable, “Personal Reminiscences,” 63. See also O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, 842; 1032, and Long, Memoirs, 215. Venable, apparently ignoring Early’s postbellum efforts to vilify Longstreet as a traitor to the South, referred to him here as “that imperturbable old soldier.” See also Wert, Longstreet, 189-190.
49 Even with the help of Lee’s staff, Longstreet and Hill managed the Battle of South Mountain very badly; see O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part I, 909; 941; 1021; 1050, Sears, Landscape Turned Red, 137, and Pierro, 160-161.
50 Allan, 360. For detailed accounts of the Battle of South Mountain, see Priest, Before Antietam, 129-271, and Hartwick, To Antietam Creek, 300-432. For an analysis that focuses on what Lee might have been able to do despite his physical condition if he had utilized his staff to supervise as military theory dictated, see Robert W. Sidwell, “Maintaining Order in the Midst of Chaos: Robert E. Lee’s Usage of His Personal Staff,” unpublished MA thesis, Kent State University, 2009, 64-67.
51 O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part I, 854, and Pierro, 136. For accounts of the Battle of Crampton’s Gap, see Priest, Before Antietam, 272-304, and Hartwick, To Antietam Creek, 438-477. For a critical discussion of Lee’s failure to keep himself appraised of the situation there by using his staff, see Sidwell, “Maintaining Order in the Midst of Chaos,” 67-68.
52 Chilton to McLaws, in O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 607-608. For a very detailed account of Lee’s thoughts and activities on the evening of September 14 that does not focus on his staff officers, see Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 284-367. See also Hartwick, To Antietam Creek, 431-436.

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For a detailed account of Lee’s movements during the battle, see Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 368-429.

Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:413.

O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part I, 914-917, and Harsh, Sounding the Shallows, 204-205.

Pierro, 258-259, Murfin, 236, and Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 384. Although Longstreet claimed long after the war (From Manassas to Appomattox, 245-247) that McLaws’ men marched to the front “under guidance of Major Taylor of general headquarters staff,” and that Hood had told McLaws where to position his men, the reports of McLaws and his brigadiers claim that the command went into battle without Taylor’s guidance; see O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part I, 857-872.

Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:397-403, and Sears, Landscape Turned Red, 232.

According to Long, Lee, was “riding along a little in rear of the lines” when he saw a straggler heading to the rear with a dead pig, ordered him arrested and sent to Jackson for summary execution. Instead of shooting him, Jackson put him in the hottest part of the fighting, and the man escaped. Long referred to this incident as “an instance of General Lee’s losing his temper- a circumstance which happened only twice, to my knowledge, during my long acquaintance with him.” See Long, Memoirs, 222. Lee’s youngest son, Robert E. Lee, Jr., wrote that Lee’s staff was with him when his father met him on the battlefield and initially failed to recognize his besotted form; see Robert E. Lee, Jr., Recollections and Letters of Robert E. Lee (New York, New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1993), 78.


Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:213.

For a more detailed recounting of casualties at Antietam and a summary of the situation on September 18, see Sears, Landscape Turned Red, 294-304. Glatthaar placed Lee’s casualties at closer to 13,000; see Glatthaar, 171.


For a detailed description of the Engagement at Boteler’s (Shepherdstown) Ford, see Harsh, Taken at the Flood, 430-465.

This emotional officer was likely either Taylor or Venable, but it may also have been Talcott. See Freeman, R. E. Lee, 2:407.

Bridges, 128-141, Robertson, 621-622, and Harsh, Sounding the Shallows, 218-220.


For example, Pollard claimed that Lee’s “spoils of the victory had not been great,” and that his withdraw, while necessary, had given the Union “the pretense of victory;” see Pollard, 317-318.

Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, 200-202; 229; 289

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Chapter 5

1 War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (United States War Department, 1880-1901; hereafter referred to as O. R.), Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 618-619.  
6 For more on the roles of general and personal staff officers, see J. Boone Bartholomees, Buff Facings and Gilt Buttons: Staff and Headquarters Operations in the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865 (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).  
7 There is no surviving record of Lee’s recommending Chilton for any such promotion, but if Lee did, it would represent another of his attempts to quietly reassign his troublesome chief of staff.  
8 Robert H. Chilton to Jefferson Davis, September 25, 1862, in Lynda Casswell Crist, Mary Seaton Dix, and Kenneth H. Williams, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 8 (1862) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 404.  None of Chilton’s former staff comrades wrote fondly of him, and mentioned him even less often than they did themselves or each other.  
9 O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 597-598.  For more on the duties of inspectors-general, see Bartholomees, 34-41.  
11 O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 688.  In Mason’s words, “All communications heretofore addressed to him as assistant adjutant-general will hereafter be directed to Capt. A. P. Mason, assistant adjutant-general.”  For Lee’s next official report, Chilton was listed among the army’s general staff officers, not his own personal staff.  
16 O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 698-699; 703-705; 712-713.  For a review of the traditional role of adjutants-general, see Bartholomees, 17-34.

Ibid, 229.

19 Under pressure from Marshall and Lee himself, Jackson recruited a new member, Charles J. Faulkner, to his staff in December 1862 purely to help write his official reports; see James I. Robertson, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, the Soldier, the Legend* (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1997), 672-697. Like Marshall, Faulkner had been a lawyer. Unlike Marshall, Faulkner never demonstrated any military skills at all, and left both Jackson’s staff and the Army of Northern Virginia when his task was complete in April 1863.


21 Bertram Wyatt-Brown is the leading authority on the southern conception of honor; see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

22 Marshall, *Aide-de-Camp*, 179.


24 O. R., Series I, Volume XIX, Part II, 707-708. Virtually nothing is known about this “Mr. Kirby.”

25 Charles S. Venable to Mary Venable, December 22, 1862, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. This letter is quoted below.

26 The headquarters letter book preserved in the Virginia Historical Society began in June 1863, but it displayed a very consistent pattern. According to the dates in the reports of the *Official Records*, Marshall would still have been working on Lee’s report during the times that Venable copied letters. Venable was either scouting or visiting his refugee family when Marshall took his place. See Letter Book, Lee Headquarters Papers, Virginia Historical Society.


30 O. R., Series I, Volume XXI, Part II, 1028. In what was probably a painful assignment, Chilton wrote the official order giving Taylor the job.


36 See Telegraph Book, Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, 1850-1876, Virginia Historical Society. In each case, Taylor’s telegrams are copied in his own handwriting. As the book showed, between the time Lee assumed command in June 1862 and January 1863, Army of Northern Virginia headquarters only sent three recorded telegrams. Between January and March 1863, army headquarters sent twenty telegraphs, of which Taylor signed twelve, Chilton signed nine (half of which dealt with disciplinary matters) and Lee signed one.

37 Taylor, *Four Years*, 77.


40 In Taylor’s words, Lee “was not one of those invariably amiable men whose temper is never ruffled; but when we consider the immense burden which rested upon him, and the numberless causes for annoyance with which he had to contend, the occasional cropping-out of temper which we, who were constantly near him, witnessed, only showed how great was his habitual self-command.” See Taylor, *Four Years*, 77.

There is only one recent monograph on the campaign and December 13, 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg. For its estimate of the strength of Lee’s army at this time, see George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 148.


Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of Edward Porter Alexander*, ed. by Gary Gallagher (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 172. Similarly, Longstreet wrote that the faulty piece “was closely surrounded by General Lee and staff, officers of the First Corps headquarters, and officers and gunners of the battery, but the explosion caused no other damage than the loss of the gun.” See Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 312. Taylor also mentioned the explosion, but in less detail; see Taylor, *Four Years*, 151.

See Taylor, *General Lee*, 151. For a more detailed discussion of the tactical details of the Battle of Fredericksburg on Jackson’s front, see Rable, 190-217; 244-254.

For a more detailed analysis of the very bloody attacks on Marye’s Heights, see Rable, 218-244; 254-267. For casualty figures, see Rable, 288.

“A Reunion of Confederate Officers and their Ladies at a Dinner Party given in 24 February 1887, as Described by Col. David G. McIntosh CSA very soon after the Occasion,” in Lee Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, 2.

Charles S. Venable to Mary M. Venable, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.


Chapter 6


Although President Davis had recommended Chilton for a brigadier generalcy months ago, John B. Magruder’s congressional allies continued to block its acceptance. Chilton repeatedly expressed his frustrations over this, and Lee reassured him in a very carefully-worded letter that he did not doubt Chilton’s devotion to the Confederate cause; see Robert E. Lee to Robert H. Chilton, April 23, 1863, in *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXV, Part II, 745-746. For more on Chilton’s work in May and June as inspector general, see General Orders No. 60, in *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXV, Part II, 787, and General Orders No. 65, in *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXV, Part II, 815-816.


regarding artillery pieces, Lee had recently reaffirmed the theory and practice that his staff officers’ instructions were to be obeyed as if they came directly from him; see Robert E. Lee to Thomas J. Jackson, March 16, 1863, in Thomas J. Jackson Papers, Museum of the Confederacy.

7 Special Orders No. 125, in *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXV, Part II, 787; 809; 813; 816; 830.


12 As Marshall described it, “A victory over the Federal Army in Virginia would have tended to strengthen the peace party in the North, only in so far as it would have tended to assure the Northern people that they could not succeed. They would not have been impressed by our consideration for their peace or comfort in keeping the war from their homes and firesides. The ‘copperheads’ were never weaker than when the Federal armies were successful, and the arguments for peace in the North would have been much more convincing if the victory had placed Washington, Baltimore, or Philadelphia in our reach than if gained in Virginia.” See ibid, 186-187.

13 See ibid, 178-180.


16 See Telegraph Book, Army of Northern Virginia, 1862-1864, Lee Headquarters Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Between June 1 and June 5, Taylor sent eight telegrams recorded in the book. As he recalled after the war, “The couriers who brought...dispatches were arriving at all hours of the day and night. Mine was the duty of receiving, examining, and disposing of all such dispatches and documents...I became an adept after a while, and could discover at a glance when aroused from sleep whether the communication, to receive which I was awakened, was one of importance, or only a matter of army routine. General Lee...constantly had his rest disturbed by reason of the great responsibility resting upon him. The many matters of great import pressing upon his mind caused him to lie awake for hours, and he more than once suggested to me not to arouse him before midnight, unless for a matter of great importance, admitting of no delay...of course, I refer here to dispatches concerning some movement of the enemy, and not to the matters of detail coming from the different commands of our army. For these army communications he had so great a dislike that I endeavored to spare him as much as possible, and would only submit for his action such matters as were of a nature to demand the personal consideration and decision of the commander of the army.” See Walter H. Taylor, *General Lee: His Campaigns in Virginia, 1861-1865, With Personal Reminiscences* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1975), 155-156.


18 Walter H. Taylor to Mary Lou Taylor, June 12, 1863, in Tower, 57-58. Perhaps revealingly, Taylor found time to write his sweetheart the day before. He may have been procrastinating dealing with his family’s financial state.


20 See General Orders No. 72 in *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXVII, Part III, 912-913. This order, which Chilton issued on June 22, is the only evidence this author can find that he was with Lee’s army during its invasion of Pennsylvania. None of Lee’s other staff officers, subordinate field officers, or foreign observers are known to have mentioned him by name. Recall that noted Gettysburg collector and researcher James R. Boteler had an entire file devoted to the question, “Was Chilton at Gettysburg?” See James R. Boteler Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Lee still approved of Chilton’s work, as he sent Ewell a copy of G. O. 72 to regulate his men’s conduct in Pennsylvania. Lee described Chilton’s order as “based on rectitude and sound policy.” See Robert E. Lee to Richard S. Ewell, June 22, 1863, in Dowdey and Manarin, 524-525.

Controversial Soldier

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22 O. R., Series I, Volume XXV, Part II, 817-818. For Talcott’s considering leaving Lee’s staff for a position in the new engineer regiment, see Charles S. Venable to Mary M. Venable, April 13, 1863, in Francis P. Venable, “Memoir of Mary Cantey (McDowell) Venable,” in McDowell Family Papers, University of Virginia, 40-44. Talcott would be married on January 7, 1864, to Nannie Carrington McPhail, a distant relative of Charles S. Venable. See Section 14, Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. See also Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, December 27, 1863, in Tower, 103-105. The date on which Talcott became engaged to his future wife does not appear in the Talcott Family Papers and as such is speculative. Nevertheless, the date of their wedding strongly suggests that nuptials affected Talcott’s thinking in June 1863.

23 H. C. Gallam, Auditor’s Office, to Charles Marshall, June 4, 1863, in Lee Headquarters Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Gallam mentioned that Venable was then in Richmond and was supposed to pick up a coat for Marshall, which he apparently forgot to do. He did carry a letter from Lee to his wife, however; see Robert E. Lee to Agnes Lee, May 25, 1863, in Dowdey and Manarin, 492-493, and Robert E. Lee to Mary C. Lee, June 3, 1863, in Dowdey and Manarin, 500-501.


25 As one of Venable’s fellow professors after the war remarked, “I always vote with Venable…his arguments are usually wrong, but I find that his conclusions are always right.’ See William Thornton, Charles Scott Venable, in Charles Scott Venable Memorial, Rare Virginia Pamphlets, University of Virginia, 14.

26 As Taylor expressed it, “we have hard work before us but if a just God continues to lend us His assistance, all will be well.” See Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, June 11, 1863, in Tower, 55-56. For a good summary of this feeling of invincibility which permeated the Army of Northern Virginia, see Jeffrey D. Wert, A Glorious Army: General Lee’s Triumph, 1862-1863 (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 207-234. Venable’s relationship with Lee was probably not too strained, for his aunt sent Lee a hat during this period; see Robert E. Lee to Mary C. Lee, June 11, 1863, in Dowdey and Manarin, 511-512.


28 Ibid, 97.

29 J. Scheibert to Charles S. Venable, January 11, 1877, in Papers of the Minor and Venable Families, University of Virginia, and J. Scheibert to Charles S. Venable, June 26, 1882, in Papers of the Minor and Venable Families, University of Virginia. Scheibert’s writings were even more remarkable because most contemporary Europeans dismissed the American Civil War as a conflict between two armies that most closely resembled armed mobs and thus lacked the efficiency of European armed forces. As a consequence, most Europeans concluded that they had little to learn from the American conflict; see John A. Lynn, Battle: A History of Conflict and Culture (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Westview Press, 2004), 179-218.


33 For more on the criticism leveled at Stuart and his response, see Emory M. Thomas, Bold Dragoon: The Life of J. E. B. Stuart (New York, New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 227-234.

34 Maurice, Aide-de-Camp, 201-203.


37 Maurice, Aide-de-Camp, 214-215.

38 Ibid, 215-216. Once again, Marshall did not relate this account to increase his own reputation; as he concluded, “I mention these facts to show that General Stuart felt it necessary to defend his course, which he would not have done had he been justified by his orders.”

39 See Thomas, Bold Dragoon, 458, and Jeffrey D. Wert, General James Longstreet: The Confederacy’s Most Controversial Soldier- A Biography (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 281. There is nothing in Marshall’s papers or any other known direct primary source to support this allegation.

40 Ibid, 209-210. See also Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 547.


42 Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 48. For a full analysis of how Stuart disobeyed his orders, see Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 547-551.
In his words, “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.” See Coddington, 108.


45 See *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXVII, Part II, 443, and *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXVII, Part III, 914, and Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 218. Continuing his critique of Stuart’s conduct, Marshall emphasized that Lee’s anxiety “was due entirely to his hearing nothing from General Stuart.” Similarly, Taylor recalled that “with the absence of the cavalry, the army was well in hand. The absence of that indispensable arm of the service was most seriously felt by General Lee.” See Walter H. Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), 92. See also Taylor, *General Lee*, 184. Long wrote that “the continued want of intelligence for several days longer greatly embarrassed” Lee. He also stated that his commander noted Stuart’s absence when he heard firing from the developing Battle of Gettysburg on July 1; see Long, *Memoirs*, 273-275.


47 Walter H. Taylor to Mary Lou Taylor, June 29, 1863, in Tower, 58.


49 Coddington used this example to characterize Lee’s orders as having a “gross lack of precision;” see Coddington, 193. Robert E. K. Krick referred to this order to prove that “clearly the headquarters of the Army of Northern Virginia cannot be said to have been a smoothly functioning military machine.” See Robert E. K. Krick, “The ‘Great Tycoon’ Forges a Staff System,” in *Audacity Personified: The Generalship of Robert E. Lee*, ed. by Peter S. Carmichael (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2004): 82-106.


55 Taylor, *Four Years*, 95-96. Thirty years later, Taylor related the incident in almost the same words, but added that he had no desire to besmirch Ewell’s reputation as a soldier or patriot; see Taylor, *General Lee*, 190-194.


61 Taylor, *Four Years*, 99-100.


Taylor, *Four Years*, 99, and Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 237. Crucially, both Taylor and Marshall referred to both Longstreet’s and Ewell’s attacks, and neither staff officer held the First Corps commander solely responsible, as Early and many others did. For a detailed examination of the fighting on the Confederate left from July 1-July 3, see Harry F. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp’s Hill and Cemetery Hill* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).


Fremantle, 260-261.


A minor controversy emerged regarding this after the war, when Longstreet denied receiving any such order, and Lee’s former staffers insisting that he had; see Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 385-386, Taylor, *Four Years*, 102, Long, *Memoirs*, 286-287, Maurice, *Aide-de-Camp*, 237-238, and Taylor, *General Lee*, 205-206. The entire dispute was unnecessary, for Lee’s report, which Longstreet unwisely dubbed “disingenuous,” clearly stated that Lee sent such a message. In Longstreet’s own report, he strongly implied having received this order; see *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXVII, Part II, 320, 359. For a succinct overview of Napoleonic tactics involving massed artillery, see Etling, 545-547.


Gallagher (ed.), *Fighting*, 253, and Coddington, 459-461. For a firsthand account of how crippled the command structure was in Heth’s and Pender’s Divisions, see *O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXVII, Part II, 637-670.

*O. R.*, Series I, Volume XXVII, Part II, 495, 544. See also Alexander, *Military Memoirs*, 417. For the most thorough examination of the failure to coordinate Confederate artillery 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, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1999), 270-283.

Sears, *Gettysburg*, 459. Coddington correctly cited this as an example of “poor staff work;” see Coddington, 461.


Long, *Memoirs*, 292-294. Note that, like Taylor, Long used Venable’s testimony to support his claims. Venable published nothing about Gettysburg after the war, but he certainly supported his former staff comrades’ views.


Chapter 7


2 General Orders No. 77, July 16, 1863, in War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (United States War Department, 1880-1901; henceforth referred to as O. R.), Series I, Volume XXVII, Part III, 1015.

3 General Orders No. 80, July 26, 1863, in O. R., Series I, Volume XXVII, Part III, 1040.

4 See Walter Taylor’s copies and analysis of the army’s personnel returns in Walter H. Taylor, Four Years with General Lee (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), 169.


7 Colonel J. F. Gilmer to T. M. R. Talcott (undated), in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Although the letter bears no date, Gilmer mentions that “a letter has recently been addressed by the Hon. Sec. of War to Genl. R. E. Lee respecting the Engineer Troops of his command, to which you are referred for your information, as it is proposed to charge you with this organization.”


10 See Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.


12 A. L. Long, The Memoirs of Robert E. Lee: His Military and Personal History (Seacaucus, New Jersey: The Blue and Grey Press, 1983), 303. In Freeman’s words, Lee “was willing to forego the personal convenience of retaining as capable an assistant as Colonel A. L. Long on his staff in order that Long might have higher rank and the Second Corps the advantage of his services as chief of artillery.” See Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography, vol. 3 (New York, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937), 223.

13 Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, August 8, 1863, in Dowdey and Manarin, 589-590.
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Bettie Saunders, December 5, 1863, in Tower, 93

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For Taylor's poet

Jefferson Davis, September 9, 1863, in Dowdey and Manarin, 596

Lee

For Taylor's engagement, see Tower, 74.

Taylor's poetic expression of joy at his engagement, see Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, October 25, 1863, in Tower, 79-81.

Taylor would remain without a horse of his own until late October, when Stuart loaned him a horse to use as long as he wanted. See Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, October 31, 1863, in Tower, 81-82.

Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, October 17, 1863, in Tower, 75-78.

To date, historians have devoted little attention to any operations in Virginia from July 1863 to May 1864. One of the best summaries of the campaign can be found in Freeman, R. E. Lee, Volume 3, 162-187.

Taylor to Saunders, November 15, 1863, and Taylor, Four Years, 120. In this part of his book, Taylor quoted from notes he made during Autumn 1863.

Taylor to Saunders, November 15, 1863.


For Talcott's marriage, see Walter H. Taylor to Betty Saunders, December 27, 1863, in Tower, 103-105.


At one point during Fall 1863, Lee’s staff had to pack army headquarters in haste, and a rumor spread among Confederate civilians that Lee’s horse had been captured and that the general himself was endangered. Receiving a letter to this effect from his fiancée, Taylor read it aloud to the amusement of his fellow staffers, and facetiously answered her that “we aides will shield him from all danger,” and that “I pledge you my word the Tycoon shall not be kidnapped.” See Taylor to Saunders, November 14, 1863 (emphasis in original). Notably, this letter is the first in which Taylor refers to Lee as the “Tycoon.” This famous and unflattering nickname that Lee’s staff gave him might thus have originated in their general’s changed demeanor after the Gettysburg defeat and Long’s departure.


Robert E. Lee to J. E. B. Stuart, December 9, 1863, in Dowdew and Manarin, 642-643.

Taylor to Saunders, December 13, 1863, 97 (emphasis in original)

As Taylor expressed on December 13, “I shall have to work more zealously still when Venable goes. I make him-good fellow that he is- help me.” See ibid, 97.

Ibid, 96-97.

It is implied that the army telegraph was out of commission because the army’s telegraph book recorded only four messages sent between July 25 and December 4, the longest such draught in the record. In December, it contained
multiple telegraphs, mostly sent from Taylor to Lee in Richmond. See Telegraph Book, Army of Northern Virginia, 1862-1864, in Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, 1850-1876, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. See also Walter H. Taylor to Richard S. Ewell, December 14, 1863, in Dowdey and Manarin, 643.


Taylor to Saunders, December 27, 1863. In this letter, Taylor confessed that “I intend now, my precious, devoting this portion of the day to communion with you notwithstanding the immense file of official nuisances (papers) which has just been brought in from one of the Corps. I intend to ignore them for the while, and let them wait ‘til tomorrow for my action. I wish they would let me rest on Sunday at least, but though every one knows the General would desire no work performed on that day except what was actually necessary, they continue to send all sorts of papers, as if their object was to persecute me, for I cannot generally be satisfied to postpone acting on what is submitted even for one day, not knowing what the morrow may bring forth.” (103-104, emphasis in original). In particular, Taylor grew close to Venable, whom he described here as “a nice manly fellow, of great intellectual attainments and a most agreeable associate.”

As the Army of Northern Virginia’s letter book revealed, with a single exception, January 1864 was the first time Marshall made any entries in it until March, and he copied all but the last of the letters in January; this coincided with the dates of Taylor’s leave of absence. See also Robert E. Lee to Mary C. Lee, January 10, 1864, in Dowdey and Manarin, 649.


As Lee wrote his wife, “The young men [meaning his staff] have no fondness for the society of the old Genl. He is too somber & heavy for them.” See Robert E. Lee to Mary C. Lee, February 14, 1864, in Dowdey and Manarin, 670-671.

Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, February 2, 1864, in Tower, 111-116, and Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, February 21, 1864, in Tower, 122-124. In the second letter, Taylor quietly added, however, that “Indeed ‘tis somewhat consoling to think that whether they add to my stars or not, they cannot increase my work or responsibility, for one more charge would certainly prove to be the straw on the camel’s back.”

Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3:235-236.

Charles S. Venable to Richard S. Ewell, February 22, 1864, in Dowdey and Manarin, 675.

Taylor to Saunders, February 22, 1864.

Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, February 23, 1864, in Tower, 125-129. In his letter, Taylor stated that “Genl Ewell who is supposed to be in command doesn’t relieve me at all, not does my friend Chilton who terms himself “Chief of Staff.” Neither has volunteered one single suggestion or in any way divided the responsibility. As for Genl Ewell he is 15 miles away and though I have kept him regularly & constantly informed of the enemy’s movements yesterday and today I have yet to hear the first word from him.”


Walter H. Taylor to Arnold Elzey, February 29, 1864, in Dowdey and Manarin, 676.

On February 28 and 29, Taylor had sent a total of fifteen telegrams; see Telegraph Book, Army of Northern Virginia, 1862-1864, in Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, 1850-1876, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.


Taylor claimed he was “indifferent” to Chilton’s ultimate professional fate, telling his fiancée that “you know the President appointed him a Brigr General, but the Senate refused to confirm the appt. Since then he has been quite unsettled and evidently desirous of returning to his old position in Richmond. He now says he will leave us unless Congress does him justice. I don’t know what his views of justice are, but others think that justice is the last thing he should desire. But I must not deal in any such scandal. He must not be spoken of unfavorably by me, for my relation with him is a rather delicate one, and though I would be safe in your hands by others my motives might be impugned. You see he has the rank and credit of A. A. G. and I have the unthankful and unrenumerative part of the
position, namely the labor and the responsibility. So I must be silent- only I shan’t cry if he doesn’t return.” See Taylor to Saunders, December 13, 1863, in Tower, 97-98.
65 Taylor to Saunders, February 21, 1864, 123.
66 From August 31, 1863 to February 27, 1864, Chilton sent only six telegrams, while Taylor sent eighteen regarding duty assignments and court-martials. See Telegraph Book, Army of Northern Virginia, 1862-1864, in Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, 1850-1876, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.
68 Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3:229.
69 In the words of historian William C. Davis, Chilton was “an inattentive listener.” See Davis, Crucible of Command, 316.
70 Walter H. Taylor to “Mother,” March 23, 1864, in Tower, 141-142.
71 O. R., Series I, Volume XXXIII, Part III, 1287, and Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, April 10, 1864, in Tower, 149-151. This was the same Martin L. Smith under whom Venable had served at Vicksburg in 1862.
72 Robert E. Lee to G. W. C. Lee, March 29, 1864, in Dowdry and Manarin, 685-687.

Chapter 8
1 In Freeman’s words, “No general ever had more devoted service than [Lee] received from his personal assistants, but surely no officer of like rank ever fought a campaign comparable to that of 1864 with only three men on his staff, and not one of them a professional soldier.” See Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography, vol. 3 (New York: New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937), 230.
3 War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (United States War Department, 1880-1901; hereafter referred to as O. R.), Series I, Volume XXXIII, Part III, 1295-1296.
6 As Taylor wrote his fiancée, “Our army increases daily. In morale & discipline its condition is excellent. We are taking the necessary steps to put the ‘concern’ in fighting trim- reducing baggage- getting up horses- &c… I am very hopeful, feeling confident that with God’s help, we will defeat their last great effort & make this the last year of serious fighting.” (Taylor to Saunders, April 3, 1864, 148; emphasis in original).
7 Taylor to Saunders, April 3, 1864, 148.
8 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, April 24, 1864, in Tower, 154-156.
10 See Letter Book, Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Between April 11, 1864, and October 4, 1864, Venable’s name appears on only five letters, while Marshall’s appears on thirty-three.
11 For example, see Charles Marshall to J. E. B. Stuart, April 23, 1864, in O. R., Series I, Volume XXXIII, Part III, 1307.
12 For Venable’s work on the signal stations, see Charles S. Venable to Captain R. H. Wilborne, March 26, 1864, in Telegram Book, Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. See also James Longstreet to Charles S. Venable, May 1, 1864, in O. R., Series I, Volume XXXVI, Part II, 940.
15 By far the most detailed examination of the Battle of the Wilderness can be found in Gordon C. Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1994). For Venable’s actions on May 5, see Rhea, Battle of the Wilderness, 234.
17 In Rhea’s words, “although faithfully conveying Lee’s message, Venable apparently neglected to impress on Longstreet the need for haste.” See ibid, 273.
20 Venable, “The Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” 525.
22 Charles S. Venable, “The Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” 525-526. This article in the Southern Historical Society Papers was actually a publication of a speech Venable had given years earlier.
23 Taylor, Four Years, 128-129.
24 Taylor, General Lee, 236-237.
26 Taylor, General Lee, 235.
30 Taylor, General Lee, 238.
31 For a detailed examination of Lee’s (and Grant’s) mistakes during the night of May 7-8, and extensive coverage of the ensuing Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, see Gordon C. Rhea, The Battle of Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern: May 7-12, 1864 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).
32 See Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, August 15, 1864, in Tower, 181-183. McClellan does not appear to have made a very deep impression on Lee’s staff; his name appears on only four letters in the army’s letter book, three of those in August. He signed very few orders, and was not among those listed by Venable, Sorrel, or Alexander among the list of Lee’s personal staff officers. Most likely, this was because everyone knew his assignment to Lee’s staff was temporary, lasting until the cavalry corps had a new commander. See Letter Book, Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.
33 For example, see W. H. F. Lee to Charles S. Venable, May 15, 1864, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Society, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
34 Venable, “Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” 528.
35 Taylor, General Lee, 240, and Taylor, Four Years, 129-130. Although Taylor escaped unscathed, his horse was wounded; see Rhea, Spotsylvania, 172.
36 Charles S. Venable to Mary M. Venable, May 11, 1864, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Venable still remembered the death toll years later, stating that “it became pitiful to see the slaughter of these brave men.” See Venable, “Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” 528.
37 Venable, “Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” 531.
38 Charles S. Venable to Nathaniel H. Harris, November 24, 1871, in Nathaniel H. Harris, “‘General Lee to the Rear–The Incident with Harris’ Mississippi Brigade,” in Southern Historical Society Papers VIII (1880): 105-110.
39 For Gordon’s somewhat fanciful account, see John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 274-286.

Charles S. Venable to Mary M. Venable, May 15, 1864, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.


There are no entries in the letter book between May 3, 1864, and June 26, 1864, by which time the two armies had settled into the Siege of Petersburg. See Letter Book, Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Marshall does not appear to have been incapacitated by this wound. While he was absent sick from the army during part of the Siege of Petersburg later that year, there is no evidence to link his ailment to his wound.

For detailed coverage of the Overland Campaign from May 13, 1864-May 25, 1864, see Gordon C. Rhea, To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-26, 1864 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).


For example, see A. S. Pendleton to C. S. Venable, May 22, 1864, and R. H. Anderson to C. S. Venable, May 22, 1864, both in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Venable, “Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” 535.

See Rhea, To the North Anna River, 345-346.

Ibid, 353.

Unsurprisingly, Venable did not mention it anywhere in his speech; see Venable, “Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg.”

Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, May 30, 1864, in Tower, 163-164. Taylor did secure a twenty-four-hour pass to visit Ms. Saunders in Richmond the next day. See Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, June 1, 1864, in Tower, 165-166.


Taylor to Saunders, May 30, 1864.

Between May 28, 1864, and May 30, 1864, Taylor received at least fourteen telegrams addressed to him from Brigadier Generals Lunsford L. Lomax and Bradley T. Johnson keeping him apprised of Federal movements toward Cold Harbor; for examples, see Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Lee finally relieved Ewell of his corps command on May 27, 1864.

As Taylor related to his fiancée, “since the General’s indisposition he has remained more quiet & directs movements from a distance. This is as it should be, & if we had capable lieutenants ‘tis the course he might always pursue. All the rest of the Staff have been sent to the front with various messages- only I am tied to ‘mama’s’ apron string.” See Taylor to Saunders, June 1, 1864.

Venable, “Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” 536.

For examples of this, see John C. Breckinridge to Walter H. Taylor, June 3, 1864, 5:30 A. M., and John C. Breckinridge to Walter H. Taylor, June 3, 1864, 9:00 A. M., both in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Taylor also received news from A. P. Hill’s staff; see William Palmer to Walter H. Taylor, June 3, 1864, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The most recent study of the Battle of Cold Harbor is Gordon C. Rhea, Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26-June 3, 1864 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2002). Lee had Venable write Davis soon after the battle probably to inform him of the army’s success; see R. E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, June 6, 1864, in Dowdey and Manarin, 219-220.

Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, June 9, 1864, in Tower, 166-167.

securing the army’s supplies, see T. M. R. Talcott to Charles Venable, June 4, 1864, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

64 There are no scholarly monographs on the entire Siege of Petersburg. One of the very best studies of one of Grant’s simultaneous offensives is the exquisitely-detailed Richard Sommers, *Richmond Redeemed: The Siege of Petersburg* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1981).

65 For example, see Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, August 15, 1864, in Tower, 181-183. Taylor was in charge of decoding and encrypting confidential messages that passed between Lee and Davis; see Walter H. Taylor to Samuel Cooper, September 29, 1864, in Dowdey and Manarin, *Wartime Papers*, 860, and Taylor, *Four Years*, 139.


69 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, August 1, 1864, in Tower, 178-179.

70 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, August 8, 1864, in Tower, 179-181.

71 For more on Taylor’s illness, see Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, August 24, 1864, in Tower, 184-185, and Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, August 28, 1864, in Tower, 185-187.

72 Taylor to Saunders, August 15, 1864 (emphasis in original). At this time, Lee’s relations with his staff most closely resembled those described by Douglas Southall Freeman. This makes sense, for Freeman cited Henry B. McClellan as his source, and McClellan served on Lee’s staff during this period. Given Venable’s temper, however, it seems highly unlikely that “the staff dealt chiefly with Lee” through him,” especially because of his “age, dignity, and station.” See Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 3:227-229.

73 Ibid.

74 See Pryor, *Reading the Man*, 407.

75 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, September 4, 1864, in Tower, 187-190.


77 Taylor to Saunders, September 4, 1864.

78 Taylor to Saunders, August 1, 1864.

81 In Taylor’s words, “We want men badly. But there is life in the old army yet, and if properly supported, all is well. I have heard sad accounts of the croaking in the city...Let every man be up and at work & not spend his time in idle laments over what may occur. Oh! for a band of 20,000 determined patriots- only 20,000 would send Grant out of Virginia. But I fear most of us love life too dearly. We expect war without danger. The Yankee army here is a poor concern, save in its numerical strength & for its numbers it must be respected, but if every man we have would make up his mind to do it, we cd [sic] drive Grant from his works. Still, though our men have not altogether the old spirit, there are many here who will do anything to be expected of mortals; & if this faction is properly supported, all is well.” (Taylor to Saunders, October 6, 1864; emphasis in original).

82 See Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, October 27, 1864, in Tower, 200-201.

83 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, November 1, 1864, in Tower, 202-204 (emphasis in original), and Robert E. Lee to Mary C. Lee, September 18, 1864, in Dowdey and Manarin, *Wartime Papers*, 854-855.

84 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, November 27, 1864, in Tower, 207-208 (emphasis in original).

85 Taylor, *Four Years*, 150.

86 See Taylor to Saunders, November 1, 1864, 202-203.
Taylor to Saunders, November 27, 1864.


For more on Venable’s increasingly despairing letters, see discussion in Chapter 13 of this work.

Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, December 18, 1864, in Tower, 211-213.

Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, December 26, 1864, in Tower, 213-214. As he admitted, Taylor did not ask Lee for this permission; Lee proposed it himself. Taylor accepted Lee’s offer, but was back in headquarters the next day.

Venable, “Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” 537, 541.

Taylor, Four Years, 135.


Ibid, 251.

Chapter 9


4 Although R. Lockwood Tower, who collected and edited Taylor’s letters, saw this letter as an example of “Taylor’s unwillingness to face reality (Taylor, 301),” Taylor was largely maintaining a bold front for Bettie’s sake, as his subsequent comments revealed.


6 Taylor to Saunders, February 5, 1865.


8 For example, on February 20, he wrote Bettie that “You had better mount your horse and travel along with me until the uncertainty has passed and our affairs are once more straightened out.” See Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, February 20, 1865, in Tower, ed., Lee’s Adjutant, 224-226.

9 Taylor to Saunders, February 5, 1865.

10 For more on former Confederates’ postwar writings, see Edmund Gaines Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Origins of the New South, 1865-1913 (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

11 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, March 5, 1865, in Tower, ed., Lee’s Adjutant, 229-231.

12 Taylor to Saunders, February 5, 1865.

13 Ibid.

14 None of Lee’s staff officers mentioned Cooke in any postwar writings. In fact, Venable did not list him as an official member of the staff, and neither did Alexander, Sorrel, or any other former Confederate commentator. Nevertheless, Cooke definitely served as an assistant adjutant-general on Lee’s staff, as he participated in the Appomattox Campaign in that capacity and was paroled accordingly at Appomattox Court House; see Marvel, Lee’s Last Retreat, 66; 89; 127.

15 Charles S. Venable to Mary M. Venable, January 6, 1865, in Francis P. Venable, “Memoir of Mary Cantey (McDowell) Venable,” McDowell Family Papers, University of Virginia, 49-50.

16 Taylor to Saunders, February 20, 1865.

17 Taylor to Saunders, March 5, 1865.

18 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, February 6, 1865, in Tower, ed., Lee’s Adjutant, 220-221 (emphasis in original). In a later letter, he condemned the Federals in even harsher terms, referring to them as “wretched Yankees,” and denouncing their “brutal persecution.” He concluded that “If my strength was but equal to my will and wish, how grateful it would be to crush the contemptible things!” In the end, though, he admitted that “That’s a wicked thought, however, & I must struggle against it. But how can a mortal cultivate humility, where the Yankees are concerned?” See Taylor to Saunders, February 20, 1865.
Taylor to Saunders, February 20, 1865. Two weeks later, Taylor wrote his fiancée in even stronger language, blasting Confederate political leaders who advocated peace as “idiots” and “imbeciles” who displayed a “readiness to lick the hand that dealt the blow,” and thus were not willing to “fight the Yankees to the last.” See Taylor to Saunders, March 5, 1865.

For an excellent detailed analysis of the history and final reality of Confederate emancipation and arming of blacks as soldiers, see Bruce Levine, Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves During the Civil War (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

As quoted in Joseph T. Glatthaar, General Lee’s Army: From Victory to Collapse (New York, New York: Free Press, 2008), 453. Lee’s own justifications for black troops were similar; see Levine, 36; 115-116; 139.


Taylor to Saunders, February 16, 1865.

Taylor, General Lee, 266.

Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, February 24, 1865, in Tower, Lee’s Adjutant, 227-228.

Charles S. Venable to Mary M. Venable, March 19, 1865, in Francis P. Venable, “Memoir,” 55.


See Taylor to Saunders, March 27, 1865.

In the end, Francis never saw the letter until after his father’s death in 1900. See Charles S. Venable to Francis P. Venable, in Francis P. Venable, “Memoir,” 50-53.

On March 27, Lee had Taylor issue General Orders No. 8, which forbade the soldiers from even jesting about desertion on possible penalty of death; see General Orders No. 8, in Dowdey and Manarin, Wartime Papers, 918.

For a more detailed summary of these actions, see Marvel, Lee’s Last Retreat, 9-16.


Taylor, General Lee, 272-273, and Taylor, Four Years, 150.


Taylor, General Lee, 276-277.

For a detailed analysis arguing that Lee’s forces were mostly intact as the army began its retreat on April 2 and then rapidly disintegrated due to desertion by April 9, see Marvel, Lee’s Last Retreat, 201-206.


Marvel, Lee’s Last Retreat, 49-52.


Marvel, Lee’s Last Retreat, 26.

Ibid, 212.

Ibid, 213.

See Glatthaar, General Lee’s Army, 461; 541.

Walter H. Taylor to Richard H. Anderson, April 5, 1865, in Dowdey and Manarin, eds., Wartime Papers, 930.

For a summary of the army’s actions on April 5, see Marvel, Lee’s Last Retreat, 53-66.

For an excellent account of the often-confusing Battle of Sailor’s Creek, see ibid, 67-87.

Ibid, 88-94.


Varon claimed that Venable urged Lee not to reply at all to Grant’s second message; see Varon, 35; 75-78.

Armistead L. Long and discount Union victory as purely the result of "overwhelming numbers and resources," see Varon, 269, n.36.

The only former members of Lee’s personal staff present at the surrender ceremonies were Brigadier General Armistead L. Long and Colonel Thomas M. R. Talcott; see Marvel, Lee’s Last Retreat, 191-199.
Chapter 10


3 See Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 130-174.


5 Mary Custis Lee to “Mrs. Armistead L. Long,” November 20, 1870, in Mary Custis Lee Papers, Washington & Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.


7 Robert E. Lee Note of April 11, 1865, in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.


9 Robert E. Lee Note of November 24, 1865, in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

10 Section 82, Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. As his epitaph stated, “It was never Colonel Talcott’s ideal to merely administer; he tried to discover the underlying and compelling forces that controlled alike the running of railroads and the directions of battles. He was one of the first men in the world to make a scientific study of the cost of transportation, and his opinions and findings on the complicated subject have been set down in a little book, ‘Transportation by Rail.’ This monograph is of itself enough to demonstrate the genius Colonel Talcott had for the mastery of details, and for the deduction of general principles.” See “Col. T. M. R. Talcott,” *Richmond Insider*, May 8, 1920, in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

11 Upon hearing that one of his fiancée’s relatives had just been assigned to work under Chilton, Taylor wrote her that “Chilton is a very good fellow in his way, & certainly one would not be troubled much who served under him, if he knew how to manage his cards.” See Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, August 28, 1864, in *Lee’s Adjutant: the Wartime Letters of Colonel Walter Herron Taylor, 1862-1865*, ed. by R. Lockwood Tower (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 185-187.


13 See Robert E. Lee to Robert H. Chilton, October 6, 1865, in Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography* (New York, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), vol. 4, 234-235. For other examples of Lee’s writings to and interactions with the Chilton family after the war, see Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, vol. 4, 191-192; 230; 270-273; 306; 336; 442; 448.


18 Chilton probably started to write something about the military history of the Army of Northern Virginia, but he never came close to finishing it. The Museum of the Confederacy has six pages of notes handwritten by Chilton on
see Robert E. Lee to Charles S. Venable, March 8, 1866, and Robert E. Lee to Charles S. Venable, July 6, 1866, both in Robert E. Lee Collection, Leyburn Library, Washington & Lee University.


31 Francis P. Venable, “Memoir,” 58-60. See also Henning & Spiro to Charles S. Venable, June 19, 1865, James A. Collins to Charles Venable, July 26, 1865, and Jacob Levine to Charles S. Venable, September 14, 1865, all in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

32 See Briscoe G. Baldwin to Charles S. Venable, August 3, 1865, Benjamin S. Ewell to Charles S. Venable, August 6, 1865, N. Robertson to Charles S. Venable, August 10, 1865, James C. Southall to Charles S. Venable, August 17, 1865, and Alan C. Rives to Charles S. Venable, September 18, 1865, all in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina; and James C. Southall to Board of Visitors, July 4, 1865, Lucas H. Thompson to Rector and Board of Visitors, July 5, 1865, and John M. R. Atkinson to Board of Regents of the University of Virginia, July 26, 1865, all in Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. Besides his family situation, the fact that South Carolina College had been effectively destroyed in 1865 (to be rebuilt as the University of South Carolina) probably determined Venable’s choice to stay in Virginia. Venable later denounced the destruction of South Carolina College in very strong terms; see Charles S. Venable, “Address Before the Society of Alumni of Hampden Sidney College, by Professor Charles S. Venable, Delivered June 11, 1874,” in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.


34 Francis P. Venable, “Memoir,” 63-64, Charles S. Venable to B. Johnson Barbour, June 10, 1867, in Barbour Family Papers, University of Virginia, and John S. Mosby to Charles S. Venable, January 7, 1869, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.


Although both former staffers grossly underestimated Lee’s numerical strength at Gettysburg, Venable did so by a much larger margin than Taylor; see Jubal A. Early, “Lee’s Strength and Losses at Gettysburg,” Southern Historical Society Papers 4 (July-December 1877): 34-41.


For a dated but still valuable study of how Confederates dealt with defeat in the immediate postwar period, see Gaines M. Foster, Gray Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Origins of the New South (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 1-46.

In Gaines M. Foster’s words, “A dead and perfect Lee…made a more useful hero than a live and perfect one. From the grave he was no longer able- no matter what southerners may have thought about his divinity- to discourage Confederate activity or mar the images made of him.” See ibid, 52.

For a detailed account of the struggle between these groups, see Janney, Burying the Dead, 105-119.


In what was both a tribute to Lee and a transparent attempt to secure donations, Washington College changed its name to Washington and Lee University almost immediately after Lee’s funeral.

Lee’s staff demonstrated reluctance to get involved in many disputes that arose between former Confederates, not only the infamous feud between Longstreet and Early. For example, in 1872 William Mahone wrote Venable asking the professor to sustain his account of the 1864 Battle of the Crater against Cadmus M. Wilcox’s competing account; see William Mahone to Charles S. Venable, April 8, 1872, in Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, and William Mahone to Charles S. Venable, August 7, 1876, in Charles Venable Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

For example, as Fitzhugh Lee noted about Gettysburg, “Among the soldiers now living, and who are accessible, and who know most about that campaign on our side, are…Colonels Taylor, Marshall and Venable, of General Lee’s staff.” See Fitzhugh Lee, “Letter on Causes of Lee’s Defeat at Gettysburg,” Southern Historical Society Papers 3 (July-December 1877): 69-76.


See Charles Marshall, An Aide-de-Camp of Lee: Being the Papers of Colonel Charles Marshall, Sometime Aide-de-Camp, Military Secretary, and Assistant Adjutant-General on the Staff of Robert E. Lee, 1862-1865, ed. by Frederick Maurice (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

“Editorial Paragraphs,” Southern Historical Society Papers 2 (July-December 1876): 159-160. By 1876, despite his blindness, Armistead Long was serving as third vice-president of the Virginia Division of the Association.

For an example of how Lee’s former staffers were involved in securing speakers for AANVA meetings, see Wade Hampton to Charles S. Venable, May 19, 1871, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

For example, see Charles S. Venable, “The Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg,” in Southern Historical Society Papers XIV: 522-542.

Venable gave the AANVA’s keynote speech in 1873, and Marshall gave it in 1874. Interestingly, although Early had called for the meeting that created the AANVA, by 1873 he already publicly regretted doing so, thus hinting that he was not able to control it like he would the Southern Historical Society (SHS); see Foster, 52-53. As Gaines Foster pointed out, the AANVA never had more than about 200 members, and most of them, including Taylor, came from the Richmond or Norfolk area; see Foster, 61. For Venable’s and Long’s continued participation in the AANVA, see “Editorial Paragraphs,” Southern Historical Society Papers 2 (July-December 1876): 252.

“Memorandum of an interview with Lee which Talcott made in 1875 at the request of the Richmond Dispatch,” Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

See Talcott Scrapbook, in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Thus, Talcott fell firmly into what Janney described as the more “unreconstructed” former Confederates who were not willing to accept the rhetoric of reunion; see Janney, Remembering the Civil War, 130-174.

led in a bitter controversy to Charles S. Venable, June 26, 1882, both in Papers of the Minor and Venable Families, University of Virginia.

Justus Scheibert endured into the 1880s; see Justus Scheibert to Charles S. Venable, January 11, 1877, a

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Gettysburg,

or at an

1877): 112

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Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

Shenandoah Valley Campaign; see Jubal A. Early to Charles S. Venable, June 9, 1871, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

Miller,” June 17, 1873, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

Venable was deeply involved in raising funds to enable the university to survive and grow; see Francis H. Smith to Charles S. Venable, November 24, 1870, in Venable Papers, Dolphe Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. At one point in the early 1870s, Venable became embroiled in a bitter controversy involving the resignation of the university rector; see Charles S. Venable to B. Johnson Barbour, March 14, 1870, Charles S. Venable to B. Johnson Barbour, May 17, 1870, and Charles S. Venable to B. Johnson Barbour, September 16, 1872, all in Barbour Family Papers, University of Virginia. See also Charles S. Venable to “Mr. Miller,” June 17, 1873, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

Venable, “Address Before the Society of Alumni of Hampden Sidney College.”

For a more detailed account of the SHS and its impact on southern memory, see Foster, 54-62.

Foster, 55. As early as 1871, Early had written to Venable asking him to help him justify his failure in the 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign; see Jubal A. Early to Charles S. Venable, June 9, 1871, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.


Much of the controversy between Longstreet and Early stemmed from journalist William Swinton’s Army of the Potomac, in which he claimed that Lee was “off his balance” at Gettysburg, determined to attack no matter the cost, and gave Longstreet as his source for the claim; see William Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac: A Critical History of Operations in Virginia Maryland and Pennsylvania from the Commencement to the Close of the War, 1861-1865 (New York, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1866), 308-372.


See Southern Historical Society Papers 2-4 (July-December 1876; January-June 1877; July-December 1877).


While the Papers contained an article-length work by Taylor, this was a reprint of a work he originally wrote for the Philadelphia Weekly Times, and it appeared verbatim in that publication’s Annals of the War.


In his letter to Longstreet, Long had written simply, “I do not recollect the hearing of an order to attack at sunrise, or at any other designated hour, pending the operations at Gettysburg.” See Armistead L. Long to James Longstreet, quoted in Longstreet, “Lee in Pennsylvania,” 438.


Discussing Venable’s forthcoming review, the *Papers* praised him as “a competent soldier and critic;” see “Editorial Notes,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 3 (January-June 1877): 95-96.

73 Charles S. Venable to Mary M. Venable, December 1, 1868, Charles S. Venable to “Lilly,” June 11, 1869, and Charles S. Venable to “Mr. Miller,” June 17, 1873, all in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. He soon remarried Mary Campbell Brown, widow of former Confederate artillery Colonel J. Thompson Brown, and the two were remembered as a very happy couple by the university community. See http://www.astro.virginia.edu/research/observatories/26inch/history/venable.php, accessed November 12, 2014.

Venable received 8% of the royalties from his textbook; see “Memorandum of Agreement between G. Lanza and the University Publishing Company, November 1, 1871,” in Venable Papers, Dolphe Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. Venable also received and honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the College of William and Mary in 1873; see Benjamin S. Ewell to Charles S. Venable, June 2, 1873, and Benjamin S. Ewell to Charles S. Venable, June 5, 1873, both in Venable Papers, Dolphe Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

74 Walter H. Taylor to Bettie Saunders, July 25, 1864, in Tower, ed., *Lee’s Adjutant*, 176-178 (emphasis in original). Taylor was a devoutly religious Episcopalian; Early was famously profane.

75 As Taylor had written to Longstreet, “I regard [criticism of Longstreet for not having been present at dawn on July 2] as a great mistake on the part of those who, perhaps, because of political differences, now undertake to criticize and attack your war record. Such conduct is most ungenerous, and I am sure meets the disapprobation of all good Confederates with whom I have had the pleasure of assisting in the daily walks of life.” See Walter H. Taylor to James Longstreet, April 28, 1875, as cited in Longstreet, “Causes of Lee’s Defeat,” 75-76.


79 See ibid, 315-316.

80 On this point, Early had pressured Taylor to reduce his figures for Lee’s army from 74,451 to 62,000, but below that point, Taylor was not willing to go; see Walter H. Taylor, “Numerical Strength of the Armies at Gettysburg,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 5 (January-June 1878): 239-241.


83 As Early concluded, “It is a little remarkable that there is such an industrious search after causes for our failure to achieve a great victory at Gettysburg, when there is an all-sufficient cause staring us in the face, patent and palpable, which fully explains and accounts for that failure- namely, the most extraordinary procrastination and delay in carrying out the orders for the attacks on the 2nd and 3rd days, upon which the whole battle hinged.” See ibid, 281, and Early, “Reply to General Longstreet.”

84 See Foster, 54-62.

**Chapter 11**


5 See ibid, 162. Interestingly, one of those who had attempted to gain access to the Confederate records was Taylor’s fellow staffer Charles Marshall; see “Editorial Paragraphs,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 5 (January-June 1878): 254-256.
For a firsthand example of Venable’s efforts in this area, see Charles S. Venable, March 19, 1876, in Charles Venable Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.


Ibid, 146-147.

Ibid, 90-114.


Ibid, 73; 140.


For example, Venable helped found the Miller School, an independent academy that remains in operation near the University of North Carolina.

See Charles S. Venable, 1862-1865, ed. by R. Lockwood Tower (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 241-243. See also Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 115-144, and Janney, Remembering the Civil War, 232-305.

Taylor, Four Years, 163.

Ibid, 162-163.


Taylor, Four Years, 163.


Ibid, 146-147.

Ibid, 90-114.


Ibid, 73; 140.


For a detailed account of Longstreet’s fall in public memory, see William Garrett Piston, Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

As Early expressed it, “I have been unable to get any information from you staff officers.” See Jubal A. Early to Charles S. Venable, March 19, 1876, in Charles Venable Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Early to Venable, January 17, 1879. Early used the phrase “notes and comments” three times in a fairly short letter, and professed that “I really should be very sorry to wound his feelings or himself in any way, but…true friendship require that I should point out to him…errors in his statements, so as to prevent him from publishing what might bring him shameful criticisms and comments.”


For examples from Lee’s childhood, see ibid, 24-31.

Ibid, 1-3. Even the reprinted edition claimed on its dust jacket that “here, in Lee’s own words,” is the story of triumph and defeat, strength and weakness.”

Ibid, 302; 385-389; 433.


Ibid, 24-95.

Ibid, 160.

He did, however, claim that Early “displayed more heroic valor” in continuing to oppose the Federals after his defeat. See ibid, 366.

Ibid, 403. Long claimed that Lee directly stated this to him on April 8, 1865, the day before the surrender.

See ibid, 425-455.

Ibid, 487. He added that “this work has been a labor of love, and its termination is approached with regret, since we can never again hope to find so worthy a subject for our pen,” and concluded that Lee “has had few peers upon the face of this earth;” see ibid, 487-489.

Venable was instrumental in establishing the University of Virginia’s school of practical astronomy; the institution even named its first observatory after him, which has only recently been demolished. He also helped start the departments of natural history, geology, history, and moral philosophy; see William Thornton, Charles Scott Venable (Rare Virginia Pamphlets, University of Virginia), 12.

See Charles S. Venable to B. Johnson Barbour, July 30, 1886, and Charles S. Venable to B. Johnson Barbour, July 18, 1888, both in Barbour Family Papers, University of Virginia.

For example, Venable helped found the Miller School, an independent academy that remains in operation near the University of Virginia at Charlottesville; see Thornton, 13. For a firsthand example of Venable’s efforts in this area, see Charles S. Venable to W. E. Boggs, April 6, 1889, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. By 1882, he was so well-known for his professional ability that the Board of Regents
of the University of Texas wrote a lengthy letter to him asking for his recommendation for someone to head that school’s new department of “Pure and Applied Mathematics;” see A. P. Wooldridge to Charles S. Venable, October 15, 1882, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. Venable responded by postcard, promising to send a more thorough response later; see Charles S. Venable to R. W. Lowry, March 26, 1883, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

31 Charles S. Venable to R. W. Lowry, November 1, 1877, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. Like many others of his day, Venable placed a great deal of gendered emphasis on making his students “men;” see H. O. Murfee to Charles S. Venable, December 23, 1899, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

32 Ibid.

33 Venable continued to revise his mathematics textbooks and receive small royalties from them until his death; see Seth T. Stewart to University Publishing Co., Murray Street, New York City, March 14, 1888, E. A. Lawrence to Charles S. Venable, February 3, 1898, and E. A. Lawrence to Venable, February 8, 1899, all in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

34 See James Longstreet to Charles S. Venable, October 17, 1878, and James Longstreet to Charles S. Venable, July 22, 1879, both in Charles Venable Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia, and James Longstreet to Charles S. Venable, June 7, 1879, in Papers of the Minor and Venable Families, University of Virginia. For more on Venable’s speech at the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia (AANV) in which he applauded Longstreet’s “imperturbable coolness,” see discussion in Chapters 12 and 14 of this work.


37 “A Reunion of Confederate Officers and their Ladies at a Dinner Party given in 24 February 1887, as Described by Col. David G. McIntosh CSA very soon after the Occasion,” in Lee Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia, 3.

38 Ibid, 4.

39 Marshall, Charles, Address Delivered Before the Lee Monument Association, at Richmond, Virginia, October 27, 1887, on the occasion of laying the corner-stone of the monument to General Robert E. Lee, By Charles Marshall, a Member of his Staff (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co. 1888), in Mrs. Mary Randolph Custis Lee Papers, Washington & Lee University, 3.

40 Ibid, 5.

41 Ibid, 6-9.


43 Ibid, 18-36.

44 Ibid, 42.


46 As Marshall concluded, “There is hardly an incident in General Lee’s life, great or small, when he was called upon to deal with the rights and the interests and the feelings of others, or with matters affecting the public that does not present an illustration of some virtue.” See ibid, 54.

47 See ibid, 9-10. For an example of one of Marshall’s public addresses on Gettysburg, see Charles Marshall, “Events Leading up to the Battle of Gettysburg,” in Southern Historical Society Papers XXIII (1895), 205-229.

48 Marshall, Address, 56.


53 For a discussion of how Appomattox was a Civil War site long-neglected by white southerners because it reminded them of defeat, see Janney, Remembering the Civil War, 274-75; 294-301.
56 Marshall, Aide-de-Camp, xxi-xxiv. As Maurice pointed out, one of Marshall’s sons served on the staff of one of Grant’s sons during the Spanish-American War.
57 For example, see Fitzhugh Lee to Charles S. Venable, June 23, 1881, and Joseph B. Kershaw to Charles S. Venable, January 7, 1888, both in Charles Venable Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; and Wade Hampton to Charles S. Venable, May 23, 1891, and Fitzhugh Lee to Charles S. Venable, July 30, 1894, both in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. See also Justus Scheibert to Charles S. Venable, June 26, 1882, in Papers of the Minor and Venable Families, University of Virginia.
59 See Wade Hampton to Charles S. Venable, August 5, 1882, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, and James H. Rion to Charles S. Venable, August 28, 1882, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
60 See Charles S. Venable to W. E. Boggs, April 6, 1889, in Charles Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
61 Thornton, 12.
62 Minutes of the Board of Visitors, University of Virginia, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
63 Charles S. Venable to B. Johnson Barbour, July 14, 1886, in Barbour Family Papers, University of Virginia. With the sale of these papers, Venable meant to raise from $10,000-$15,000 for the school’s library to acquire books on a regular basis. Venable was also strongly committed to the establishment and strengthening of a Young Men’s Christian Association at the University, and was willing to correspond with northerners to help do so; see Dwight L. Moody to Charles S. Venable, April 4, 1891, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. While Venable continued to correspond with the Lee Family, this exchange was strictly limited to health-related news; see G. W. C. Lee to Charles S. Venable, May 13, 1895, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
64 See Charles S. Venable, Personal Reminiscences of the Confederate War, in McDowell Family Papers, University of Virginia. Unlike Marshall’s papers, these unfinished memoirs were never published.
65 See Harrison Randolph to Charles S. Venable, February 26, 1896, in Charles S. Venable Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. See also Jason T. Jones to Charles S. Venable, November 19, 1898, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
66 H. B. McClellan to “Mrs. Venable,” October 14, 1899, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
67 Thornton, 15.
68 Thornton, 14-15. In his words, “A man of antique mold he was, strong and earnest, direct and forceful, bold and sincere; a brave soldier, a true patriot, an humble Christian, a faithful friend, an honest gentleman…To know him was a lesson in virtuous and noble living; to love him was to breathe in the fragrance of a generous and chivalric soul. His nature was rather active than meditative, and worked upon others by lofty purpose and dauntless courage.”
69 In part, this was likely due to the fact that two of his sons, Francis and Charles, Jr., both became professors themselves at the Universities of North Carolina and Texas, respectively; see Francis P. Venable to Charles S. Venable, March 28, 1898, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
71 Although both Marshall and Venable attended Early’s very public funeral, neither addressed the crowd there; see “Memorial Address by Hon. John W. Daniel, before the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia, at the
Annual Meeting held at Richmond, Va., December 13, 1894,” in *Southern Historical Society Papers* XXII (1894), 281-335.

72 Taylor had maintained occasional correspondence with Venable, apparently over personal matters; see Benjamin S. Ewell to Charles S. Venable, March 7, 1893, in Charles Venable Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.


75 Ibid.

76 For example, see Walter H. Taylor to Scott Shipp, June 8, 1908, in Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute.

77 See Walter H. Taylor to E. W. Nichols, January 29, 1914, in Walter Taylor File, Virginia Military Institute. Taylor was forced to decline the invitation because he was “immersed in several enterprises, with a demand upon my time and strength that I find it difficult to meet.”

78 Taylor, *General Lee*, 11-13. Taylor added (13), “A very empire in extent of territory, the Southern States then had an aggregate of population of nearly ten millions, and to deny such a people the right of self-government was equivalent to a confession of error in the revolt against England, and the branding of the Declaration of Independence a subterfuge and a delusion.”

79 Ibid, 32.


81 Taylor, *General Lee*, 231; 262.

82 For example, see Taylor’s statements in ibid, 137, 189-190.


85 For Taylor’s direct rebuttal to Longstreet, see Walter Taylor, “Lee and Longstreet,” in *Southern Historical Society Papers* XXIV (1896), 73-79.


87 Ibid, 264-266.

88 For more on the rise of the “Solid South,” see Foster, 104-144.


90 Ibid, 124-125.

91 Taylor, *General Lee*, 174-175.

92 Ibid, 298-299.


**Epilogue**


3 Taylor did contribute to a short article in 1903, but it did little besides list all of the men who served on Lee’s personal or general staff and offered no commentary on them or the war itself; see E. D. Newton, “Members of General Lee’s Staff,” *Confederate Veteran* XVI, no. 7 (July 1908), 336-337. He did not even yield to a request from the V. M. I. Alumni Association for an autobiography, passing that task to his wife, who wrote the Association president that “I fully understand the difficulty you have experienced in getting from these old soldiers any satisfactory record of their life; they are reluctant to write about themselves.” See Elizabeth Saunders Taylor to Joseph R. Anderson, January 4, 1910, in Walter Taylor File, Kirn Library, Virginia Military Institute.


“By Order of General Lee, Walter H. Taylor, A. A. G.,” The News Leader, Richmond, Virginia, Thursday, March 2, 1916, and “Col. W. H. Taylor, ‘Trusted Adjutant’ of Lee, is Dead,” Virginian-Pilot and the Norfolk Landmark, Thursday, March 2, 1916, both in Walter Taylor File, Kirn Library, Virginia Military Institute. Almost fifty years later, on Robert E. Lee’s birthday, the Virginian-Pilot wrote a short piece on Taylor that continued to focus on his service to Lee and pointed out that he rarely spoke or wrote about himself, simply stating that “Col. Walter Herron Taylor of Norfolk was a taciturn man. He wasn’t one to bounce his granddaughter on his knee and tell her of the interesting things he’d done. He never told her stories of how he was Gen. Robert E. Lee’s most trusted staff officer, the only one who was with him through all of his campaigns.” See untitled article, Virginian-Pilot, January 19, 1964, in Walter Taylor File, Kirn Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.


See Talcott Scrapbook, in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. See also Carlton McCarthy to T. M. R. Talcott, May 1, 1890, and Thomas Ellett to T. M. R. Talcott, May 28, 1890, both in Talcott Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. McCarthy was the Secretary of the Virginia Division of the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia.


Ibid.
