

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION WITHIN THE ARMY OF NORTHERN
VIRGINIA DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR**

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF OPERATIONAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

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Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

March 2016

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ABSTRACT

During the American Civil War, human intelligence (HUMINT) came in from all directions, but without established processes to properly vet it, it was not fully embraced by senior leaders and correspondingly was never utilized to its full potential. The Confederacy in general and General Robert E. Lee in particular, did not find intelligence collection and analysis at large a worthwhile endeavor. That is not say he did not use it at all. In fact, Gen Lee frequently used his cavalry to scout out enemy positions because he considered this type of intelligence necessary for battle. However, he preferred not to engage in other types of intelligence collection such as the use of spies, because he felt it was unreliable and not the way professionals or gentlemen fought. This essay explains how HUMINT was used by the Confederacy during the Civil War, with a focus on how the Army of Northern Virginia utilized intelligence during three storied battles. As this essay will show, intelligence was acquired in a variety of ways during the Civil War. However, this intelligence, outside of scouts, was largely regarded as both unreliable and unprofessional and thus was not incorporated by all Confederate leaders. Had the Confederacy developed a more robust intelligence system, it may have proved its worth and reliability and been more fully embraced by senior leaders.

PREFACE

“He rode into the dark of the woods and dismounted. He crawled upward on his belly over the cool rocks out into the sunlight, and suddenly he was in the open and could see for miles, and there was the whole vast army below him, filling the valley like a smoking river. It came out of a blue rainstorm in the east and overflowed the narrow valley road, coiling along a stream...,spiked with flags and guidons like a great chopped bristly snake, the snake ending headless in a blue wall of summer rain. The spy tucked himself behind a boulder and began counting flags. Must be twenty thousand men, visible all at once. Two whole Union Corps.”¹

- Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels*

The above quote was taken from Michael Shaara’s Civil War novel, *The Killer Angels*. As expected in a novel, much of the narrative is fiction, but in this case, “Shaara introduced a real spy, one of the most famous in American history – Henry Thomas Harrison.”² As Civil War historian Peter Maslowski noted “Harrison, a Mississippian, had discovered the Union Army of the Potomac rapidly nearing the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia commanded by General Robert E. Lee, who believed the Union Army was far away, still south of the Potomac River.”³ Harrison’s intelligence “precipitated the events that led to the Battle of Gettysburg,” as Gen Lee, upon receiving Harrison’s intelligence, ordered his army to redirect its movement and concentrate near Gettysburg to “meet the swiftly approaching menace.”⁴ This vignette is just one example of how intelligence influenced the ways the Confederacy conducted operations and prepared for battle during the Civil War.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, intelligence has provided information to help leaders make and implement security decisions.⁵ In his article, *From Revolution to Reform*, career Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) intelligence analyst and historian John M. Tidd advised that the US lacked an organized intelligence apparatus from the Revolutionary War until the start of the Civil War.⁶ He further wrote that intelligence collection was “mostly ad hoc,” throughout much of the Civil War, especially in the Confederacy; although when it was incorporated it had a significant impact.⁷ Though the Civil War did not officially begin until the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter, SC on April 12, 1861, battle lines were drawn much earlier.⁸ Intelligence collection began long before, as both sides jockeyed for information on the each other’s plans, troop build-ups, and potential movements. What separated the Civil War from most other engagements, in regards to intelligence, was the relative ease in which it was collected.⁹ The opposing sides each spoke the same language, had largely the same moral fabric, and until the start of the war, were under the same government.¹⁰

During the Civil War, human intelligence (HUMINT) came in from all directions, but without established processes to properly vet it, it was not fully embraced by senior leaders and correspondingly was never utilized to its full potential. Gen Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia from June 1862 until the end of the war, was generally “disheartened” with HUMINT and did not devote a single member of his staff solely to intelligence work.¹¹ The Confederacy in general and Gen Lee in particular, did not find intelligence collection and analysis at large a worthwhile endeavor.¹² That is not say he did not use it at all. In fact, Gen Lee frequently used his cavalry to scout out enemy positions because he considered this type of intelligence necessary for battle. However, he preferred not to engage in other types of

intelligence collection such as the use of spies, because he felt it was unreliable and not the way professionals or gentlemen fought.¹³

When utilized, the intelligence that the Confederacy received was very beneficial and had a significant impact on several key battles. HUMINT, in all its various forms, provided the Confederacy invaluable information regarding Union troop movements, battle plans, and personnel numbers. However, this intelligence, outside of scouts, was largely regarded as both unreliable and unprofessional and thus was not incorporated by all Confederate leaders. Had the Confederacy developed a more robust intelligence system, it may have proved its worth and reliability and been more fully embraced by senior leaders.

METHODOLOGY

This essay explains how HUMINT was used by the Confederacy during the Civil War, with a focus on how the Army of Northern Virginia utilized intelligence during three storied battles. As this essay will show, intelligence was acquired in a variety of ways during the Civil War. Spies, newspapers, scouts, and cavalry reconnaissance all provided invaluable intelligence to the Confederacy. Some historians dubbed several of these intelligence sources, in particular scouts, cavalry, and newspapers, as other than HUMINT.¹⁴ However, most consider all of these sources as HUMINT and use the terms spy, scout, and informant interchangeably.¹⁵ Throughout the rest of this essay, the terms HUMINT and intelligence will be used to encompass all of the aforementioned sources. It should be noted that the Confederacy, as well as the Union, also incorporated signals intelligence, such as telegraph interceptions, throughout the Civil War. While this intelligence no doubt influenced both sides, this essay focuses on HUMINT, whereby people provided the intelligence either in person or via correspondence.

After establishing what HUMINT is and its integral role during warfare, a review of how it was utilized during three battles, Bull Run, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg, all involving the Army of Northern Virginia, will be discussed. The intelligence provided prior to and during the Battle of Bull Run and the Battle of Chancellorsville made a significant difference that helped lead to a Confederate victory. Intelligence provided prior to the Battle of Gettysburg, which ultimately resulted in a Confederate loss, likely saved the Army of Northern Virginia from “complete annihilation,” undoubtedly prolonging the war.¹⁶

WHAT IS HUMINT AND HOW/WHEN IS IT USEFUL?

The CIA defines HUMINT as any information that can be gathered from human sources.¹⁷ This information can be collected through debriefings, official contacts, and other clandestine means such as spies and informants.¹⁸ Throughout history, information derived from human sources has helped shape when, how, and where battles take place.¹⁹ The ancient Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu devoted an entire section of his book, *The Art of War*, to the “employment of secret agents.” He advised foreknowledge of the enemy, which can only be obtained from “men who know the enemy situation,” was essential to the success of any battle.²⁰ In Sun Tzu’s opinion, armies should plan their campaigns based on the intelligence they receive from human sources.²¹

The 2007 US Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*, addressed many of the same intelligence premises written by Sun Tzu. In section 2, *Perspective – (Think Like the Adversary)*, it called for intelligence analysts to continually “seek to understand the adversary’s thought process, and develop and continuously refine their ability to think like the adversary.”²² In order to think like an adversary, one must understand the adversary’s objectives, strategies, capabilities

and overall motivations.²³ In addition, an understanding of the adversary's cultural and religious traditions, language, and societal norms is imperative during the planning process.²⁴ One must recognize and internalize these factors when building and executing campaigns or they will be unable to think like the enemy.

Renowned British intelligence analyst and military historian Sir John Keegan advised that during peacetime intelligence services are in place to keep track on what is going on largely to maintain the status quo, whereas in war they are supposed to bring victory.²⁵ He argued the only good intelligence during war is that which can help achieve victory on the battlefield, or perhaps more importantly, avoid defeat. He stated that useful intelligence progresses through five stages: 1) Acquisition – intelligence must be found through HUMINT, signals intelligence, etc.; 2) Delivery – once collected, intelligence has to be sent to the right user. Keegan noted this is the hardest stage for HUMINT because “unless it is sent in timely fashion, preferably in real time, which allows it to be acted upon, it loses its value”²⁶; 3) Acceptance – intelligence has to be believed or it is worthless. This is especially difficult for “agents who volunteer their services” before their credentials are established; 4) Interpretation – most intelligence comes in “scraps,” so it is incumbent on the receiver to put the pieces together; and 5) Implementation – intelligence officers working at a subordinate level have to convince decision-makers and commanders in the field that the “raw material” they provide is reliable enough to act upon.²⁷ HUMINT, no matter how pertinent it may be, is of no use if it is not received in a timely manner and, more importantly, if the people making decisions are not convinced it is reliable.

HUMINT DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

At the outset of the war, the Confederacy held a significant advantage over the Union in regards to the number of informants and spies. In his book, *Spies and Spymasters of the Civil War*, Civil War historian Donald Markle stated there were four reasons for this: 1) The Confederacy immediately had targets to collect on. The Union had established government agencies, including the War Department, whereas the Confederacy, at least initially, did not have the same number of governmental targets; 2) Even before hostilities broke out, the Confederacy had a number of sympathizers throughout the North that were actively providing information; 3) A number of government workers from the Northern states moved South after the war began; and 4) The Confederacy had an established network of “insiders,” including Congressional members, prominent socialites, and military leaders in Washington D.C. when the war began.²⁸

Intelligence comes in many forms, from passive collections such as simply watching and listening to the more active role that spying requires. The key is not only acquiring such information, but the ability to then transmit it in a timely manner.²⁹ This is as true today as it was during the Civil War, especially when collecting and disseminating tactical intelligence which can have a significant impact on the battlefield and generally has a short shelf-life. Throughout the Civil War timely dissemination was a greater issue because, outside of the telegraph, there were limited ways in which intelligence could be transmitted in real-time. Both sides developed elaborate systems to funnel intelligence to the right people at the right time. These dissemination systems were particularly important for Confederate spy networks, as they had a much larger number of spies in Northern “enemy” territory. The only way these spies could get safely and reliably get information from the North to the South was through these networks.³⁰

Spying is often called the second oldest profession, and, historically speaking, it is “as old as war itself.”³¹ One of the larger problems the Confederacy faced was how to get the intelligence spies collected in the North to the right people in the South quickly enough so they could use it. Since many of its spies were located in Northern territory, they had to develop elaborate courier networks to get intelligence across enemy lines. The “Secret Line” was one such network that was established to help funnel intelligence reports to Richmond, VA.³² This “chain of men and women who slipped in and out of taverns, farms, and waterfront docks connected Baltimore and Washington D.C. to the Confederacy.”³³ Another network, dubbed the “Dr.’s Line,” used real and fake doctors in Washington D.C. and Southern Maryland to distribute information south. As Markle wrote, “Doctors were frequently called out at night and other irregular times and they always carried a black bag – which was a great place to hide couriered material.”³⁴ Finally, the “Postmaster Line” in Southern Maryland was said to be so efficient that information from President Lincoln’s cabinet meeting reached Richmond within 24 hours.³⁵ Many of the postmasters in Southern Maryland were sympathetic to the Confederacy and used their “postal offices to facilitate the passing of information to their Southern friends.”³⁶

One of the more famous Confederate spies who used the Secret Line was Rose Greenhow, a Washington D.C. socialite who had regular contact with members of Congress, as well as several high-ranking military personnel.³⁷ In fact, Ms. Greenhow was reportedly recruited by Thomas Jordan, a Quartermaster in the War Department, because she was so well-connected.³⁸ She had no official training, but was able to harness her “womanly skills” to obtain intelligence about Union garrison strength, among other things.³⁹ Another famous spy, Belle Boyd, was also known for using her “beguilingly womanly-ways” to gather intelligence regarding Union troop strength.⁴⁰ The self-appointed “Cleopatra of the secession,” provided

Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson critical intelligence that multiple Union generals were consolidating forces prior to the Front Royal Battle in May 1862. Based on her intelligence, Gen Jackson adjusted his forces and plan, likely saving his troops from a resounding defeat. After the battle, Gen Jackson sent a thank you letter to Ms. Boyd which read” I thank you, for myself and for the army, for the immense service that you have rendered your country.”⁴¹ However, Ms. Boyd, like Ms. Greenhow, had no formal training or experience in covert collections. Both of their lives as spies were short-lived as each openly expressed support for the Confederacy which drew attention from Union officials, ultimately resulting in their arrests.

One of the items that spies frequently collected and passed to the Confederacy were newspapers. In fact, newspapers were so important to the Confederacy that they developed a courier network called the “Old Government Line,” which was specifically tasked to transfer Northern newspapers and letters to the South.⁴² Gen Lee was reportedly an avid reader of Northern newspapers, in particular the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, so much so that the Confederacy placed a spy in Alexandria, VA whose sole purpose was to collect newspapers for the general.⁴³ Confederate President Jefferson Davis was also reportedly a reader of the *Washington* and *Baltimore Dailies*, which provided reports of battles, maps, plans, and casualties.⁴⁴ Union General William Tecumseh Sherman was so perplexed by the amount of intelligence that was written in these newspapers that he stated “Northern newspapers are the Confederate’s best spies.”⁴⁵ Gen Sherman further remarked “Napoleon himself would have been defeated with the free press.”⁴⁶

The Confederacy and Union both utilized newspaper delivery boys to gather intelligence on enemy encampments and troop strength. Markle wrote “newspapers were very limited to the

Civil War soldier in the field and newsboys selling local papers were a very common sight among the troops. Both the Confederacy and the Union made use of these newsboys to collect information as they sold their papers.”⁴⁷ The Confederacy reportedly trained two young boys as spies and sent them out to sell papers at Union camps. The two boys were effective but drew the attention of General George H. Sharpe, head of the Union Intelligence for General Ulysses S. Grant.⁴⁸ Gen Sharpe told his staff “they have given Gen Lee much valuable information, and traveling under this guise are apt to be suspected as spies. Their names are Smith.”⁴⁹ It is not reported if these two boys were ever caught, but suffice it to say the intelligence they provided was so important that it was read at the highest levels of the Confederate Army.

Another significant source of intelligence came from scouts, often within Confederate cavalry regiments, who produced as much as, if not more, intelligence than espionage.⁵⁰ Scouts gathered intelligence about the enemy’s location, movements, and order of battle.⁵¹ Historian Thomas Allen wrote that General James “Jeb” Stuart, Chief of Cavalry in the Army of Northern Virginia, was Gen Lee’s “greatest scout.”⁵² Gen Lee routinely sent Gen Stuart on reconnaissance missions behind enemy lines, and once remarked that Gen Stuart “never gave him a bad piece of information.”⁵³ Gen Stuart was known to employ “covert” scouts, those individuals who separated from the rest of the cavalry regiment and did not wear their uniforms in order to conduct long-term reconnaissance.⁵⁴

During the initial stages of the Shenandoah Campaign in Spring 1862, Gen Jackson embarked on operations to preclude Union forces from moving through the valley towards Richmond. The problem was that Gen Jackson did not have any maps of the region and was unable to take advantage of the terrain because he was unfamiliar with it.⁵⁵ He immediately sent out scouts to identify routes throughout the valley. He also elicited the help of the local

population to aid his mapmaker in creating reliable maps. Gen Jackson knew that success rested on his superior knowledge of the valley's geography and local intelligence. By harnessing his scouts and the local population Gen Jackson was able to identify viable routes for offensive and defensive operations. In effect, he was able to use the unforgiving terrain to his advantage and was ultimately able to thwart the Union advance.⁵⁶

HUMINT AND THE ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

The Army of Northern Virginia was activated in October 1861 and its last units were deactivated on April 9, 1865 during its surrender at Appomattox, VA.⁵⁷ During that time it was led by several generals, most notably, Gen Lee commanded the army from June 1862 through the surrender at the Appomattox courthouse.⁵⁸ Throughout the Civil War, the Army of Northern Virginia fought in a number of significant battles. The following is a brief examination of three of those battles with an emphasis on the how HUMINT shaped the way the battles were fought.

Battle at Bull Run (First Manassas) – July 21, 1861

The opening salvo of the war began when Confederate troops shelled Fort Sumter, SC on April 12, 1861. However, the war did not start in earnest until the Battle of Bull Run (or First Manassas), fought in Virginia on July 21, 1861.⁵⁹ Prior to the battle, President Abraham Lincoln prodded Union General Irvin McDowell to launch an offensive against Confederate forces posturing near Manassas, VA.⁶⁰ At the time, General P.G.T. Beauregard, then Confederate Commander of the "Alexandria Line," which later became part of the Army of Northern Virginia, had massed approximately 32,000 Confederate soldiers in a relatively strong position along Bull Run creek, just north of Manassas Junction, VA.⁶¹ President Lincoln hoped that

General McDowell and his army of approximately 28,000 soldiers could make “quick work of the bulk of the Confederate Army, open the way to Richmond, and end the war.”⁶²

As the morning of July 21st approached, both generals were jockeying for position in an effort to flank their opponent’s left side.⁶³ However, neither army could outmaneuver the other. Gen Beauregard’s forces were hindered by overall lack of communication, causing some elements to move too soon or too late, while Gen McDowell’s forces were hampered by an overly complex plan that required precision and synchronization, something not easily achieved with an army that size.⁶⁴ Despite its inability to outflank the Confederate forces, Gen McDowell’s forces began shelling across Bull Run Creek and sent a small contingency across, a shallow section of the creek, Sudley Ford, in an attempt to attack the Confederate left.⁶⁵ At the same time, Gen Beauregard sent a much larger force to execute a flanking movement on the Union’s weak left side.⁶⁶

Heavy fighting ensued for most of the day as Confederate forces were initially driven back. However, late in the afternoon, Confederate reinforcements began to arrive, many of which came by rail from the Shenandoah Valley.⁶⁷ The additional forces allowed Gen Beauregard to not only extend and reinforce his own line, but also move from a defensive to an offensive posture.⁶⁸ The Confederates succeeded in breaking the Union’s right side which caused “mass confusion” and led to a disorganized retreat.⁶⁹ Adding to the confusion was the fact that many of the narrow bridges Union troops used to move into place were damaged during the battle and became mostly unusable. As Union troops looked for alternate routes, the Confederate forces poured on artillery fire, causing many of the Union troops to disperse into small groups and abandon their logistics wagon train.⁷⁰ Confederate forces were able to take the battlefield, but were unable to pursue the Union troops any further. By July 22, 1861, the “shattered” Union

Army reached Washington D.C. and President Lincoln who relieved Gen McDowell of command.⁷¹ President Lincoln realized that the war would be a “long and costly” one.⁷²

Total casualties, including those killed, injured, captured, and missing, were estimated at 4,878, with the Union sustaining 2,896 of those and the Confederates 1,982.⁷³ Although the both sides lost a comparable number of forces, the Battle of Bull Run is widely regarded as a stunning Confederate victory. The assumption that the more populated and much better equipped North would be able to quell the “Southern uprising” in a few months was gone, replaced by the realization that a protracted war would follow. The ferocity of the Confederate forces are generally lauded, and rightly so. What is not as widely discussed is the role that HUMINT played in the battle. Prior to the battle, Ms. Greenhow provided Gen Beauregard with key information regarding the Union’s plans, including Gen McDowell’s force size and suspected movements.⁷⁴ Ms. Greenhow’s intelligence about the Union’s plans were reportedly the first that Gen Beauregard heard and led him reach out to Confederate General Joseph Johnston to ask for reinforcements.⁷⁵

During the battle, Gen Beauregard also harnessed his cavalry, led by then Col “Jeb” Stuart, to conduct reconnaissance of Union forces as they moved into place. Not only did Col Stuart report on Gen McDowell’s forces, but his scouts also identified Union General Robert Patterson’s forces west of Bull Run.⁷⁶ Col Stuart’s cavalry were able to cut off Gen Patterson’s avenue for reconnaissance, and effectively took his forces out of the fight.⁷⁷ Without Gen Patterson’s reinforcements, Union forces were outnumbered. In addition, because of Ms. Greenhow’s intelligence, the Union had lost the element of surprise, and was at a disadvantage as Gen Beauregard was already planning to send out forces to flank Gen McDowell’s army when the battle commenced. HUMINT was by no means the only reason, as it never is, why the

Confederacy won. But without the prior warning about the Union's intentions to attack, the Confederacy may have been caught "flat-footed" and the Union potentially could have delivered the early knock-out blow President Lincoln so desired. In addition, had Col Stuart's scouts not found and cut-off Gen Patterson's reinforcements, the result may have been much different.

Battle of Chancellorsville – 27 April – May 6, 1863

Following the Army of the Potomac's defeat at Fredericksburg, VA in December 1862, President Lincoln replaced General Ambrose E. Burnside with General Joseph Hooker. President Lincoln hoped Gen Hooker's energetic personality would provide the army with a much needed boost.⁷⁸ At first Gen Hooker delivered - he outmaneuvered the Confederates in late April 1863 and was able to swing his force of approximately 97,300 soldiers behind the Army of Northern Virginia's left near Chancellorsville, VA.⁷⁹ Gen Lee scrambled to pull together all of his forces from "far-flung camps" spread throughout the middle of Virginia. Prior to the engagement, the Army of Northern Virginia numbered approximately 57,300 soldiers.⁸⁰

Greatly outnumbered, Gen Lee and Gen Jackson devised a plan to split their forces in half and march approximately 30,000 soldiers to maneuver behind the Army of the Potomac.⁸¹ Gen Jackson led the clandestine march in the early morning hours on May 2, 1863, leaving Gen Lee with only 15,000 soldiers to hold off Gen Hooker's army. Throughout the day Gen Lee feigned attacks against the Union forces by initiating and then quickly moving multiple skirmish lines. In effect, Gen Lee hoped to distract Gen Hooker so the Confederate forces could move into place without being detected.⁸²

The plan worked – by five o'clock in the afternoon on May 2nd, Gen Jackson had completed his circuit around Gen Hooker's forces and was positioned behind the Army of the

Potomac.⁸³ Once in place, Gen Jackson “unleashed his men in an overwhelming attack on Gen Hooker’s right flank and rear,” shattering the 11th Corps and pushing the Army of the Potomac back more than two miles.⁸⁴ During the confusion that accompanied the Confederate charge, Gen Jackson was mortally wounded by his own men, dying later that afternoon. The Confederate offensive continued on May 3rd, as the infantry doggedly pushed ahead seizing key terrain abandoned by Gen Hooker’s army. Confederate artillery continued to pour on the attack from a crucial hilltop, driving the Union forces further back.⁸⁵ By mid-morning on May 3rd, the Confederate infantry broke through the final resistance and united all of their forces near the Chancellorsville clearing.⁸⁶ A few skirmishes remained, including the Battle of Salem Church on May 4th, but the majority of the fighting was over by days end on May 3rd. By early May 6th, the Army of the Potomac retreated across the Rappahannock River and moved north to regroup near Washington D.C. The Army of Northern Virginia won the battle, but sustained approximately 13,460 casualties. The Army of the Potomac suffered approximately 17,300 casualties.⁸⁷

The Battle of Chancellorsville is considered a major Confederate victory because it not only stopped the Army of the Potomac’s push south, but also drove them back north. One key to the victory was the clandestine march led by Gen Jackson on May 2nd. Before conducting this daring march, Gen Jackson summed Jeremiah Hotchkiss, his civilian mapmaker, to elicit “local” help to find the best route around the Union forces.⁸⁸ Hotchkiss, working with locals sympathetic to the South, discovered a covered route through the hills. Hotchkiss also had several locals guide the Confederate troops through the pass. Civil War historian Bevin Alexander advised this movement was “one of the most spectacular marches in the history of warfare” because the Army of Northern Virginia, which “represented the entire Southern cause,” was at risk.⁸⁹

In addition, prior to the battle, Gen Lee sent out his cavalry under Gen Stuart to gain as much intelligence about enemy positions and strength as possible. Gen Lee told Gen Stuart “as soon as you can exact information of strength and movements of the enemy, let me know.”⁹⁰ Gen Stuart’s scouts not only determined the Union strength and encampments, but also discovered the Union had a weak right flank.⁹¹ Gen Stuart reported the Union’s right was “floating in the air,” meaning it did not have a secure defensive position on its Western end.⁹² At the same time, Gen Stuart’s men also captured Union prisoners from three different corps and, subsequent to interrogation, were able to ascertain exact force numbers and proposed movements.⁹³

Finally, on April 29th, multiple informants alerted Gen Lee, via the Confederate courier system, that Union troops were on the move towards Chancellorsville.⁹⁴ Gen Lee immediately adjusted his forces to provide better protection to his left flank.⁹⁵ All of this intelligence, from informants to scouts and couriers, impacted how the Army of Northern Virginia and Gen Lee approached the battle. Realizing he was greatly outnumbered and likely unable to break Union lines with a frontal attack, he agreed with Gen Jackson that they should try to get behind enemy lines. The covered march would have been nearly impossible if not for the intelligence provided by local guides who not only helped Gen Jackson’s mapmaker plan the route, but also physically guided the troops through the narrow pass. The result was an astounding victory for the Confederacy, one which propelled Gen Lee to take his army and the fight back northward.

Battle of Gettysburg – July 1-3, 1863

Following his striking victory at Chancellorsville, Gen Lee led the Army of Northern Virginia northward to begin its second “invasion of the North.”⁹⁶ Gen Lee wanted to take the fight away from “war-ravaged Virginia,” and intended to “threaten Northern cities, weaken the

North's appetite for war and, especially, win a major battle on Northern soil and weaken the peace movement in the North."⁹⁷ As Gen Lee moved north, Major General George Meade, who replaced the recently deposed Gen Hooker, kept the Army of the Potomac between Gen Lee and Washington D.C.⁹⁸ When Gen Lee learned that the Army of the Potomac was in Pennsylvania, he concentrated his army around Gettysburg, PA.⁹⁹

On July 1st, elements of the two armies collided west and north of Gettysburg. Approximately 30,000 Confederate troops and 20,000 Union soldiers engaged in these initial skirmishes which resulted in the Confederate forces pushing the Union forces back through Gettysburg to Cemetery and Culp's hills, south of the town.¹⁰⁰ By July 2nd, both sides received significant reinforcements bringing the total number of forces to approximately 93,000 Union troops and over 71,000 Confederate soldiers. The Union took up defensive positions around a "fishhook-shaped range of hills and ridges" south of Gettysburg.¹⁰¹ The Confederates essentially wrapped around the Union positions, surrounding them on all sides.¹⁰² Gen Lee launched a heavy assault on the Union's left flank which spurred intense fighting at Devil's Den, Little Round Top, the Wheatfield, the Peach Orchard, and Cemetery Ridge.¹⁰³ Throughout the day, Gen Lee's forces made progress and gained ground, but were unable to dislodge the majority of Union forces from their defensive positions.¹⁰⁴

By the morning of July 3rd, fighting resumed on Culp's Hill, and cavalry battles, led by Gen Stuart, raged to the east and south.¹⁰⁵ As the day wore on, Confederate General George Pickett, impatient with the current stalemate, led a dramatic infantry charge with approximately 12,000 troops against the Union line on Cemetery Hill. Concentrated Union rifle and artillery fire repulsed the charge and inflicted significant casualties to Gen Pickett's men.¹⁰⁶ The failed charge was Gen Lee's last attempt to decisively defeat the Union troops at Gettysburg, and also, his last

attempt to take the fight into northern territory. Soon after the failed charge, Gen Lee led his army on a “torturous retreat” back to Virginia.¹⁰⁷ The Army of the Potomac carried the day, but both sides sustained heavy casualties. Union losses totaled over 23,000 while the Confederates lost over 28,000 men.¹⁰⁸

The Battle of Gettysburg was a decisive, albeit very costly, victory for the Union. However, had Gen Lee not received timely intelligence prior to the battle, the Army of Northern Virginia may have been caught off guard and potentially could have been surrounded and destroyed. Confederate spy Henry Thomas Harrison provided information on the Army of the Potomac’s “fast” movements nearing the Army of Northern Virginia. Based on this information, Gen Lee concentrated his forces near Gettysburg.¹⁰⁹ Prior to receiving Harrison’s intelligence, Gen Lee thought the Army of the Potomac was much further away. In addition, Gen Lee’s forces were fairly spread out and highly susceptible to attack by a larger force.¹¹⁰ Although the Confederacy ultimately lost the Battle of Gettysburg, Gen Lee’s ability to mass his forces and dictate when the attack began likely saved the Army of Northern Virginia from complete annihilation.¹¹¹

Career CIA intelligence analyst and historian J.A. O’Toole remarked, in regards to Harrison’s intelligence, “espionage has seldom been so potent a master of events.”¹¹² O’Toole argued Harrison’s intelligence directly led to the Battle of Gettysburg because it forced Gen Lee to mass his army there. This not only changed the direction of Gen Lee’s Northern campaign, but likely the Civil War itself.¹¹³ Without Harrison’s timely intelligence, Gen Lee would likely have left his army dispersed and unknowingly moved them into direct contact with the much larger Union force.¹¹⁴ Even though the Confederates ultimately lost the Battle of Gettysburg, Harrison’s

intelligence allowed the Confederacy to consolidate their forces, saving them from complete destruction.¹¹⁵

In addition to Harrison's intelligence, Confederate scouts also provided critical information during the battle. Maslowski advised "on the crucial second day at Gettysburg, Gen Lee dispatched scouting parties to investigate the Union right flank."¹¹⁶ His scouts were able to identify potential weaknesses on the Union's right which led Gen Lee to shift his forces. Again we see the dichotomy that was Gen Lee's use of, and thoughts about, HUMINT. On the one hand Gen Lee liked to keep his scouts active and "well out" because he realized his Army's movements "must be made in a measure regulated by the enemy's activities."¹¹⁷ On the other hand, he did not want to engage in other types of HUMINT, such as spies, which he thought was both unreliable and not gentlemanly.¹¹⁸ Instead he preferred direct "head-on" confrontation, the type of which was seen during Gettysburg, which ultimately led to his, and the Confederacy's, demise.¹¹⁹

CONCLUSION

"Intelligence is decisive, not only in preparing for war, but in defending the peace."

- Robert Gates, former Secretary of Defense & CIA Director

Historian Dr. James McPherson wrote, "The Civil War is the central event in America's historical consciousness. While the revolution of 1776-1783 created the United States, the Civil War of 1861-1865 determined what kind of nation it would be."¹²⁰ He further advised that Northern victory preserved the United States as one nation and "ended the institution of slavery that had divided the country from its beginning."¹²¹ However, that victory came at a great cost –

over 625,000 lives were lost, nearly as many American soldiers as died in all the other wars in which this country has fought combined.¹²² The above is a very small snippet of the Civil War and by no means delves into the complexities of the war, or the individual battles themselves. Instead, it focuses on only a part of the battle calculus - how HUMINT was harnessed by the Confederacy and how that intelligence shaped the battlefield.

A simple equation between intelligence success and battlefield success cannot be made as there are so many variables that must be considered.¹²³ The battles described in this paper were ones in which intelligence impacted the outcome. However, in regards to Confederate intelligence as a whole, and the Army of Northern Virginia under Gen Lee in particular, intelligence was never a priority as evidenced by the fact that no senior officers were assigned to lead it.¹²⁴ Instead, Confederate intelligence was very decentralized, so much so that each army or each commander decided if they wanted to utilize HUMINT.¹²⁵ As discussed earlier, there were times when Gen Lee incorporated HUMINT into his battlefield preparation. In particular he frequently used his cavalry to scout the enemy. But he never embraced other types of HUMINT, such as the type of intelligence that spies provided, because it did not fit into the type of war he wanted to fight.¹²⁶ What is striking is that the type of intelligence that spies provided made significant impacts, as evidenced in the three battles discussed earlier. In his seminal book *On War*, Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz stated “many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain.”¹²⁷ It appears that Gen Lee agreed with Clausewitz in this regard as he stated “reports are so conflicting, it is difficult to learn the truth” and often “too late to profit by it.”¹²⁸

Although intelligence may never be the deciding factor in battle, as victory is about doing rather than thinking, it can effect preparation for and adjustments during the battle. In fact, as this

essay shows, when utilized, the intelligence the Confederacy received was very influential prior to and during several key battles. HUMINT, in all its various forms, provided the Confederacy invaluable information regarding Union troop movements, battle plans, and personnel numbers. Unfortunately for their cause, this intelligence was sporadic at best, and never fully embraced by the South as a whole. Had the Confederacy developed a more robust and centralized intelligence system, and exploited their advantages over the Union, the direction of the Civil War, and potentially the outcome, may have changed.

¹ Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels* (New York City, NY: Ballantine Books, 1976), 3.

² Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 39.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John M. Tidd, "From Revolution to Reform: A Brief History of U.S. Intelligence," *SAIS Review* XXVIII, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2008): 5.

⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "The Battle of Bull Run Summary & Facts," *Civilwar.org*,

<http://www.civilwar.org/battlefields/bullrun.html?tab=facts> (accessed 20 February 2016), 1.

⁹ Donald E. Markle, *Spies & Spymasters of the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1994), xvi.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Edwin C. Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union: The Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 6.

¹² Bevin Alexander, *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War: The Fatal Errors That Led to Confederate Defeat* (New York City, NY: Crown Publishers, 2007), 37.

¹³ Bevin Alexander, *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War: The Fatal Errors That Led to Confederate Defeat* (New York City, NY: Crown Publishers, 2007), 6.

¹⁴ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 44.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ G.J.A. O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action from the American Revolution to the CIA* (New York City, NY: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991), 171.

¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "INTELLIGENCE: Human Intelligence," <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2010-featured-story-archive/intelligence-human-intelligence.html>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1963), 144-145.

²¹ Ibid., 149.

²² Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence* (Jun 2007), II-1.

- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ John Keegan, *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda* (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 4.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 5.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 5-6.
- ²⁸ Ibid., xvii.
- ²⁹ Donald E. Markle, *Spies & Spymasters of the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 24.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Alan Axelrod, *The War Between the Spies: A History of Espionage During the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Zenda Inc., 1992), 1.
- ³² Thomas Allen, *Intelligence in the American Civil War* (New York City, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2010), 13.
- ³³ Ibid., 14.
- ³⁴ Donald E. Markle, *Spies & Spymasters of the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 19.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 20.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 160.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Thomas Allen, *Intelligence in the American Civil War* (New York City, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2010), 12.
- ⁴⁰ Donald E. Markle, *Spies & Spymasters of the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 155.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 155-156.
- ⁴² Thomas Allen, *Intelligence in the American Civil War* (New York City, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2010), 16.
- ⁴³ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 47.
- ⁴⁴ G.J.A. O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action from the American Revolution to the CIA* (New York City, NY: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991), 131-132.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 47.
- ⁴⁷ Donald E. Markle, *Spies & Spymasters of the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 64.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 65.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Edwin C. Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union: The Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 5.
- ⁵¹ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 44.
- ⁵² Thomas Allen, *Intelligence in the American Civil War* (New York City, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2010), 18.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 19.
- ⁵⁵ John Keegan, *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda* (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 75, 78.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 93, 97.
- ⁵⁷ "The Army of Northern Virginia," *Historynet.com*, <http://www.historynet.com/army-of-northern-virginia> (accessed 20 February 2016), 1.
- ⁵⁸ Bevin Alexander, *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War: The Fatal Errors That Led to Confederate Defeat* (New York City, NY: Crown Publishers, 2007), 37.
- ⁵⁹ "The Battle of Bull Run Summary & Facts," *Civilwar.org*, <http://www.civilwar.org/battlefields/bullrun.html?tab=facts> (accessed 20 February 2016), 1.

- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 2.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 1.
- ⁷⁴ Donald E. Markle, *Spies & Spymasters of the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 160.
- ⁷⁵ G.J.A. O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action from the American Revolution to the CIA* (New York City, NY: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991), 121.
- ⁷⁶ Bevin Alexander, *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War: The Fatal Errors That Led to Confederate Defeat* (New York City, NY: Crown Publishers, 2007), 15.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ "The Battle of Chancellorsville Summary & Facts," *Civilwar.org*, <http://www.civilwar.org/battlefields/chancellorsville.html?tab=facts> (accessed 20 February 2016), 1.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 2.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 1-2.
- ⁸⁸ Bevin Alexander, *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War: The Fatal Errors That Led to Confederate Defeat* (New York City, NY: Crown Publishers, 2007), 198.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid.
- ⁹⁰ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 46.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Bevin Alexander, *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War: The Fatal Errors That Led to Confederate Defeat* (New York City, NY: Crown Publishers, 2007), 196.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 193.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 192.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ "The Battle of Gettysburg Summary & Facts," *Civilwar.org*, <http://www.civilwar.org/battlefields/gettysburg.html?tab=facts> (accessed 20 February 2016), 1.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2.
- ¹⁰² Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 39.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ G.J.A. O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action from the American Revolution to the CIA* (New York City, NY: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991), 171.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 45.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Bevin Alexander, *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War: The Fatal Errors That Led to Confederate Defeat* (New York City, NY: Crown Publishers, 2007), 6.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Dr. James McPherson, "A Brief Overview of the American Civil War: A Defining Time in Our Nation's History," *Civilwar.org*, <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/civil-war-overview/overview.html> (accessed 2 March 2016), 1.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Edwin C. Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union: The Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 4.

¹²⁴ Donald E. Markle, *Spies & Spymasters of the Civil War* (New York City, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 4.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Thomas Allen, *Intelligence in the American Civil War* (New York City, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2010), 16.

¹²⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 117, 140.

¹²⁸ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the American Civil War," *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Military History Symposium, Colorado Springs, CO, 1991, 56.

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